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fresh ideas...



## Let's Talk

As accommodation industry professionals we are all in the people business. Our clients are people, our owners, tenants, landlords and committee members are people and our guests are, for the most part, people. Yes, the pet friendly resort is on the rise but let's stick with people for now.

As people in a people business I would argue that our greatest asset is our ability to communicate effectively. In recent years the explosion in social media use combined with the myriad nonverbal, non-personal forms of communication at our disposal is resulting in more communication than ever before.

Social Media users in Australia are some of the most active in the world, with a total of around 60% of the country's population an active user on Facebook, and 50% of the country logging onto Facebook at least once a day.

Globally Facebook has 2.32 billion monthly active users. There are 10 million FB users in Australia, where 69% of the population use some form of social media. 9 million Aussies use Instagram and 4.7 million are active on Twitter. Business emails average over one hundred per day per user.

Trouble is, all this electronic interaction is, in my humble opinion, making us less effective communicators. I'm a strong believer that business relationships are ultimately personal. Relationship-based face-to-face and personalised communication methods build a level of trust and rapport that I don't think electronic mediums can duplicate.

Email and text are two great examples. In both cases its very easy to lose the message subtext, particularly if the discussion is challenging. For sure use an email to confirm the outcome of a discussion but have the discussion first. It seems to me that as we use non verbal communication more and more we are losing the capacity to resolve issues or indeed to even confront uncomfortable situations. It's also worth acknowledging that the most effective communication is almost always a result of verbal and nonverbal attributes. In the virtual world body language, phasing and emphasis are largely lost leaving only the words to convey the message.

Of course, there is an incredible up side to the slippery slope our communication trends are heading down. If you are a half decent talker, can articulate thoughts and arguments well and are prepared to embrace the challenging conversations you have a competitive advantage, particularly in business.

A great example of this is the dreaded management rights agreement top up process. At the one extreme we have managers who's fear of even asking is so pronounced that they simply put forward a notice of motion with zero discussion or lobbying. On the other end of the spectrum is the manager who actively engages in conversations with owners about the positives in granting a top up. For sure there will be lively debate and some owners will vote No but it's got to be better than the surprise motion that gets every one's back up. In these sorts of situations I am a great believer in acknowledging disagreement or a potential problem when having a challenging discussion and getting that emotional part of the communication on the table and hopefully consigned to the waste bin soon after.



Too often people have long debates which seem to skip around the central issue and as a result the real problem is never resolved. Developing the skill and personal courage to tackle challenging discussions adds real value to your personal management style and potentially to your business more broadly. Another great communication tip I was given years ago is a hard one to execute but it absolutely works. The angry client. Let's face it, we've all had the experience and the first instinct is to give as good as you get. That's the wrong strategy of course and there's an interesting bit of human physiology behind the correct response. Once someone gets mad and decides you are the target, they want to let you have it. The trick is to let them go, give them no negative response to bounce off and watch them run out of steam. Almost never fails and generally ends up with the angry person feeling embarrassed and apologising. It's at that point that the effective communicator moves to problem resolution mode and pretty much pretends that the aggressive encounter never happened. Takes a level of personal self-control but well worth it and works just as well when the anger is manifested via email or text. Pick up the phone and acknowledge the apparent unhappiness of the client. Don't reply via the same medium, it never works.

My point in all of this is an absolute belief that as technology changes the way we communicate we will slowly lose some of the critical skills necessary to get our point across and influence outcomes. You've only got to turn on the 6 o'clock news and listen to our politicians to know that our country's leaders are pretty hopeless when it comes to concise and effective communication.

My advice is next time you need to sell an idea or promote an outcome try personal face to face meetings or phone calls. The more challenging the issue, the more important to your personal or business success the better! Effective personal communication is a practiced skill and one that's becoming rarer by the day.

I close this month's column on a very sad note. Our dear friend and broker Lisa Quick passed away in mid-April. Lisa came to us at a time when we desperately needed a seasoned professional who could help us take the business forward and put up with me at the same time. Lisa displayed great warmth and empathy with our clients and proved a wonderful asset for our business. She had a truly beautiful nature and we will miss her. Vale Lisa and our deepest sympathy to Dave and all the family.

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