

OPCD Podcast: Episode 20 - “Improving Your Business Communication Skills” (2/26/2015)

Interview with Ms. Melissa Voynich, *Professional Development Communications Coordinator for the Office of Professional and Career Development, Harbert College of Business*

Voiceover: How much time do you spend thinking about communication and how you communicate with others? This is a major factor when it comes to success in the business world, or really anywhere for that matter, so if it's not currently on your radar you'll want to stay tuned with us here on today's episode of the OPCD podcast.

We communicate all day, every day so it's not something that we really need to work on more right? Well, actually it's very much a skill that needs practicing and perfecting and there's a direct correlation between your ability to master it and how well you'll do in your career field. Today we're talking with Mrs. Melissa Voynich - you may know her as Mrs. V - and she's the Professional Development Communications Coordinator for the OPCD.

M. Voynich: My primary job is I teach the business 2100 course, which is Oral Communication for Business. That is where students will learn to do the basic, 3 minute, present yourself in an organized manner, kind of speech. So I work with students on that primarily. Secondly, students can schedule me for a counseling appointment and I can help them with their specific communication needs.

Voiceover: And that could mean getting help in one of several different areas. To give a broad overview, business communication is both verbal and non-verbal. It covers everything from email and on-the-job correspondence to social media, with sites such as LinkedIn, and of course all of your interpersonal communication as well. That would be all the things like elevator speeches and job interviews.

M. Voynich: Communication is how students are going to be placed in the workforce because it all starts with your job interview: how you walk into it and what are the first words that you say. The course that I teach focuses on giving 3 minute speeches and we look at how are you interesting, what is your hook, was your delivery confident, do you sound knowledgeable in your subject? My hope is that students take those skills so that when you're at a career fair, when you're talking to a recruiter, when you're walking with them down the hallway or you're in the parking lot with them and you have three minutes. Hey, you come away with an interview if you present yourself confidently, knowledgeably, if you sound and look like you know what you're talking about that can take you so far.

Voiceover: So in terms of brushing up those skills there's a few things you can start working on now. And the first may not be one that you were expecting. All communication starts not with speaking, but listening.

M. Voynich: It a skill that you need to work on, it doesn't just happen. The physical thing that happens is hearing. Listening is the taking a message and processing it and then coming up with some kind of feedback for the person who sent that message to you.

Voiceover: And there's an easy way to tell if listening might be one of your weaker areas.

M. Voynich: One of the ways you can identify having a struggle with listening is if you're the friend that is always interrupting your other friends. Interrupting is trying to hurry up the other person so that you can start talking. Communication is not just about talking and it's not just about public speaking, it's about being able to take that message and process it and come up with good feedback.

Voiceover: While you're getting in the habit of listening, go ahead and throw watching on the list too. Studying the habits of the communication experts can go a long way in terms of helping you improve your skills.

M. Voynich: Watch the experts in action and by that I mean come to a workshop and seminar or watch a TED talk. TED talks are available, they're of no cost to you, you don't even need to sign to use them and you can watch extremely professional speakers talking about their industry, talking passionately. You can watch for content and also for their delivery, how they convey their confidence in their knowledge.

Voiceover: For more one on one help, let's revisit an idea that we've talked about before.

M. Voynich: Another suggestion I have to improve your communication is find a mentor and learn from them. We have the mentorship program in the OPCD, but you can find a mentor anywhere. It can be a professor that you trust, it can be a coworker at your fast food restaurant that you work at, it can be me. You can connect with me on LinkedIn and I will be happy to serve that function for you. A mentor is a leader or a coworker that you respect that you feel has values that you could learn from.

Voiceover: So while there may be a lot here that you suddenly realize you really need to work on, the good news is that practice often does make perfect and there's a ton of great resources for you right here within Lowder. And a final hint for today that could make all the difference. The quickest way to sound like a professional is to get rid of the "umms" "likes" and "you knows" - vocal fillers have got to go!

M. Voynich: If you know that you have a vocal filler that you use frequently be really aware when you're talking about taking a deep breath in at the end of every sentence. It is impossible to say "ummm" and inhale at the same time. So take a moment and try it, cause I know that's what you're doing right now, and you'll realize you are not able to say "ummm" and take a deep breath in. It's not possible. So if you really focus on that when you're practicing your communication skills that's gonna take you really far.

Voiceover: So sign up for the workshops, start checking out those TED talks and most importantly, start really listening to the things you're hearing. Thanks to Mrs. V for filling us in on all of that and stop in to Lowder 101 if you'd like to find out more. That's all we've got for you today but we'll see you next week - same time, same place - see ya then!