

## Communicate Your Value: How to Get a Job and Keep It

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

One of the best ways to realize the importance of communication is through simple services, such as getting a shoeshine, ordering hotel room service, or taking advantage of [valet parking](#). In these situations the people providing the service must act quickly to show their value and win a large tip. If they fail to show their value, they risk selling themselves short and losing out on the extra cash. You can always tell how good someone is at these sorts of jobs because they communicate their value, or lack thereof, usually early on in their interactions.

Several years ago I was getting my shoes shined at a Washington, DC airport.

As the shine progressed, I noticed I was being treated to a ridiculous amount of attention. The man used a modified common contractor's drill to buff my shoes, in addition to other specialized tools. He painted the heels with what appeared to be an artist's brush and, as the shine progressed, it was one thing after another like this. Finally, towards the end of the shine, he sprayed something on my shoes, took out a match, and very briefly lit them on fire! It was the strangest thing I had ever seen. He put out the fire in less than a second and made a statement about how this would really make a major difference in the shine. The shoes ended up looking fantastic and I gave the man a giant tip. I'm sure he got tips like that all day long. The shoeshine man did everything he could to communicate his value.

Communicating our value is something we all must do to keep our jobs. We must also do the same in order to [get jobs](#). Imagine if this man interviewed for a shoeshine position and described his approach to the job. Imagine an average shoeshine man doing the same. *Who would you hire?*

One of the biggest mistakes people often make when interviewing for jobs (or in their current jobs) is failing to communicate their value frequently and in detail. This kind of communication is one of the most important things in our careers. If you go above and beyond the call of duty on a daily basis, or have become aware of cost-saving measures or new sources of revenue, you owe it to yourself and the company to communicate this. It is extremely important that you communicate with your company and supervisors at all times.

If you were an employer, you would expect nothing less from your employees, right?

Why? Because the company you work for, or want to work for, cannot possibly know the multitude of ways in which you can or already contribute. The company cannot know all the improvements you can or already make to its bottom line. You need to make the people around you aware of who you are and what you can do. If people don't know this information, you are doing yourself a disservice. People lose jobs all the time because their superiors do not know who they are or how they are helping the company. Don't let this happen to you!

Earlier this week, I saw an employee (who works as a driver) sitting outside my office, using a computer. Sitting next to him was a manager. The [driver](#) appeared to be surfing the Internet and not doing much else. I watched this go on for a couple of hours as I passed by now and then. Later in the day, I called the manager into my office. I was very close to firing either the manager or the driver--or both. I could not believe that someone was being paid to sit there and surf the Internet.

"What is he doing?" I asked.

"He says his finger hurts," the manager said.

I proceeded to question the manager about whether the driver could work or not. The manager said, "I assume he cannot." I knew the driver had cut his finger earlier in the week, but I also knew it was not serious. I met with the driver to discuss the situation as well. What essentially happened in this exchange cast a very bad light on both of the employees.

First, the manager assumed the driver could not do any other work, because he had a hurt finger. The manager did not communicate with the driver further to see if there might be any other type of work he could do; He simply decided to end the conversation there, without giving the driver any other work to do.

Second, the driver did not ask for any more work. The driver simply decided that, since he was not given any more work to do, he would just sit there and do nothing. I know this driver quite well and he is very talented. He knows about carpentry and has many other useful skills. Obviously the driver's wounded finger did not preclude him from playing around on the computer.

In many companies, both of these men would have lost their jobs that day. The driver should have spoken up and stated that he did not have anything to do. The manager should have spoken up and either found another task for him to do, or sent him home. Both men should have handled this situation much differently. They both failed to act as responsible employees.

It is like this with your job too--regardless of what you do. All employers want things done efficiently. No one wants to waste time or money. By communicating clearly you are able to avoid the appearance of inefficiency. For this reason, nothing is more important than effective communication.

Communication goes much further than this simple example. Communication is important in the highest levels of executive suites. Communication is needed to ensure that businesses are healthy and that you are preserving your job through positive efforts, and through garnering appreciation for those efforts. Effective communication can help you to know exactly where you are going and what is going to happen in your career. Most importantly, communication can help you ensure that you are always in a good position with your company--and if you are not, you can usually get out while there's still time.

A couple of years ago, one of our businesses at [Career Mission](#) dealt primarily with student loans (and it still does, although much less so than in the past). In running this business I was always a little circumspect about its long-term prospects, mostly because a lot of the business was dependent upon major forces that were outside our control: (1) government programs to subsidize student loans from private lenders, and (2) the value of those loans as securities on Wall Street. Both

of these eventually went away, and following this the student loan business suffered a great deal.

Had I been an employee at the time, I certainly could have benefited from knowing this information. I could have asked to be given work in other departments or divisions of [Career Mission](#), which were not as dependent upon [student loans](#). For example, I might have asked to work in an employment-based business as well. In short, I could have communicated with my superiors, relaying my value and how it could translate to other, healthier areas of the company.

The mortgage business in the United States was also built on the value of being able to sell securities (i.e., packaging loans into bundles and selling them as a group). Imagine if you worked for one of these mortgage companies two years ago. Down the street from our office in Pasadena is the shell of IndyMac, a former giant bank that did tons of these mortgages. The mortgage business of IndyMac is now completely gone. What if you had worked in this bank a couple of years ago? Would you have been asking questions about the bank's long-term viability? What would you have done for the company and for yourself as the tide began to shift?

The ability to communicate your value is part of the big picture. You need to communicate your value but also understand where you and the value of your work fits into the grand scheme. Is your value to the organization dependent upon forces outside of your control? Is your job dependent upon the government like the student loans were? You need to understand these things well in order to assess the viability of your company and your employment.

Once you interview with a company--or even send in a résumé, you do not have anything to lose by communicating your value. A little-known job search secret is that a significant percentage of people get jobs each year using non-traditional methods to communicate with potential employers. For example, calling before sending a résumé is a great way to get the employer's attention. Calling after an interview to reaffirm your interest is another great way to get an employer's attention. Making sure you remain on the employer's radar with a series of notes (even if you end up getting the job six months from now) is also a great way to get an employer's attention. Remember, communication is key.

Communication means letting people know you are there. Let people know you are interested in working for them. Let people know you care. When you communicate with a potential employer, you make yourself stand out. Excellent communication can get you a job when you might not have otherwise succeeded.

What makes you special? What makes you different? Why are you a good employee? Communicate who you are and what you do well. This is what all potential employers want to hear, and it is what you need them to know.

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