



# CAMD Communicator

Volume: 0001  
 May 2014

## 3-Step Strategy: Save Money & Improve Business Communication Skills

Greetings friends, colleagues and professional associates,

It has been some time since I wrote and shared some thoughts with everyone. So at the encouragement of good friends, I have once again taken up the pen (or in this case, the keyboard).

Recently I delivered a presentation to the German Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai for their annual HR Summit. The theme of this Spring’s event was: *Keys for successful leadership*. I know that many of my friends and colleagues were not able to attend the event, so I thought I would share some of the tips and advice I offered in my talk:

### The Science Behind Developing Communication Skills.



During the presentation I promised to provide the audience of senior managers with tips on how to save money and get more from their English language and business communication skills training efforts. Now I would like to share some of these same tips with you.

But first, I think it is important that we look at some common misconceptions about how adults learn, and how they acquire and use additional languages. The first thing we need to realize is that Children learn language easier than adults, for many reasons. Adult learning differs from how children learn.

### Adults learn differently than children.



CHILDREN	ADULTS
Rely on others to choose what is important to be learned	Decide for themselves what is important to be learned
Accept the presentation of important information	Need to substantiate the information based on their beliefs and experience
Have expectations that what they are learning will be useful in their long-term future	Expect that what they are learning will be immediately useful
Have little or no experience upon which to build	Have much experience upon which to build



Don’t expect programs that are designed for the way children learn to be successful with adult learners.



Maybe it’s a good idea to review why English language business communication skills are so important to our organizations. Essentially, we want to develop local leaders and managers to look after operations in the countries where we operate.

**International companies consistently rank communication skills as the most critical leadership competency.**

People in our companies need to communicate effectively with:

- team members (colleagues and staff),
- supervisors and managers,
- investors and stakeholders,
- other divisions and departments,
- clients and suppliers,
- media and the public.



**Effective communication is the first step to good management and leadership development.**

Effective communication is the most important foundational leadership & management core competency.

Without good communication skills, other leadership and management competencies cannot be developed.

**Better communication means better business.**

Ok, so what is “effective communication”? Effective communication does NOT mean having perfect language skills. In fact, I have never met anyone who was “perfect” in any language. Even me, I have been using English for a long time and I am not perfect with it. But I can communicate effectively with it.

Effective Communication simply means:

**Making yourself understood correctly (people understand the message you intend them to get)**

**&**

**Understanding others correctly (you understand what other people intend you to get)**

It is tougher when we are not using our native language, but can still be achieved even with less than perfect language ability.

Also, it is my experience after working with several thousands of people in China for over 16 years, that if adults like English, then they are already pretty good at it by the time they leave university. If they are not good in English by then, they may have decided it is not important to them, or that they simply don’t like it.

For these adults, more English learning is NOT what they want or need. What they prefer is to learn how to use the English that they already know for communicating more effectively at work.

Now ... if you are still with me, here are some very practical tips for helping the staff in your companies to improve business communication in practical ways.



## **“3-Step Strategy” to save money and improve the English business communication levels of the staff in your organizations.**

### **1) Focus on Assessment First**

- Assess the professional staff who currently need (or will need) to use English for business communications.
- Assess a large group and develop a profile of learners (assessments are not expensive).
- Use a standardized Telephone and Email assessment - they are best (short, focused, accurate).
- Focus on real speaking and listening skills during the assessment.
- Remove body language from the assessment (many people can guess the meaning from body language).
- Give a verbal instruction over the phone for writing a work related email (test ability to follow verbal instruction).
- Also assess their email correspondence for writing skills and ability to follow verbal instruction by phone.

### **2) Categorize the Learners**

- Create a profile of learners by categorizing them based on their communicative competence and English level.
- Use simple categories such as:
  - *Basic/Beginner*: need real foundational English language skills – general English learning required.
  - *Lower Intermediate*: will benefit most by mixing general and business English training.
  - *Intermediate*: can benefit from business English communication skills training – but have language flaws.
  - *Upper Intermediate*: are good candidates for professional business communication skills in English.
  - *Advanced*: need challenging course in advanced business communications (more focus on tone and style).

### **3) Develop Training Strategy**

- Decide which functions and individuals need to improve the most and use appropriate skills development methods.
  - *Basic/Beginner*: language school with Chinese teacher for basic level general English language program.
  - *Lower Intermediate*: language school with foreign teacher for basic level general English language program.
  - *Intermediate*: can be business English or business communications: in-house or in school with foreign teacher.
  - *Upper Intermediate*: group work in customized business communications in-house program with foreign trainer.
  - *Advanced*: individual coaching in customized business communications to focus on style refinement.

Ok, now we know what, how and why. But how do we make sure that we get the best return on the investment that we will make?

- Link the learning results to the employee performance planning and review process.
- Set learning and development goals and targets in the employee performance plan.
- Expect and elicit results – don’t treat the program as “optional” or a company benefit or perk.
- Have participants sign a “Learner Contract” to increase their commitment and effort.
- Ensure that management and line supervisors are involved in the process and monitoring results.
- Work with quality training providers that understand adult learners and action learning techniques.
- Make the learning relevant to their real work (improve the “on-the-job” skills transfer).
- Develop a motivational reward program where participants can see WFIM “what’s in it for me?”
- Broadcast your results and market the success of your program to others in the company.