

THE EXPERT'S VOICE® IN ORACLE

The Tech Professional's Guide to Communicating in a Global Workplace

Adapting Across Cultural and Gender Boundaries

April Wells

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April Wells
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This book is dedicated to my husband, Larry Wells. Without his support and gentle prodding over the years, this book would never have been possible. He's kept me going and kept me focused even when I wanted to give up. It is because of him that I have had the opportunity to learn about so many different cultures from all over the world, including right next door.



About IOUG Press

IOUG Press is a joint effort by the **Independent Oracle Users Group (the IOUG)** and **Apress** to deliver some of the highest-quality content possible on Oracle Database and related topics. The IOUG is the world's leading, independent organization for professional users of Oracle products. Apress is a leading, independent technical publisher known for developing high-quality, no-fluff content for serious technology professionals. The IOUG and Apress have joined forces in IOUG Press to provide the best content and publishing opportunities to working professionals who use Oracle products.

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About the Author

April Wells has been in IT for more than 20 years. She is an Oracle database administrator and applications DBA with experience in large companies, midsize companies, and startups. She has international experience in many regions of the world, including South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America. April's international work has brought her into contact with people from all levels of organization and all walks of life, impressing upon her the need to adapt to better facilitate effective communication across cultures, ages, and genders. She has made many mistakes and learned much the hard way so that you don't have to.

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CHAPTER 1

Communication Matters

Everyone communicates. By learning to communicate more effectively and efficiently, you can become a more valuable employee, improve your self-confidence, and increase your worth to your department and your company. As technologists, we are often better at communicating with the people who we see every day, but I know from experience (you know, those hits you take on your performance appraisals that suggest you could improve in your communication skills?) that we can improve in the way we interact with just about everyone we meet.

We all communicate, and we all have from the day we took our first breath. We continue to communicate until we take our final breath. Any parent understands the difference between the “I’m wet” cry, the “I’m hungry” cry, and the “I’m bored” cry. You can glean from across distances at least some of the information that someone is trying to convey to you even without being able to hear them.

You know when your boss is late for a meeting, and you know when your loved ones are in a bad mood.

Communication happens on an almost continual basis. By learning to communicate in different situations in the most effective way, you can further your career and make your next performance appraisal better. Pay attention to the different communication situations you find yourself in and learn how to adapt your message and method to the current situation.

I've been reminded of the criticality of communicating effectively in a business setting when I've gotten my annual performance appraisal and heard that communication was one of the places I needed to concentrate my efforts for the following year. I've read the appraisals and worked at improving in one or another place where I thought my communication has been lacking. It was hard to listen to that boss, however, tell me how much I was lacking in communication ability when he was the one who repeatedly called me into his office to look over his critical e-mails to make sure there weren't any glaring factual, grammar, or other mistakes. If I was so abysmal at communication, I'm not sure I was the best person to do the proofreading and make suggestions. I was never quite sure what I was supposed to do with the mixed messages I was getting, but I helped with the emails to make my boss look good, and I worked hard to improve the preception that everyone had of my communication skills.

I read books.

I watched videos and Ted talks.

I researched where I thought I might be lacking and I learned. And as I learned my performance appraisals improved and soon I no longer was getting told that it was a weakness I needed to improve upon. It became one of my strengths and selling points.

This book contains a great deal of what I learned through all of those methods and through much trial and error. May you learn from my mistakes.

Terminology

When you are talking about any topic that you aren't well versed in, you need to understand the vocabulary that is common to that topic. Ironically, the best place to start this conversation on communication is with the basic vocabulary that we will use in this book. This will set us off on a good common ground of using the same words and them meaning the same thing.

Communication

Communication isn't something that magically happened when we started our professional career. It has been going on all of our lives. We do it every minute of every day, and usually we do it without thinking about doing it. We simply communicate.

When people think about *communication*, they typically think about the spoken word, be it face to face or across a telephone line. Communication isn't merely speaking with others, though. It is more than that.

A little better, but not complete. Lets look a little closer at communication in more of its forms.

Communication can take many forms, one of which is of course the spoken word. But think about all of the ways that you exchange information every day.

You wake up in the morning, you talk to your family over breakfast, you look at your text messages, you check e-mail, and you may look at social media. All of these things are communication.

If you drive to work, you play the nonverbal communication game of navigating traffic. You merge onto the highway, you nod or motion to people crossing the street, and you yield the right of way or you don't. Stopping for coffee or breakfast on your way to work? You communicate with the clerk who waits on you or with the counter attendant at the gas station. If you take a cab or public transportation to work, you flag down the transportation, you speak to the driver, and maybe you tell him where

you need to go or you simply nod and smile to her when you climb the steps. You pull the cord when you need the bus to stop. You mumble “good morning” to your fellow passengers.

At work, you check your voice mail, check your e-mail, IM your teammates, and start your day. You sit in meetings and listen or participate; you take notes.

Going out at lunch for a walk? Did you notice the lone protestor in the park? What about the woman singing outside in the park with her guitar case open? Maybe the panhandler on the corner? They’re all communicating too.

You communicate all of your waking hours all of your life in one way or another, sometimes one on one, sometimes in a small group, and sometimes with everyone you can possibly reach with your message.

Books, newspapers, magazines, those annoying flyers that someone puts under the windshield wipers of cars when people are shopping...all of these things are communication.

Think about the communication you experienced today and pay attention to what you experience tomorrow. Think about what is effective and what isn’t, what gets the point across, and what just leaves you feeling a bit wrong.

Culture

So, if that is communication, what is culture?

Culture is the particular set of customs, morals, codes, and traditions of a person or group.

Frequently people think about culture as being “mine” or “theirs.” Often this is with the connotation that because “mine” is what the person is comfortable with, it has to inherently be better than “theirs.” But...if you are on the other side of the equation (the “theirs” side), you simply have a different “mine” perspective. Usually the “theirs” side is the people who live in another country. This, however, isn’t always the case.