



May 2009

Dear Clients, Colleagues, and Friends,

Re: Good Communication is Key

It has been thirty years since the opening of Commonwealth Engineering & Technology, Inc. (CET) in the spring of 1979. Engineers had just made the transition from slide rules to hand held calculators a few years earlier. Computers were giant monsters hidden away in climate controlled rooms and fed by punch cards. Engineering drawings were prepared by draftsmen drawing with rapidograph pens and Leroy lettering sets. Secretaries banged out reports on IBM Selectric typewriters. And, engineers and their clients communicated mainly by letters (with carbon copies), hard-wired telephones, and lots of face-to-face meetings.

Today, even the fax machine is old technology. Now, we send e-mails and make calls on the run from our cell phones, or send text messages. We hold teleconferences and webinars. We even have the ability, if we find it useful, to “blog” and “tweet” on social networking web sites like Facebook and Twitter.

The ability to communicate in different ways has changed dramatically over the years. What hasn't changed is the need for good communication, especially in our industry where so many people are involved in a project – from the facility owner and operator, to the engineer and architect, to the contractor, manufacturer, and supplier, to the government regulator. And, with the need to communicate across four generations in the workforce, from the Silent Generation to the well-connected Millennials, it is especially important, and useful, to find out how those on your project team prefer to communicate. It can create some real efficiencies.

Sometimes, however, we become so enamored with the speed and convenience of today's technologies that we forget the importance of personal communication, whether by telephone or a face-to-face meeting. Hearing a voice or seeing a face can contribute so much more to understanding each other than text on computer screen, which can often be misinterpreted, at best causing a loss of time in trying to explain the real intent of the message, or worse a loss of goodwill. Let's hope that in this increasingly fast-paced world, we don't forget the personal communication that is so important in serving one another. The next time it seems like people “just aren't getting it,” we encourage you to pick up the phone or pay someone a visit and see what a difference it makes.

Until next time,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas E. Whittle".

Thomas E. Whittle, P.E., BCEE
Principal Engineer