

Communication

Keep it direct and simple

Communication simply stated is what we say and how we say it. Direct communication is the best form of communication. But whatever be the form, reaching out to the audience is important. A good leader has the keys to stir the soul with his communication skills. Continuing the series on 'leadership', this article explores the effectiveness of a clear and powerful communication...

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"When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion"

- Dale Carnegie

A leader who doesn't communicate will travel the journey alone. "Who speaks, sows; who listens, reaps," says an Argentinean proverb, and so is effective communication an important part of being a successful leader. Developing excellent communication skills is essential to effective leadership. A leader must be able to share knowledge and ideas to transmit a sense of urgency and enthusiasm to others. If a leader can't get a message across clearly and motivate others to act on it, then having a message doesn't matter.

The success of any relationship, job or even marriage depends on communication. People will not follow a leader, who neither knows what he wants nor where is he going. Nothing could be easier than failing to communicate. Treating others in a demeaning, condescending or berating way is out of context today. The 'I am the boss and you just work here' attitude has lost shine. For a long time, loudness was equated with toughness, stubbornness with superior knowledge and argumentativeness with honesty. Thankfully, those days have come to an end.

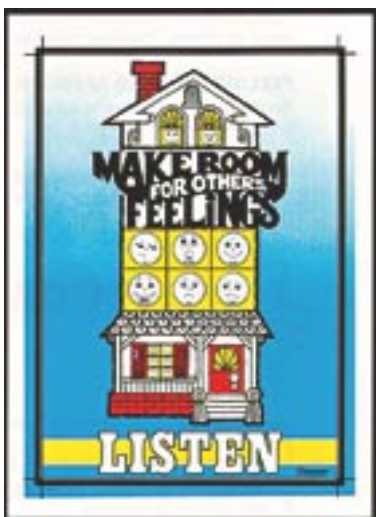
Communication is best and most effective when it is direct. If you are working on the shop floor, and something on the line 300 ft away needs to improve to make your job more effective, walk over and talk to the person. Do not try it any indirect way. Similarly, if you are the boss commanding multiple divisions – may be multi locations – how you receive

communication and how you communicate, will be vital to the success of your company goals. Would you listen to communication fed to you by someone (even if you think he is your trusted lieutenant in the corporate hierarchy) other than the individual concerned? Would you communicate back through a third person (even if he or she is your trusted lieutenant in the corporate hierarchy)? Or would you communicate directly with the person where the issue needs to be resolved? By taking the indirect route, leaders have lost in many ways – business, revenue, high value adding people, etc. Inability to communicate effectively and directly is a sign of weakness in a leader; people may tag along only because you hold a bigger designation and not because they are sold out to you.

The ability to communicate well is what lights the fire in people. It's what turns great ideas into actions. It's what makes all achievement possible. We all think that we communicate well because we have been doing it ever since our childhood. But true and effective communication is rather rare in the adult world. There is no secret recipe for communication, but one can use some basic concepts and improve it:

- Make communication your top priority
- Be open to other people
- Create a receptive environment for communication.

No matter how busy you are during the day, you must take time to communicate and make





it your priority. All the brilliant ideas in the world are worthless if you don't share them. You can accomplish communication in many ways – through meetings, one on one, at the lunch table, over a coffee break, etc. What is important is that communication never stops. In an organisation where most people work on computers, people get habituated to communicating through intranet or e-mails even to the person at the next table. When you want to communicate effectively, you don't seek to create records for post mortem (then you have already killed the spirit), but you get up and go discuss the subject one on one within the same campus and commit to your discussions.

Communication doesn't have to happen in big conference rooms. The most effective way is the informal one. Unfortunately, we have structures in organisations. We have managing directors, presidents, vice presidents and all those other levels. One on ones is a way of overcoming those structural hazards. At lunch over a game of ping-pong or at the coffee table, etc. These conversations are more off the record stuff. It's a chance to stay in touch. You can find out, how they feel about the company and their jobs. Use it as a chance to learn something about them as individuals. It's your chance to become more human towards them. Encourage them to ask you questions about the company. Share your vision. Share your strategies and collect a feedback. Direct eyeball-to-eyeball communication has many benefits. As Lee lococca once said "I've known a lot of engineers with terrific ideas, who had trouble explaining them to other people. It's always a shame when a guy with great talent can't tell the board or a committee what's in his head". The biggest mistake managers make, besides thinking that all wisdom flows down from them, is failing to

understand that communication is a two-way street. You have to share your ideas and listen to theirs. That is step number two: Be open to other people – up, down and sideways.

When Jack Welch ran General Electric, ever so often he'd schedule an appointment with a man named Ram Charan. They'd sit in Welch's corner suite and spend a couple of agenda-less hours talking about business, people and the world. Ram Charan is a management consultant, but these meetings - like Charan's chats with dozens of other CEOs - were unlike most interactions between consultants and executives. Charan presented no power point presentation and kept no team of MBA's standing ready to implement his advice. Instead, he just offered informal wisdom about how to improve companies - and even bosses as overscheduled and impatient as Welch routinely have made time to listen. "I'm a huge admirer," Welch told NEWSWEEK, describing Charan as unusually adept at helping companies import 'best practices' from other firms. "Ram is an incredibly effective sponge - he's always learning, and he keeps confidences... People just like to listen to what he's saying."

In the places I worked in India and overseas, I kept an open door policy – anyone could walk in and talk to me anytime. What I got out of it was some amazing feedback. They told me what they thought was going wrong, so I could correct it. I got some great suggestions. They asked where they wanted help and their ideas on solving problems. About design improvements, machine maintenance, cleanliness, training, food in the canteen, productivity, etc, all. The unions never struck work while I held the fort. They told me about their fears, their problems. I was able to help them in their personal lives. Good communication also builds trust, and trust builds bonding. Such interaction does not happen by accident, that's where rule number three comes into play: Create a receptive environment for communication. "Once people do take the risk of telling you what they think, do not punish them for their openness. Do nothing – absolutely nothing – to discourage them from taking that risk again", says Stuart Levine and Michael Crom, CEO and VP, respectively, of Dale Carnegie and Associates.

The truth is that communication is both



a skill and an art. It's a process worth thinking about and practicing more than what many people do. Sometimes you may have to show your personal vulnerability by putting your ideas on the line. Look at it this way – you are sharing with others and asking them to share with you. And that may always not be easy. It will take time and techniques that need to be practiced. Communication is built on trusting relationships.

“Educators take something simple and make it complicated. Communicators take something complicated and make it simple,” – John Maxwell. It includes three parts, which are: phraseology – spoken words (can be written too), tonality – how we say it, and body language – the spirit or earnestness with which we say it. There are three parts in which our voice communication is heard. They are verbal, tonality and body language. Your communication is read in all these three compartments. You can become a more effective communicator by following some simple guidelines:



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- Communication is not only what you say but also how you say it. Do not communicate using complex phraseology, big words or big sentences. Simplicity is the key to effective communication. So simplify your message to ensure that you are understood
 - It is necessary to see the person you are trying to communicate with. Ask yourself the questions; who is my audience? What are their questions? What do I need to accomplish? How much time do I have to communicate? Being more audience oriented will make you a better communicator. “People believe in great communicators, because great communicators believe in people,” says John Maxwell
 - Say what you truly believe, and then live by what you say. People look for credibility in great communicators. How do you convey your credibility to your audience? It's simple. First, believe in what you say, and second, live by what you say. Conviction in action is credibility itself. Show the truth to your audience
 - What is your goal as you communicate? Your goal must be action. Dumping information is not communicating. Always give them something to feel, something to remember and something to do when you communicate. When you hone your skills to do that, your ability to lead others will go to a new level.
- There are a few things one can do to improve one's communication skills:
- When you want to communicate something, make it simple, clear and straightforward. Use simple language, simple sentences that can be easily understood. Include all aspects that you want to communicate. Do not leave anything to be understood. Do not leave anything implied. Most important, communicate directly to the person or persons you want to receive the message. Do not go through other tiers in your structure (for reasons of dilution/adulteration/or alteration of the communication. Be clear and crisp like the sound of a bell to maintain effectiveness. Remember simplicity and clarity are a communicator's best friends. “We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is, knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out,” Ray Bradbury
 - Focus on what you want to communicate. Keep your subject and audience in mind. Think about what they need. Think about what are their questions or what they will be. Think about their desires. Remember good communicators meet people where they are. “The reality of the other person is not in what he reveals to you, but in what he cannot reveal to you. Therefore, if you would understand him, listen not to what he says but rather what he does not say,” Khalil Gibran
 - Are you living your message? Is there a difference between your message and who you are? Ask the people closest to you – your spouse, friend, subordinate, mentor, tutor, coach, children, parents, boss, etc. They may be able to see things you are blind to. Include their comments to make changes and become better at communicating. “Watch your manner of speech, if you wish to develop a peaceful state of mind. Start each day by affirming peaceful, contented and happy attitudes and your days will tend to be pleasant and successful,” Norman Vincent Peale. **MMT**