



9 Practices Make You a More Effective Communicator

BY MARTIN ZWILLING · MAY 17, 2017

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Every business professional and **entrepreneur** believes they are a good communicator, but how do they know? It's really the perception of the recipients that counts, and poor communicators are almost always poor listeners, so they don't hear the shortcomings. Warren Buffet once told a class of business students that better communication could boost their value by fifty percent.

That's certainly worth going after, so it is time for all to take a hard look in the mirror, recognize the need to improve, and make the commitment to change. But looking in the mirror doesn't help unless you know what to look for. I see real help a recent book, "What MORE Can I Say," by Dianna Booher, one of the most recognized business-communication gurus, which clearly calls out the parameters of effective business communication.

In that context, she offers a nine-point checklist for success in the art of communication and persuasion that I believe every professional should use in their own self-evaluation. I'll paraphrase a few of her insights here to get you started:

1. **Generate trust rather than distrust.** Effective communication requires trust in you, your message and your delivery. We tend to trust people that we think are like us, or we have social proof that others trust, or we feel reciprocal trust from the sender. People who are optimistic, confident, and demonstrate competence generate trust. Are you one of these?
2. **Be collaborative rather than presenting a monologue.** Collaborating for influence has become a fundamental leadership skill. Be known for the questions you ask—not the answers you give. Statements imply that you intend to control the interaction, whereas questions imply that other input has value to arriving at a mutually beneficial decision.
3. **Aim to simplify rather than inject complexity.** Simplicity leads to focus, which produces clarity of purpose. People distrust what they don't understand, what they perceive as doublespeak, or things made unnecessarily complex. Influencing people to change their mind or actions requires building an intuitive simple path to your answer.
4. **Deliver with tact and avoid insensitivity.** Some word choices turn people off because they are tasteless, tactless, or pompous. Phrase your communication to avoid biases that might create negative reactions. Consider using other authority figures or quotes to deliver a more persuasive message while eliminating any sensitive implications.
5. **Position future potential instead of achievements alone.** The allure of potential is normally greater than today's actual achievements. This is especially true for career advancement, motivation, and the power of

systems. For customers and clients, let them have it both ways. Consider what you can package as your own untapped potential.

6. Consider the listener perspective rather than the presenter. Listeners tend to average all the pieces of information they hear and walk away with a single impression. More is not always better, so reduce the length of presentations and speeches. Perceptions are more important than reality. Avoid the “over-helpfulness” syndrome.

7. Tend toward specifics rather than generalizations. Many executive speeches miss the mark because they aim for the general constituency and hit no one. People need to know how a message relates to them personally, not just what has to be done and why. Your challenge is to make the future seem attainable and applicable to each listener.

8. Capitalize on emotions in addition to logic. Emotion often overrides logic, but logic rarely overrides emotion. For many listeners, a logical explanation merely justifies and supports an emotional decision that has already been made. Recognize and calm first any emotional reactions of fear. Engage multiple senses to reach a listener's emotion.

9. Lead with empathy before your own perspective. Empathy starts with actively listening to what's being said and what's not being said. Listen for the gaps and distortion between perception and reality, and then focus on closing these gaps before any persuasion of your own perspective is attempted. Let others help you listen, and tune your response.

As the economy continues to improve, and the competition gets tougher, you need every ounce of communication skill you can muster to land the career and business opportunities that will be come your way. Standing still means falling behind. Are you listening and changing at the right pace to get your fifty-percent advantage?

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