

HOW TO COMMUNICATE LIKE A PRO

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Here are six techniques you can use to help you say things simply but persuasively, and even forcefully:

(1) Get your thinking straight. The most common source of confusing messages is muddled thinking. We have an idea we haven't thought through. Or we have so much we want to say that we can't possibly say it. Or we have an opinion that is so strong we can't keep it in. As a result, we are ill prepared when we speak, and we confuse everyone. The first rule of plain talk, then, is to think before you say anything. Organize your thoughts.

(2) Say what you mean. Say exactly what you mean.

(3) Get to the point. Effective communicators don't beat around the bush. If you want someone to buy something, ask for the order. If you want someone to do something, say exactly what you want done.

(4) Be concise. Don't waste words. Confusion grows in direct proportion to the number of words used. Speak plainly and briefly, using the shortest, most familiar words.

(5) Be real. Each of us has a personality—a blending of traits, thought patterns and mannerisms—which can aid us in communicating clearly. For maximum clarity, be natural, and let the real you come through. You'll be more convincing and much more comfortable.

(6) Speak in images. The cliché, that “a picture is worth a thousand words” isn't exactly true (try explaining the Internal Revenue code using nothing but pictures). But words that help people visualize concepts can be tremendous aids in communicating a message. Once Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative became known as Star Wars, its opponents had a powerful weapon against it. The name gave it the image of a far-out, futuristic dream beyond the reach of current technology. Reagan was never able to come up with a more powerful positive image.

Your one-on-one communication will acquire real power if you learn to send messages that are simple, clear, and assertive; if you learn to monitor the hearer to determine that your message was accurately received; and if you learn to obtain the desired response by approaching people with due regard for their behavioral styles.

Your finesse as a communicator will grow as you learn to identify and overcome the obstacles to communication. Practice the six techniques I just mentioned, and you'll find your effectiveness as a message-sender growing steadily.

But sending messages is only half the process of communicating. To be a truly accomplished communicator, you must

also cultivate the art of listening.

If you're approaching a railroad crossing around a blind curve, you can send a message with your car horn. But that's not the most important part of your communication task. The communication that counts takes place when you stop, look and listen.

We're all familiar with the warning on the signs at railroad crossings: Stop, Look and Listen. It's also a useful admonition for communication.

It's easy to think of communication as a process of sending messages. But sending is only half the process. Receiving is the other half. So at the appropriate time, we have to stop sending and prepare to receive.

A sign on the wall of Lyndon Johnson's Senate office put it in a down-to-earth way: "When you're talking, you ain't learning."

LISTENING PAYS

Salespeople have learned that you can talk your way out of a sale, but you can listen your way into one. They listen to their customers to find out what their needs are, and then concentrate on filling those needs. Skilled negotiators know that no progress can be made until they have heard and understood what the other side wants.

LISTENING REQUIRES THOUGHT AND CARE

Listening, like speaking and writing, requires thought and care. If you don't concentrate on listening, you won't

learn much, and you won't remember much of what you learn.

Some experts claim that professionals earn between 40% and 80% of their pay by listening. Yet, most of us retain only 25% of what we hear. If you can increase your retention and your comprehension, you can increase your effectiveness in the 21st century's Age of Information.

LISTEN WITH YOUR EYES

If you listen only with your ears, you're missing out on much of the message. Good listeners keep their eyes open while listening.

Look for feelings. The face is an eloquent communication medium. Learn to read its messages. While the speaker is delivering a verbal message, the face can be saying, "I'm serious," "Just kidding," "It pains me to be telling you this," or "This gives me great pleasure."

SOME NON-VERBAL SIGNALS TO WATCH FOR:

Rubbing one eye. When you hear "I guess you're right," and the speaker is rubbing one eye, guess again. Rubbing one eye often is a signal that the speaker is having trouble inwardly accepting something.

Tapping feet. When a statement is accompanied by foot-tapping, it usually indicates a lack of confidence in what is being said. Rubbing fingers. When you see the thumb and forefinger rubbing together, it often means that the speaker is holding something back.

Staring and blinking. If you've made your best offer and the other person stares at the ceiling and blinks rapidly, your offer is under consideration.

Crooked smiles. Most genuine smiles are symmetrical. And most facial expressions are fleeting. If a smile is noticeably crooked, you're probably looking at a fake smile.

Eyes that avoid contact. Poor eye contact can be a sign of low self-esteem, but it can also indicate that the speaker is not being truthful.

It would be unwise to make a decision based solely on these visible signals.

But they can give you valuable tips on the kind of questions to ask and the kind of answers to be alert for.

GOOD LISTENERS MAKE THINGS EASY

People who are poor listeners will find few who are willing to come to them with useful information. Good listeners make it easy on those to whom they want to listen. They make it clear that they're interested in what the other person has to say.

MESSAGES FROM THE MASTERS
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