



Focus

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Five Essential Communication Tips

Communication misfires are so common we often make little notice of them. Still, ineffective communication bedevils leaders of all stripes so I offer these five tips to improve your odds of getting your point across.

Repeat, repeat, repeat.

This tops my list because it is simple and effective. Repetition works because people tend to believe what they hear over and over. That's why advertising (and propaganda) works! Leaders get extra credit for delivering the same message through different channels: print, email, and spoken messages come to mind.

Make it real.

Your message should be from the heart: clear, simple, and without modifiers or "fluff." By from the heart I mean obviously authentic, and direct. Authentic is independent of the message content, which may be positive or negative, inspiring or cautionary. Here's the benchmark: Someone with full knowledge of the facts would deliver an authentic message, "Yes, that's about how it is."

Use stories where possible.

Humans have used storytelling to pass on important knowledge since . . . well, before recorded history. Because we instinctively love a story, inserting stories in our communication improves effectiveness. I'll return to advertising for validation; even a television commercial has a story that essentially says, "Your life will be better if you use our product." The story can be brief, like: *In June of last year, a health worker in a tiny town in Zambia went to the Web site of the Centers for Disease Control and answered a question about the treatment of malaria.* [From *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling*]

by Stephen Denning] That is an example of a springboard story, and there are different story types you can employ depending on your objective.

Engage the listener's imagination.

Use the word "imagine" and graphic descriptions to lead each recipient to create vivid images in their minds. No illustration or video clip can equal the human imagination and each person's mind movie is personalized and uniquely powerful.

Provide context and explain relevance.

The best crafted message will fail if the intended recipient doesn't pay attention, so make certain the audience understands the message is important to their well-being. Even when recipients know they are members of a large group, use powerful and memorable language and make the message *interesting*. Human brains are hard to notice different, or interesting, things and a skillful messenger exploits this to break through the clutter of competing communications.

Well, that's all for now. But remember the Martian invasion begins tomorrow at 11 hours GMT, so check my Twitter account for the latest updates. I have also set up a simplified new client sign up to expedite distribution of alien invader resistance tips in my new newsletter, *Mastering Martians for Fun and Profit*.

Tom Wagner

If you've got the alien invader problem licked,
contact me about using DiSC Personal Profiles to
turbocharge your employees' communication skills.

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