

Chapter One The Fine Art of Communication

“The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing in the right place, but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.”
Dorothy Nevill¹

Winston Churchill is one of the best known speakers in our generation, and he had a great impact both as a communicator and as a listener. One time, a rather boring speaker of Parliament was rambling on and on, and Churchill was sitting with his eyes closed. The speaker noticed that Churchill’s eyes were closed and asked, “Mr. Churchill, must you sleep while I am talking?” Churchill’s response was, with his eyes still closed, “No, it is purely voluntary.” Another time, a female member of Parliament was quite upset with him and said, “Mr. Churchill, you make me so mad; if you were my husband, I would put poison in your tea.” Churchill’s response was “Madam, if you were my wife, I would drink it.” Churchill certainly had a way with words!²

How we communicate--that is, how we talk, listen, understand, and interact with others on our team--determines the influence we have in our relational world. If Lorraine and I have a consistent belief in our previous book, *Leveraging Your Leadership Style*, and this book, *Leveraging Your Communication Style*, it is this: life is about relationships! We think your relationships with God, your spouse, your family, your coworkers, your neighbors, and your friends are the core of life. Communication stands at the center of each of these relationships. This book will help you become a better communicator by equipping you to discover how you can best speak and how you can become a better listener. In the next few pages, you will be introduced to the various aspects of speaking. Then, in the chapters that follow, Lorraine and I will help you (1) discover your own communication style and (2) learn, as both a speaker and a listener, how to interact with others who have different styles of communication.

It Is about Give and Take

It may surprise you to hear that most of us need *a lot* more help learning how to listen than we do learning how to speak. You probably picked up this book looking for some tools and techniques that will help you become a better speaker, but we would be irresponsible not to also help you become a better listener. The Bible tells us this truth in James 1:19-20: “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. For man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires”(NIV). I can’t tell you how many times over the course of my life that I have wished I were slow to speak and quick to listen!

So, what is communication all about? At the heart, communication is telling *my* story and listening to *your* story. If I am in the workplace, you are telling me about the sales project, but when you do, a part of you is involved in the story. When I am telling you about what I did last weekend, I am telling you something about me. When we communicate, we are sharing our stories. Artists understand this particularly well because when they sing, paint, write, or dance, they are expressing part of their soul--the deepest part of themselves. When you talk, remember that you are sharing part of yourself with others, and when others are speaking, they are sharing part of themselves with you.

How important is communication in the workplace? It is a *big* issue, and getting *bigger*! For instance, in a 2002 survey of 1,104 employees around the country, 86 percent of the respondents said that their bosses seem to consider themselves great communicators, but only 17 percent said their bosses actually communicate effectively. “We thought there was a communication gap, but it turned out we were totally wrong. It's not a gap; it's a chasm,” says

Boyd Clarke and Ron Crossland, who include the survey in their book *The Leader's Voice: How Your Communication Can Inspire Action and Get Results!*³

Bridging that communication chasm is what this book is all about. Regardless of whether you are communicating with one person, with a small group, or with a large audience, you will need to understand the mechanics of basic communication. The remainder of this chapter will help you understand the basics of effective spoken communication.

Three Keys to Communication

Since we believe that all communication is ultimately about relationship, we urge each person to think of communication in light of facts, feelings, and figures. Facts are the data and details that we are trying either to share or to get agreement upon with our audience. Feelings are the emotions we are either experiencing or want our audience to experience. Figures are the symbols or images that help us to connect with our audience. We have all experienced speeches or presentations where the speaker appeared to have some level of mastery of the material and seemed genuinely to believe the material had some importance to the speaker and to us. However, we left the presentation feeling frustrated and bored because the presenter never connected with us. I believe that an effective communicator must address three primary engagement targets: the mind (the thinking place), the heart (the feeling place), , and the feet (the action place). If the speaker does not do this, then he or she has missed the mark.

Years ago, I (John) was fortunate to have a fantastic experience in a college communications class taught by Professor Womack. I loved that experience so much that I ended up taking two more classes from him. Professor Womack often trained corporate presenters, and I will forever be in debt to him for his excellent training. He was always clear about the

importance of connecting at the cognitive (head), affective (heart), and behavioral (feet) levels with the audience. Based on the professor's advice and the advice in Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, I always try to "begin with the end in mind." In other words, what do I want this person to do, or what difference should this conversation make? By starting from that perspective, I can arrange the three elements (facts, feelings, figures) and the three points of engagement (head, heart, feet) as I outline my presentation.

Facts

Facts are the tangible part of your presentation; they are where you try to connect with the mind of the people in the audience. People are interested in your facts (your information or expertise) if you show that you understand the relationship between your facts and their circumstances. In essence, you are connecting the dots. When you are presenting in a one-on-one conversation or in any group of fewer than ten people, it is very important *not* to have the facts be the primary driver of the communication. When you can see the "whites of their eyes," the primary driver of the communication must come from the heart. People need to know that you care about them and are speaking to them, not assaulting them with a series of facts that may or may not connect with the issues that they are concerned about.

On the other hand, when you are in a larger audience, facts often help to establish credibility. A tried and true framework for speaking comprises the three questions, "What? So what? Now what?" By having mastery of your facts and information with a larger audience, you help to establish credibility. But even here, be careful! Reciting reams of information without relating to your audience at the point of their felt need is a dangerous manoeuvre (and a potential sale or relationship killer).

Feelings

People don't care about how much you know until they know how much you care.

Feelings are the “soft” part of your presentation; they are where you should try to connect with the hearts of the people in the audience. Many speakers find it easy to dismiss this aspect of communication, as though dismissing it would make it go away. Friends . . . *stop! Everyone*, regardless of his or her style, whom you are speaking to has feelings and emotions, and your effectiveness as a communicator is directly related to your ability to connect your story to *his or her* story. However, you must remember that your primary focus in most communication is not simply to make your audience feel something, but for them to take some action. The “heart” part of your presentation must be woven in such a way that you are able to connect the listeners’ mind(thinking) and feet (action) through their heart (feeling). Whatever we feel strongly about, we will do. What we only accept in our head will never be lived out in our feet. All behavioral change happens with a thought that begins in the head, gets rooted in the heart, and then gets lived out through the feet.

One particularly effective way to communicate feelings is to be willing to tell your own story and some of how you felt at a certain moment. Since I (John) am a pastor of a large church, I speak to well over a thousand people every week. Part of what people comment about is that I am very “real,” and what I take from that is that when I share my story with them, they are able to relate to me at the heart level.

Figures

Figures are where we establish symbols, visuals, paradigms, or values that can help people translate their thoughts and feelings into actions. I know that I personally wrestle with

communicating well with figures. Though I don't doubt the old saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words," I find that I personally am so "text" oriented that I have to be very intentional about including "pictures" in my presentations. One of the ways that I have overcome this is to use common images in my stories that everyone can relate to. For example, I was recently speaking about things that "overflow" in our lives. So I used the example of the large industrial trashcan in my family's garage at home and a weekly (sometimes two or three times!) ritual where our trash overflows and I have to perform a task that I call "trash management." I get a stepladder, climb up into the trashcan, and holding on to the garage door rails, I step down on the trash. We all have something that overflows in our lives. What is overflowing in your life, and what can you do to change it if it is the wrong thing? I probably spent three minutes of my thirty-minute presentation telling that story, but I promise you, it was a visual image that stuck in people's minds throughout the week. Provide a visual image that gives people a "hook" to hang their thinking on so that they can begin to develop a plan of action.

The goal of these presentation and engagement points is to develop a simple framework for speaking. Another old framework for speaking is to "tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them." The goal of most of your communication will be to change a behavior and elicit a response. Go after that result with an emphasis on simplicity. I used to play quite a bit of tennis. My advice to people learning to play tennis is the same as it is to those of us learning to speak well. We should master a few basic principles and then learn to execute them with consistency. Years ago, Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes was reported to have said the following: "I don't give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would die for the simplicity on the other side of complexity."⁴

Learn the basics of communicating well, then do it. This is the key to leveraging your success as a communicator.

You'll never go wrong if you prepare for speaking by thinking about your audience's head, heart, and feet. Engage your audience with facts, feelings, and figures. Finally, know what you want them to do in response to your presentation before you say your first word. The rest of this book will help you become an excellent communicator. You'll learn how to leverage your communication style by speaking with excellence and by listening with excellence to the communication styles of those in your life.