

The Ten Tenets of Effective Communication (part one)

Both you and your audience benefit when your communication adheres to these tenets

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS ABOUT CONNECTING with your audience. It's about your audience getting your message as you intended. It begins with understanding who your audience is and how they can best 'hear' your message, then using this information to craft and deliver your message. This is simply another way of saying that your message, whether written, verbal, or visual, must be audience-centered—focused around the needs of your



audience. Put yet another way, communication is less about you and all about them.

Effective communication is simple and clear, focuses around a single idea, and ultimately achieves the results you desire.

To be most effective, your communication must adhere to these ten tenets.

Effective communication is:

- ◆ Honest,
- ◆ Clear,
- ◆ Accurate,
- ◆ Comprehensive,
- ◆ Accessible,
- ◆ Concise,
- ◆ Correct,
- ◆ Timely, and
- ◆ Well designed.
- ◆ It builds goodwill too.

Let's discuss each in some detail.

Honest. The rock-bottom, most steadfast principle of any communication is honesty. Honesty builds rapport with your audience, and in this age of social media, a strong rapport is vital to success.

Anything short of the truth can cause adverse consequences for both you and your audience. In extreme cases, not

telling the entire truth can cause physical harm. Once your audience sees that you are shaving off parts of the truth, not telling the entire story, or worse, distorting the message with misinformation, your communication is doomed.

Blurring the truth of bad news is all too common. In the face of unsettling news, honesty can be disarming simply because it is unexpected.

Any kind of misinformation causes your audience to not only question the validity of your present message, but also your past and future messages. Misleading your audience can cause faulty decision making (such as investing when divesting is more judicious). Dishonest information can easily result in litigation and costly settlements.

These repercussions are some of the many reasons why you must maintain the highest level of integrity in all your communication. But there is a positive reason as well:

Being honest is the right thing to do.

Clear. Clarity enables your audience to get your message as you intended. And isn't that the whole point.

Instructions especially benefit from clarity. Who among us hasn't struggled through frustrating assembly instructions, or the less-than-accurate steps for using software features? And yet it's this lack of clarity that increases traffic to a company's technical support lines with the corresponding increase in costs.

Clarity is greatly enhanced when communication focuses on a single meaning and message. Clear communication means your audience doesn't have to guess or fill in the blanks or even ponder your meaning.

Accurate. Get your facts straight. Even the slightest inaccuracy subjugates believability and can bring the contents of an entire document into question.

Inaccuracies can annoy and perplex an audience, especially when they know otherwise. And keep your own biases at bay when citing facts; remain objective.

Compelling information presented accurately can still raise eyebrows; there is no need to overstate.

An occasional misstated fact can be tolerated, but attention to detail in this all important area is well worth the effort. The little bit of extra research that corrects a distortion goes a long way toward creating authoritative communication.

In a presentation, I once used the quote "Never miss an opportunity to keep your mouth shut", which had been attributed to author Robert Newton Peck. When I called him to verify this attribution, Mr Peck set the record straight. He told me, "Samuel Johnson said that."

Accuracy is ethical.

Comprehensive. Thorough communication answers all questions, provides all the necessary information in sufficient detail, and enables your audience to assess and act with confidence.

Oftentimes, being comprehensive means describing background information so that your audience has a foundation on which to consider the heart of your communication. Don't make assumptions about what an audience knows or about their background. An audience must be able to paint the entire picture of your message, and it's your job to give them the tools to paint that picture. A complete, self-contained explanation and discussion enables your audience to proceed safely, to be efficient with their time, and effective with their efforts.

History also benefits from comprehensiveness. Consider how important detailed minutes from crucial meetings can be, especially minutes from Board of Directors' meetings.

(See part two for the last six tenets.)

—RICH MAGGIANI

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