

Citibooks' Tips and Ideas on...

Management Communication

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Practice Makes Perfect: Changing Your Communication Habits One Step At a Time

Judy Ringer

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The concept of practice applies to any skill that you want to cultivate. If you take up a new musical instrument, you will need to practice a while before you're ready to give your first concert. In Aikido, the martial art I study and teach, we get on the mat many times each week to practice and perfect our technique.

Improving our communication habits also requires practice. The problem with holding difficult conversations is we often find ourselves in performance mode before we have the chance. It is important to learn the skills of effective communication and to take the time to practice them.

There are many excellent books, teachers, and workshops that will teach the skills, then help you to practice and improve. Seek them out. Make a commitment to read one book or attend a workshop every few months.

You can also learn from your successful conversations as well as the ones that don't turn out as expected. By bringing awareness to what you did well and what you might have done differently, you gradually become more proficient. Here are some ways to bring that awareness to bear in the moment, and to continue to practice communicating more clearly and purposefully:

- Increase Awareness. Notice whether your communication style is accomplishing your goals. If not, try something different.
- Acknowledge. What is your positive hope for the communication? What is theirs? Recognize that you are both doing your best, and give yourself and your partner the benefit of the doubt.
- Keep it safe. Maintain a calm, centered attitude, a respectful demeanor, and a positive purpose.
- Cultivate curiosity. Develop an open, curious, and interested frame of mind. Regardless of what your conversation partner says, try to see their centered intent and respond appropriately.

- Practice, Practice, Practice. Try new techniques and learn from them. If you tend toward a passive and accommodating style, try offering a different opinion on occasion. If the opposite is true and you are on the talkative side, stop yourself and listen more. Ask questions. Try being curious.

A tourist stopped a New Yorker on the street and asked: “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” The New Yorker replied: “Practice!” An old joke, but a good one. The point is that change takes place gradually over time. Try one adjustment today. Review the suggestions above, and pick one. Let me know what happens. Take time to enjoy your newfound power. And most of all - have fun!

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About the Author :

Judy Ringer is the author of Unlikely Teachers: Finding the Hidden Gifts in Daily Conflict and the award-winning e-zine, Ki Moments. Judy is a black belt in aikido and nationally known presenter, specializing in unique workshops on conflict, communication, and creating a positive work environment. She is the founder of Power & Presence Training and chief instructor of Portsmouth Aikido, Portsmouth, NH, USA. To sign up for more free tips and articles like these, visit <http://www.JudyRinger.com>

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Be Curious - And Be a Successful Communicator

Judy Ringer

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There are many ways to improve the way you communicate. For example, you will always start things off on the right foot by opening the conversation in a way that creates mutual respect. Using phrases such as, "If you have a minute, I'd like to talk with you about something that I think will improve the way we work together," helps set your conversation partner at ease. It tells him or her that you have positive intentions.

It is also important to know your purpose for the conversation. Some purposes are more useful than others. A useful purpose is one you have power over. For instance, you can control your own reaction; you can share your view; learn about your partner's view; work toward a sustainable solution.

On the other hand, examples of purposes that are NOT useful are: trying to change the other person; attempting to control their reaction; or going in with a hidden agenda.

Be Interested

Of the many ways to improve your conversation skills, one of the best is to be interested. Curiosity is one of the most useful tools in the communication toolbox. When you enter the conversation with "beginner's mind," you will necessarily adopt the attitude of a learner. You will not have to pretend to ask honest, open questions. They will come naturally. As you listen, you can reflect on what is being said (and not said). You will gain information and ease tension. If you can't think of a question, you can always acknowledge what you've heard, or you can say: "I see, tell me more about that."

One of the reasons we're not curious more often is that we mentally equate curiosity with agreement. We think that if we don't disagree immediately, our conversation partner will assume we're okay with whatever he is saying. This is not useful thinking. It prevents you from seeing the whole picture and from learning where your partner is coming from.

The next time you find yourself in a difficult conversation, give yourself and your partner a gift by asking questions - questions to which you do not know the answer. Watch what happens. You will learn a lot, and you will feel more

powerful, not less. Remember - listening does not equal agreement. It means you are a skilled and active learner, a good partner, and a conscious communicator. Live, learn, and enjoy the moment.

Good luck and good communication!

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Communication: Who is in their Right Mind?

Kevin Dwyer

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Thinking style is a primary factor in communicating, information processing, judgement, problem solving and interaction with others. An individual's thinking preference has far reaching influence over leadership, decision making, relationship building, negotiating and influencing.

Understanding our own thinking style preference and that of people and teams that we work with is important because it allows us take advantage of the strengths we each bring to team environments.

Research by the 1981 Nobel Prize for Medicine winner, Roger Sperry and other researchers notably Ned Hermann and Kobus Neethling, who built on that work, identified that the brain has four thinking styles. The thinking styles are labelled by the quadrant of the brain that controls the thinking style. That is, left cerebral quadrant, right cerebral quadrant, left limbic quadrant and right limbic quadrant.

Left cerebral quadrant thinking style is characterised by a liking for working with facts, dealing with facts in a precise and exact way, looking at problems in a logical and rational way, interested in technical aspects and seeing performance as important.

Right cerebral quadrant thinking style is characterised by seeing the whole picture and not detail, liking change and trying new things, enjoying being busy with several things at the one time, having imagination, liking to find a connection between the present and the future and having a gut feeling for new ideas.

Left limbic quadrant thinking style is characterised by liking facts to be organised and orderly, liking to work with detail, preferring safety and security to risk-taking, liking facts in a sequential and chronological order and preferring a stable and reliable work environment.

Right limbic quadrant thinking style is characterised by experiencing facts in an emotional way, liking interaction with people, feeling empathy towards others and solving problems through an emotional, not logical process. When communicating, these people make much use of very picturesque language and

body language and facial expressions.

All people are dominant in one or more styles. Sixty percent of the population are dominant in any two styles, thirty percent in any three styles, seven percent in one style and three percent are whole brained, that is, equally at home with all four styles. There is no best thinking style profile. The challenge comes when people with dominant and opposite thinking styles have to interact.

People with a left cerebral quadrant thinking style preference may appear to others as being arrogant with a critical style and an uncaring personality. Those with a right cerebral quadrant thinking style may appear to be a dreamer with a messy workplace, poor timekeeping and starter but not a finisher of projects. A brain dominated by a left limbic quadrant thinking style can appear to be inflexible, bureaucratic, risk averse and unable to see the big picture. A right limbic quadrant thinking style preference may make an individual appear emotional, overly concerned with others feelings and to slow things by wanting to get too many people involved.

Communication is better defined as what is received, not what is transmitted. People filter communication based on their experience, their emotional state and their thinking style. Therefore thinking styles directly impact the quality of communication. Thinking styles also impact directly the value that people place upon one another's worth in an organisation.

Tailoring what we say and how we say it to fit the thinking style of recipients automatically improves the quality of the communication and the value placed by the recipient on receiving future communications from us. For example, if your CEO has a right cerebral dominant thinking style (big picture, holistic, intuitive), do not put proposals to them with lots of detail. Use the classic one pager supported by visuals in the form of a slide pack.

In a project team do not put a person with a right limbic dominant thinking style (interpersonal, feeling based) in charge of a technical, tight deadline and tight budget project! However, perhaps a project manager with lower limbic (sequential, organised, detailed) and upper cerebral (logical, analytical, fact based) dominant thinking style combined with a right cerebral (holistic, intuitive, integrating) and right limbic (interpersonal, feeling based) communications manager might mean the project is run well and effectively communicated.

Understanding people's thinking styles can be determined using web-based tools and interpretation provided by distributors of both Hermann's and

Neethling's work and it is relatively cheap. However we can't always ask someone we are building a relationship with to take a test! In this case spend some time asking questions and observing. Do they have their CD's in alphabetical order (left limbic)? Is their desk a perpetual mess (right cerebral)? Are they empathetic to the point of being annoying (right limbic)? Are they only interested in facts (left cerebral)?

So next time you have a communication problem with your team or an individual, ask yourself who is in their right mind, left mind.....

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Kevin Dwyer is the founder of Change Factory. Change Factory helps organisations who do not like their business outcomes to get better outcomes by changing people's behaviour. Businesses we help have greater clarity of purpose and ability to achieve their desired business outcomes. To learn more or see more articles visit <http://www.changefactory.com.au>

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Why People Resist Us

Rick Maurer

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There's a one-word reason most ideas never see the light of day: Resistance.

Resistance is often behind the glassy-eyed stares you get following a presentation, the sarcastic put-downs you have to put up with when you describe your vision for a new product or service, and other people's abrupt departure from the water cooler when you approach, enthusiastic and ready to share an idea. What people are saying to you, either directly or indirectly is, I've heard your idea and I don't get it, I don't like it, or I don't like you.

By understanding the resistance getting in the way of your ideas, you can work to turn opposition into support. How can you do it? Use clear language and good listening skills to head-off resistance before it takes on a life of its own. When you can't avoid it, learn how to recognize and address the three most common types of resistance so you can keep conversations moving forward and bring ideas closer to implementation.

Here are the three primary forms resistance takes—and what you can do to make each work for you instead of against you:

- Level 1 resistance: “I don't get it.” When you see a person's eyes glaze over, eyebrows furrow, or head tip slightly to one side or another, they're sending you an unspoken message: “I don't get what you're saying.” That's your cue to slow down and touch base with the person before they get so confused or lost in the morass of your idea that they lose interest altogether. After all, if people don't get your idea, there's no chance they'll support it.

Level 1 resistance involves the world of facts, figures, and data. It crops up often when people in highly-technical fields, like computer science, try to share their brainchildren with the rest of the company. They go to great lengths to explain how a software package or new hardware configuration can solve problems—and even generate profit over the long-term, and somewhere between the bits and bytes, underlying the multi-acronym sentences featuring POSIX, WYSIWYG, XT/AT, and UNIX, is a brilliant idea. It's just that—alas—it can only be understood and appreciated by other high-tech experts.

If you find yourself in this position, step back from your idea and consider your

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