

Is Communication Always A Good Thing?

BY CANDY TYMSON CSP

Have you had a problem lately with communication? Do you find that you seem to be issuing more and more information, yet people just aren't 'getting it'?

I've recently been running a series of round-table forums for the franchising industry where the number one issue always seemed to be: "How do we get people to read and respond to our communications? We send out lots of information but people still claim they are not being informed."

British writer Joseph Priestley believed that with the advent of television and communication technology, the more elaborate the means of the communication, the less we actually communicate. The implications of this are disturbing—do you think that the increase in the number of ways we can communicate (SMS, email, instant messaging, voice mail etc) may actually be diminishing the quality of our communication?

In the text *Communicating in the 21st Century*, author Baden Eunson highlights the ongoing challenges of having quality communications, when using the convenience of technology to distribute the message. Communication is often seen as a panacea: "If only we could communicate more, then things would be better". I would argue that if only our communication was better then we would communicate more!

Less or More

US Marketing Strategist, Al Ries, expressed it well: **Today, communication itself is the problem. We have become the world's first overcommunicated society. Each year we send more and receive less.**

Perhaps we have reached a stage in business where less really is more when it comes to communicating with each other. For every situation that would be improved by more communication, there is a situation that would be improved by less communication. Think about it.

For example, what do you typically do when you receive an email that goes into a great deal of detail, when in fact it was just a few key answers you really needed?

And we have all had situations where we have regretted sending out an email, speaking out or expressing our frustration in aggressive terms.

So what to do?

Consider the following ways to improve communication:

1. Meet face-to-face more often
2. Use the telephone more often
3. Ask: How would you prefer me to communicate with you? (This is particularly important if you are working with different generations in your organisation. Generation X & Y typically prefer email and SMS for example, while a Baby Boomer may prefer face-to-face interaction.)
4. Focus on using the Core Message and 3 Key Points technique (see below)
5. Use technology to simplify your communication rather than increase it
6. Provide training in effective communication skills (of course I can help there!)

Communication Checklist

Being clear on the outcome you wish to achieve from your message will ensure a better result. Think about whether you want to create awareness, build understanding, establish commitment, change attitude/behaviour or simply get something off your chest.

This will then enable you to be clearer on the objective of the communication, whether it be to inform, engage, inspire, involve, or unload.

Next, consider the best method to issue the message (the jargon word for this is 'channels'). It may well be that a number of channels are required to reach your target audience depending upon their location, age and status in the organisation. And of course providing repetition of the message, by using a number of different channels, has proven to be very effective as well.

Now, the message itself—should it be compelling having impact that will create awareness, or empathetic providing relevance to build understanding? Perhaps it should be persuasive to establish commitment, or provide a call to action to commence a change of attitude or behaviour.

Finally, how do you know if your message has been received and understood?

There are a number of methods that could be employed to measure the outcome.

(By the way, if you'd like a simple communications checklist that sets out these points, just send me an email and I'd be happy to send it to you.)

Using The Core Message Technique

Simply by developing your core message, and then supporting it with three key points, you have an effective template for issuing an important announcement, presentation or briefing document.

Consider:

- What do they need to know?
- Why do they need to know?
- How will it impact on them?
- How should they be told?

This will help in developing your core message, and assist in identifying the three key points which will support it.

Communicating about communication can be challenging too! I hope these ideas will assist you in being more effective in 'getting through'.



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