

Getting Your Ideas Across

by

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GETTING YOUR IDEAS ACROSS

Over the years, I've learned that fully 85 percent of what you accomplish in your career and in your personal life will be determined by how well you get your message across and by how capable you are of inspiring people to take action on your ideas and recommendations.

You can be limited in other respects – by education, contacts and intelligence – but if you can interact effectively with others, minute by minute and hour by hour, your future can be unlimited.

I am going to share with you some ideas, techniques and skills that you can use to accelerate your progress toward power communication. But first, there are two major myths about communication that must be dispelled.

The first myth, which many people believe, is that because they can talk, they can communicate with others. Men especially, according to the research, think that by speaking louder and faster, they're more effective in dealing with people. Many people think that because they have the gift of gab, because they have no problem talking to others on any subject that comes to mind, they're good communicators.

Often, exactly the opposite is true. Many people who talk a lot are often poor communicators – even terrible communicators. Many people in sales and business think that being able to string a lot of words together in a breathless fashion makes them excellent at getting a message understood by others. However, in most cases, those people are seen as boring or obnoxious, or both.

Let me say this slowly and clearly: The ability to talk is not the same as the ability to communicate. As I will discuss later, the ability to communicate is the ability both to send and to receive a message. The ability to communicate is the ability to make an impact on the thoughts, feelings and actions of someone. Many people who consider themselves excellent talkers are not very effective at all in this regard.

So let's dispel the first myth, the myth that talking is equal to communicating. Don't allow yourself to become complacent. The ability to talk to one or more persons is only the basic requirement for communication. It's the starting point. It's the jumping-off place. Effective communication is something else again.

The second myth about effective communication is that it's a skill that people are born with. Either you have it or you don't have it. If you're not extroverted, gregarious and outgoing, you don't have what it takes to be a good communicator.

Again, nothing could be further from the truth. Communication is a skill that you can learn. It's like riding a bicycle or typing. It takes time and practice, over and over. But if you're willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life, as you will soon see.

Communication requires both a sender and a receiver. The process of communication happens rapidly, and this same process takes place whenever two or more people exchange ideas. First, the sender thinks of an idea or image that he or she wishes to convey to the receiver. The sender then translates the idea or image into a form, or words, either written or spoken. Those words constitute the basic message that is transmitted to the receiver. The receiver catches the words, like a baseball player catches a baseball, and then translates the words into the ideas and pictures that they represent in order to understand the message that was sent.

The receiver then acknowledges receipt, and replies by translating his or her ideas and pictures into words and transmitting them to the sender. When the message has been sent and the receiver has acknowledged receiving it by transmitting a response that the sender receives, accepts and understands, the communication is complete.

If this sounds complicated, it is. Probably 99 percent of all the difficulties between human beings, and within organizations, are caused by breakdowns in the communication process. Either the senders do not say what they mean clearly enough, or the receivers do not receive the message in the form in which it was intended.

An enormous number of factors can interfere in any communication, and every one of them can lead to a distortion of the message in some way. Probably every problem you'll ever have will be somehow associated with a failure or breakdown in the communication process.

Let me explain. According to Albert Mehrabian, a communications specialist, there are three elements in any direct, face-to-face communication: words, tone of voice and body language. You've probably heard that words account for only 7 percent of the message, tone of voice accounts for 38 percent of the message, and body language accounts for fully 55 percent of the message. For an effective communication to take place, all three parts of the message must be congruent. If there is any incongruency, the receiver will be confused and will tend to accept the predominant form of communication rather than simply the literal meaning of the words.

Very often, you will say something that you feel is innocuous to a person and he will be offended. When you try to explain that you felt the words you used were inoffensive, the person will tell you that your tone of voice was the issue.

The third ingredient of communication, body language, is also very important. The way you sit or stand or incline your head or move your eyes, relative to the person with

whom you're communicating, will have an enormous effect on the message received. For example, you can dramatically increase the effect of your communications by leaning toward the person you're speaking with. If you're sitting down, this is easy. If you're standing up, you can accomplish the same effect by shifting your weight forward onto the balls of your feet and leaning slightly toward the person you're talking to. When you make direct eye and face contact with the person, combined with focused attention, you double the impact of what you're saying.

In fact, one of the easiest ways for you to break off a conversation, almost like knocking a needle off a phonograph record, is by just turning away from a person and looking into the distance when he is speaking. That will usually abruptly cause the person to stop speaking. He will feel that he's just been abandoned in the middle of the conversation.

So your choice of words is important, but even more important is your tone of voice and your body language. The better you can coordinate all three of those ingredients, the more impact your message will have, and the greater will be the likelihood that a person will both understand it and react the way you want him to.

You've heard the saying that God gave man two ears and one mouth, and in conversation, you should use them in those proportions. Truer words were never spoken. The best communicators are excellent listeners. The worst communicators are continuous talkers. In fact, often the most important part of the message is the part that is conveyed by the pauses you make between thoughts and ideas. The message is conveyed in the silence that takes place during the lulls in conversation. All master communicators have learned to be comfortable with silence. Remember that a person can absorb only a certain amount of information, as ground can absorb only a certain amount of water. If you pour too much water onto the ground, it will form into puddles instead of soak in. A person's mind is very much the same. If you don't give someone an opportunity

to absorb what you're saying, by pausing and waiting quietly and patiently, he will be overwhelmed by the continuous stream of thoughts and ideas, and often will distort the message and miss the point.

One of the most vital requirements for effective communication, especially with important messages, is preparation. Preparation is the mark of the true professional. The late Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant of the University of Alabama football team was famous for saying, "It's not the will to win but the will to prepare to win that counts." In all communications, the will to prepare in advance of talking and interacting with people is the key to achieving maximum effectiveness.

In high school and college debating, where the individuals and teams are judged on the effectiveness of their ability to get their ideas across and to win their points, they're taught to prepare exhaustively. Especially, they're taught to prepare the debate from the point of view of the opposition before they prepare their own arguments. Lawyers were taught to do this in law school. Before they go into court, lawyers think through every possible piece of evidence or information that favors the opposing party. They then prepare their arguments in such a way as to undermine what they think the opposing party will present as its strongest point.

Remember that in communicating, people do things for their own reasons, not for yours. Everyone's favorite radio station is WIIFM, which means "What's in it for me?"

The more important the communication, either in business or personal life, the more important it is to prepare for it. Think through where the other person is coming from. What is his or her point of view? What are his or her problems or concerns? What is he or she trying to accomplish? What is his or her level of knowledge or information about the subject under discussion?

The best communicators do not use a lot of words, but they choose their words carefully, in advance. People appreciate straight talking. Avoid the tendency to dress up your message and sugarcoat it. When you have a question or a concern, or you want something, come right out and say it without confusion or distortion. You'll be amazed at how much better you feel and how much more positively someone will respond to your message.

In getting your point across, perhaps the most important word of all is the word ask. The most effective people are those who are the best at asking for what they want. They ask questions to uncover real needs and concerns. They ask questions to illuminate objections and problems that people might have with what they're suggesting. They ask questions to expand the conversation and to increase their understanding of where people are really coming from.

You get your message understood by getting out of yourself, by putting your ego aside, and by focusing all of your attention on the other person. You get people to do the things you want them to do by presenting your arguments in terms of their interests, in terms of what they want to be and have and do. You prepare thoroughly in advance of any important conversation. You think before you speak, and you think on paper. You can say almost anything if you say it, or ask it, pleasantly, positively and with courtesy and friendliness.

The ability to communicate is a skill that you can learn by becoming genuinely interested in people and by putting their needs ahead of your own when sending a message or asking them to do something for you. When you concentrate your attention on building trust, on the one hand, and on seeking to understand, on the other hand, you'll become known and respected as an effective communicator everywhere you go

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Tracy is Chairman and CEO of Brian Tracy International, a company specializing in the training and development of individuals and organizations.

Brian's goal is to help you achieve your personal and business goals faster and easier than you ever imagined.

Brian Tracy has consulted for more than 1,000 companies and addressed more than 5,000,000 people in 5,000 talks and seminars throughout the US, Canada and 56 other countries worldwide. As a Keynote speaker and seminar leader, he addresses more than 250,000 people each year.

He has studied, researched, written and spoken for 30 years in the fields of economics, history, business, philosophy and psychology. He is the top selling author of over 50 books that have been translated into dozens of languages.

He has written and produced more than 500 audio and video learning programs, including the worldwide, best-selling Psychology of Achievement, which has been translated into more than 20 languages.

He speaks to corporate and public audiences on the subjects of Personal and Professional Development, including the executives and staff of many of America's largest corporations. His exciting talks and seminars on Leadership, Selling, Self-Esteem, Goals, Strategy, Creativity and Success Psychology bring about immediate changes and long-term results.

He has traveled and worked in over 90 countries on six continents, and speaks four languages. Brian is happily married and has four children. He is active in community

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