

**Citibooks' Tips and Ideas on...**

# **Management Communication**

Volume 1

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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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# 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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About the Author :

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

audience. How can you communicate the idea to them in language—minus all traces of jargon—that they can understand? Will pictures, models, slides, an on-site walk-through, help? Clear, thoughtful, two-way communication is the key to overcoming Level 1 resistance.

- Level 2 resistance: “I don't like it.” Sometimes your ideas can trigger an emotional response, typically rooted in fear, that causes another person to hem and haw about your idea or to actively oppose it. Some of the fears underlying these Level 2 responses include:

- o The concern that something about your idea will make the other person look bad or lose status in the eyes of others.

- o Worry that your idea will cost the person his job or endanger his financial security.

- o Nervousness that your idea will cause the person to fail, perhaps as a result of—and in the wake of—your success.

The emotions behind Level 2 responses get in the way of productive communication. If they're never aired, these fears fester until what was once a tiny bump on the road to implementation is now an enormous boulder blocking your way. Recognize and address the fears underlying Level 2 resistance and your idea is more likely to continue moving forward.

- Level 3 resistance: “I don't like you.” Picture this: You're in a meeting with your accountant when she says, “I've got good news for you. I've found some loop holes that will significantly reduce your taxes.” A year ago—prior to the Enron debacle—you might have welcomed both the accountant and her ideas with open arms. Now, however, the system of checks-and-balances she represents is tainted by what you've read and seen on television, and every idea she proposes gets run through a filter of suspicion in your mind. That's Level 3 resistance.

While the other two types of resistance have to do with your ideas, Level 3 resistance is about you—ouch. When you're the one doing the proposing, your history with others, as well as their bias, prejudice or mistrust, influence how your idea is heard and received.

Level 3 resistance is the toughest to deal with because it's so hard to believe—and accept—that there are people in the world who don't like you and everything you stand for. However, if you choose to deny or ignore it, your

ideas will never get off the drawing board.

The key to dealing effectively with Level 3 resistance is to step outside yourself and see what others see when they look at you—and what they hear when they listen to you.

Once you've made an effort to see yourself and your idea through another's eyes, try these techniques for working through and moving beyond all three levels of resistance—'I don't get it,' 'I don't like it,' and 'I don't like you:'

- o Focus on conversation, not presentation. Ask questions to find out what's going on in the other person's mind and why she opposes your idea.
- o Listen carefully to what others say in response to your idea—both verbally and through their body language and behaviors.
- o Avoid knee-jerk reactions, like defensiveness, sarcasm and shutting down.
- o Find ways to connect with others. Paraphrase their concerns to show that you're listening; embrace suggestions that piggy-back on your idea; and make it clear that there's room—and opportunity—for others to join you as you move forward to implement the idea.

Resistance at any level is good because it demonstrates that others hear you and are intrigued enough about your ideas to oppose them. That may sound like cold comfort, but it's not: Figure out what's behind resistance and you'll be well on your way to turning opposition into support.

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# The Key to Success

## *Real Estate Investment Club*

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We meet many investors who are looking for a magic pill. They think there is a magic sentence; a special program; the perfect boot camp; the easy way to find deals. Folks, I have to tell you, there is no magic pill. You can be successful if you'll do one thing: WORK! There are an unlimited number of foreclosures every single month. The number of homeowners who needs help is mind-boggling. In most larger cities, as many as five hundred foreclosures are filed every week. This doesn't include the homeowners who save their property before it hits public record.

Do you know what the real key to success is? It's good communication skills. Seriously! If you can't talk to homeowners and bankers, how do you expect to close deals? We have been studying NLP: Neuro Linguistic Programming. NL...What? NLP is the way you communicate with others. It's simple folks, the better you communicate, the easier the deals come.

NLP is cause and effect language. It uses patterns of speech and words in the correct group to persuade others to see things your way. Here is an example: You could ask a homeowner, "Will you sell your property to me?" Or you could say the same thing using NLP. It sounds like this: "Mrs. Homeowner, when you decide now to work with me and we get your property sold, you'll know you made the right decision. Let's do the right thing and sign this agreement now so we can get you what you want in the time you want it. Won't that be great?" Doesn't the second sentence sound better? It's embellished language and works remarkably well.

In our second sentence, we used "embedded commands." These are commands within the sentence that call homeowners to action. Can you guess the embedded commands? They are: decide now, work with me, get your property sold, do the right thing, and sign this agreement now. By adding just a few commands to your presentation, you'll be able to close more deals.

Here are a few of our favorites: work with me, sign this agreement now, decide now, trust me, buy now, accept this offer, make a commitment, convince yourself, postpone the sale date, motivate yourself, take the short sale, get it approved, and begin to realize.

You might be thinking, “How do I begin to use these commands in my communication?” It's easy, folks. Plan a presentation, write several basic sentences, and more importantly, practice. Here are a few examples: “When you decide now to accept this short sale, you'll begin to realize that working with me is easy. I close my deals in record time, which makes you look great to your boss.” Here is another: “Mrs. Homeowner, you have to convince yourself that working with me is the right thing to do. Let's sign the agreement so you can start sleeping well again. Won't that be great?”

NLP takes practice to be good at it. We truly believe it is the difference between earning \$100,000 a year and \$500,000 a year. Which would you rather earn? We're sure most of you answered \$500,000. Fellow investors, have you taken the time to determine your numbers? If you sit face-to-face with a homeowner, how many deals do you get under contract? We get seven out of ten and we are certain it is because of our communication skills. With proper communication skills, you can close seven out of ten as we do.

Without proper communication skills you might close two out of ten. If you are getting two out of ten homeowners to contract, look how many more people you have to sit down with just to get the same seven deals we get. We can speak to one hundred homeowners and get seventy contracts. Likewise, you speak to one hundred homeowners and only get twenty to contract. Which would you rather do? We agree, seventy. Look how much more money you can earn from the exact same work?

Folks, take time to learn how to communicate. Read a few books on NLP, attend sales seminars, invest in books that teach how to close deals, and take the time to really listen to your homeowners to see how you can be helpful. With the right words and the right attitude, you'll make millions! We do!

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# How Speakers Are Like Musicians

*Sandra Schrift*

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Emerging speakers can learn a great deal from great musicians. They can learn to connect their heart with their listeners, their audience. A great musician does not merely play notes. A great speaker does not merely utter words. They use their instrument, their voice, to communicate feelings of sadness, joy, drama, and curiosity.

Great speakers use their words to help their audiences connect with their emotions. In a short time, the audience is not just listening to the speaker's message but feeling and experiencing it.

Here are a few tips to create a great performance:

1. You want to be nervous.

Get your butterflies to fly in formation. Some tension brings about a great speech. You usually don't look as nervous as you feel.

Be prepared, be relaxed.

Practice, practice, practice. Use visualization techniques. One speaker suggests that you curl your toes and get rid of your adrenalin. Get out of your head and in to your heart. Reduce nervousness with self talk.

Your mantra might be - "I am a relaxed, confident speaker."

2. Great speeches have great stories.

Sprinkle them throughout your presentation. We delineate our thoughts visually and your audience needs to "see" what they "hear."

3. Your voice is the source of power.

FDR, Martin Luther King, Churchill used the power of their voice. Remember people need to see what they hear. Slow down, add a pause, whisper . . . use your voice to change tones, be loud or soft as needed.

#### 4. Use your eyes - to make contact with audience.

Focus on one person at a time and all the other people will feel as if you are talking to them also. This will help you to connect with people and make them feel you are there for them.

#### 5. Interact

provide your audience with short role plays or partnering exercises. This gives them an opportunity to practice what you are telling them to do. Give them an opportunity to tell someone about their challenge and get some feedback as to how to resolve it. Then they can walk out the door at the end of the program ready to think or act differently. This is what every great speaker wants!

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# What Noise? White Noise

*Chelsea Ammerman*

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If you have ever worked in a cubicle environment with everyone on the phone all day long, then you can relate to this dilemma. This past May, we made a move into our new office in the historic downtown vicinity of Kennesaw, GA. Along with the beautiful hardwood floors and 10' ft. ceilings, came acoustical problems. Overheard telephone conversations, excessive paper shuffling and general routine duties made our working environment challenging.

After much research, we discovered that there are basically three stages of noise reduction you can choose from, also known as the ABC's of noise reduction:

A= Absorption- which can be baffles, banners, carpeting and/or area rugs on the floor

B= Blocking- which can be utilized with cubicle walls

C= Covering- which is a noise reduction "white noise" system installed with small speakers in the ceiling or above the ceiling tiles

Since we were already equipped with state of the art cubicle stations that blocked 10-15% of our noise, our first step was purchasing four 4' ft baffles, which were installed above our cubicle walls as well as area rugs in each work station. This reduced our noise level by another 10-15%. The final stage was finding the appropriate "covering system" for our office. Depending on the square footage of your work area and the employee count determines on the system you will need.

We chose the VoiceArrest System with QT (Quiet Technology) from SpeechPrivacy Systems. It has 4 channels that can be set to reduce noise of any decibel level. Starting at the lowest level of 1= 36 decibels and going to the highest level of 4=45 decibels. The VoiceArrest System is a non-intrusive system that filtrates through the office space and sounds like an HVAC system running in the background. Thus, bringing our noise reduction level up another 40-50%.

Overall, the accumulative noise reduction we have achieved is approximately

70% less than before, creating a more pleasant and productive working environment.

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# Communication with Backbone Not Bite

*Susan Wilson*

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“The basic difference between being assertive and being aggressive is how our words and behavior affect the rights and well being of others.”

--Sharon Anthony Bower

Consider again the workings of assertive communication. The style is one of mutual respect and of concern for the needs expressed by each person in a conversation. Truth is expressed, but it's given with care. Feedback is valued, and those with an assertive style have the confidence to seek it out and absorb its value. Do these ideas match the way that you most often communicate?

The single greatest benefit of assertive communication is that you know that you are respecting others and expecting respect from others when you use it. The second greatest benefit of assertive communication is that you raise the probability of getting what you want.

Two other styles have an audience as well. While either may be useful in a given situation, neither is the healthiest style on an ongoing basis. One is passive communication; the other is aggressive communication. The passive style avoids telling the truth; the aggressive style avoids communicating with care. Those who choose a passive style often are not willing to invest the time and energy needed to deal with issues or with other people. Consequently, they remain silent, even when their views could add valuable insight.

With the aggressive style, tact flies out of the room. The aggressive person is interested in a limited agenda- his own! The aggressive style is more than willing to trump you to get what he wants. An aggressor often uses junk talksm (sarcasm, bullying, ridicule, negative politics) to intimidate and overcome others.

Each one of us probably can see ourselves in at least two of the three communication styles; the opportunity we have is to move toward assertive communication more frequently and consistently.

How did you choose your communication style?

What gets attention gets to be a habit. A basic premise of psychology is that we

continue behavior that gets rewarded; and continued behavior becomes a habit. So, if early on, crying and pinching others helped me to get my way, then I'll keep that habit as an adult. I'll just turn crying and pinching into whining and "pinching" others with my words.

Fear. Most of us know something about the "flight or fight" plan when we are scared. When we flee an uncomfortable situation, conflict or awkwardness, we are practicing passive behavior as a response to fear. When we push our way into a confrontation, assuming that our might will get us what we feel is right, then we are practicing aggression as a response to fear.

What you believe to be true about people.

Some of us believe that others are only out to better themselves with no intention for fair play. Some of us believe this because we've had a bad experience with a parent or a boss or someone else who was an influence in our lives. If your belief is that you have to get your share before someone else gets there first, then you might be more likely to try aggressive behaviors to get what you believe is yours.

I didn't know there was a better way. For most of us, a consistently assertive response is a learned response. We need to become aware of the need for assertive communication and its benefits. Then we need to discover information that leads to more mutually respectful communication.

Successful Strategies to Strengthen Your Backbone for Assertiveness:

Journal. Write down daily situations that were obstacles for you, whether in a relationship or in meeting a goal. You can be brief, but identify the situation and your reaction. Was it fair? Was it kind? Was it truthful? Was it effective? What is a different response to note and practice so that you are more assertive in a similar situation?

Take initiative to identify an assertive behavior to try each week. You probably can think of dozens as the days go by, but here are eight to jump start your thinking.

1. Write a note to someone who would value hearing from you.
2. Pick up the phone and call someone to say thank you in a specific way for something that has been done for you.

3. In a room with strangers this week, strike up a pleasant conversation.
4. Read something interesting; take note of a new piece of information. Find a way to share it with someone today.
5. When you meet someone new, commit the name to memory. Use it in your conversation with that person.
6. Offer to take on a new responsibility.
7. Read a book on assertive behavior. One of my favorites is, Your Perfect Right by Robert Alberti and Michael Emmons. It's old, but it's valuable!
8. Ask valuable questions (What is the best use of my time and energy? How can I be helpful to you? What did I learn today that will make me more valuable for tomorrow?)

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# Muzzling the Motor Mouths

*Bill Lampton, Ph.D.*

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Nonstop talkers surround us. They appear to have no concept of time, as they ramble on endlessly--following their request to "talk to you for a minute." You want to treat them courteously, yet demonstrate that you need privacy to finish your work.

During my twenty-three years in management, I dealt with blabbermouths frequently, so for the last ten years I have devised a system for silencing the workplace windbags. Here are my suggestions:

ONE: Offer nonverbal cues. If you continue your work and don't make eye contact, many people will take the hint and decide to leave. Another approach: Check your watch repeatedly. A more prominent gesture: Put your hand up like a policeman stopping traffic, a universally understood position. Start packing your briefcase, signaling your departure plans.

TWO: When subtle cues won't work, explain why you can't have a conversation. "I can't talk right now, because I'm in the middle of a project that's due tomorrow. I'll get back with you later." Notice--that puts you in charge of the next move.

THREE: Try giving a time limit: "I've got five minutes. What can we cover in that amount of time?" Then stick to the announced limit rigidly, and get on the phone or walk away when the five minutes have expired.

FOUR: Make sure you meet with gabby people in their offices, not yours. Why? Walking away is much less awkward than trying to shuffle someone out of your office.

FIVE: Wherever you meet, schedule the get-together just before lunch or closing time, when they will be more conscious of time limits themselves.

SIX: Enlist an assistant's help. Before the chatty person arrives, tell a co-worker to interrupt you if the visitor is still there after fifteen minutes. A comment like "Do you remember that appointment you have now?" will justify your ending the conversation.

SEVEN: Compliment the talker by saying, "Gosh, what you are saying sounds worth considering. Please go back to your desk now and put your recommendations in writing, so I can share them with the staff."

EIGHT: Remove the usual comforts by having a stand-up meeting. This symbolically conveys that you are not going to settle in for an extended appointment.

NINE: In a group meeting, tell the windbag, "Really appreciate your input on that, Marvin. Now let me give Sharon and one or two others a chance to respond." Another ploy: "We're on a tight schedule, so I have to move us to the next point on the agenda."

TEN: Ask for a conclusion: "Sandra, I think I get what you are driving at, but just to be sure please sum it up for me in a few sentences."

ELEVEN: Get up and walk toward the door, saying, "Let's finish this on the way out."

TWELVE: Introduce them to someone else: "I want you to share your ideas with Norman, because he heads this particular program."

Next time the company chatterbox confronts you, try these approaches. They work, and they won't shatter relationships.

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# Who Do You Need to Influence the Most? - Four Simple Skills, When and How to Apply Them

*Bob Selden*

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Do you need to have:

- Your manager give you more credit for the work that you do?
- Your partner acknowledge that your ideas are really worth listening to?
- Your children accept more responsibility?
- Your friends take you seriously when you really mean it?
- Your customers buy more from you?
- Your suppliers meet your quality standards?
- Your team become more energetic?

Hey, couldn't the list go on! I'm sure many of us would like to see some or all of the above occur (and probably a few more as well). The key to being more successful in our interpersonal endeavours, is to become more influential. Influence is no longer considered a magic quality that is bestowed on some and not others. Nor is it something we gain through holding a position of power. Surprisingly, we can all improve our ability to influence others by merely sharpening the influencing skills we already have in our armoury and perhaps using them more appropriately according to the situation.

The first step in applying our influencing skills more productively, is to recognise the type of situation we are facing. Is the person (or people) you are trying to influence at all emotional about the topic? For example, are they worried or excited, sad or happy? What are your feelings about the topic? Do you have some basic needs that you must satisfy? If either you or your influence target are at all emotional about the topic, then you are dealing with a "feeling" type situation.

On the other hand, if both parties see the topic or discussion as factual – i.e.

logic and reason prevail over emotion, then you are in a “fact” situation.

So, step one is to decide “Is this situation feeling or fact?” As you might now expect, Feeling and Fact situations require quite different influencing skills.

Let’s say that you are a parent. You want to get your seven year old child to tidy their room. All the reason and logic in the world will not get the child to tidy their room if they don’t want to (no doubt many of you can relate to this!). Despite what some of the parental guideline books might suggest, experience shows that you need to take an assertive (feeling) type approach rather than a reasoning (fact) approach in such a situation.

However the assertive approach taken with your child will probably not work when you want your boss to approve a new item of budget expenditure (in fact it may even work in reverse and get your budget cut!)

Let’s look at how to manage the Feeling situations first. For example, when a person comes to us with a personal problem, we need to apply our reflective listening skills. Whereas, when we have a very strong desire to get our needs met (for instance in a tough negotiating situation), we need to apply assertive skills.

Whilst these situations are quite different in their context, both are feeling type situations – the first is dealing with their feelings, the second is dealing with our feelings. Because of this, each feeling influence situation is successfully handled by using different influencing skills.

For feeling situations, the most powerful influencing skills are:

- Reflecting . . . The ability to really listen to the underlying message being expressed by the other person (not what they may be saying, but what they are really feeling)
- Asserting . . . Stating our own needs and expectations strongly

Fact situations on the other hand, require the skills of questioning and suggesting. Whenever we ask open, non-threatening questions we are using the influencing skill of gathering data. e.g. “I’d like to hear more about your proposal. What are the main reasons why you have suggested this?”

Whenever we put forward a proposal, recommendation or merely a suggestion, we are using the influencing skill of suggesting. And our suggestions can

become even more powerful when they are supported with strong reasoning. e. g. "There is only one system on the market that meets these requirements and that is why I recommend the P680".

For fact situations, the most powerful influencing skills are:

- Questioning . . . Asking fact-finding, non-judgmental questions.
- Suggesting . . . Making proposals and suggestions supported by two or three strong reasons.

Employing our natural influencing skills more productively on a daily basis means:

1. Deciding whether the situation calls for feeling or fact type influencing skills
2. Using the most appropriate feeling or fact influencing skills for the situation.

So, next time you want to influence that important person in your life, rather than barging in, step back a little and think. Is this fact or feeling? What skills will be most appropriate?

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