



Continuous Improvement in Technology

Conference at Illinois State University



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I have been thinking about where I am at this point in my career, and what I really know and understand that I did to know earlier in my career. I am an expert in many facets of communication, but as I have accumulated expertise, I have become a communications strategist

Have you ever considered
strategy in the same sentence
with communication?

I am concerned with how we are going to use communications as an effective tool to benefit our area.

How are we going to make the most effective use of “communications” to:

- let people know who we are
- what we do
- what we want
- what we need
- what opportunities we offer
- what opportunities we can leverage

On top of communicating well and with absolute intention—I am concerned with how do we do that as efficiently as possible.

So...what does that have to do
with you?

Communication skills are
becoming critical to IT
organizations.

As IT moves from a support entity in organizations, to a partner if not driver of business, communications is becoming essential—especially for those who want to move beyond a career of solitary engineering or programming and into a leadership role.

If you want to move up or have freedom in your career, you must be able to communicate.

As a leader you need to
have the skills and confidence to...

Communicate information
Generate interest and enthusiasm
Connect with people
State your case
Ask for what you need
Share your ideas

Think about this...

- You can't lead if you can't communicate basic information.
- You can't lead if you cannot generate interest and enthusiasm.
- You can't lead if you cannot connect with your audience.
- You can't lead if you are eloquent and no one will listen.
- You can't lead if you overwhelm people with information, but give no message.

Just like any other critical aspect of your job, I would hope that you decide to elevate your communications skills—not become an expert—just add to your skills over time to elevate your abilities.

Communicate with Impact

Elevate Yourself as a Leader



So, what I thought I could do is give you some awareness of communication as a strategic tool—for your area, and for yourself—and give you five strategies and some easy changes you can make quickly and painlessly to communicate with impact and elevate yourself as a leader.

Don't worry if communications is not in your comfort zone. You don't have to learn it all today, or this week, or this year. As we go through ideas...try to find just one that resonates with you. Just pick one idea and practice it. Just like any other skills you will get better at it.

What would it mean to you if...
you could communicate better?



Think about this. What would it mean to you? Make a list of what could happen for you or your organization.

What if people...meaning employees, administrators, customers, vendors:

- Heard your message
- Cared about what you said
- Understood you better
- Knew what to do
- Acted on your recommendations or requests

What if people....

Heard you?
Cared what you said?

Understood you better?
Knew what to do?

Read your emails?

Could you....

- Build better relationships?
- Build consensus among stakeholders?
- Gain support for initiatives?
- Strengthen your teams?
- Justify budget increases?
- Sell your ideas?

What would it mean to you if you could get control and **leverage a TOOL** that would improve any one of these areas of your work:

- Build better relationships
- Build consensus among stakeholders
- Gain support for initiatives
- Strengthen your teams
- Justify budget increases
- Sell your ideas

Could you....be a better leader?

The image features a large red parallelogram on the left side, set against a gray gradient background that transitions from light to dark. The text "Be a better leader?" is centered across the boundary between the red shape and the gray background.

Be a better leader?

And first, let me ask if you
understand what I mean by
communication?

Information is not communication.

People tend to forget...

Management is not leadership.

Keep in mind that information is not communication.

What do I mean by that?

Well, what IS communication?

Conveying a message so that it is not only received, but understood as it is meant to be understood. Strategic communication also means we have a result we are trying to accomplish. Leaders communicate well, and strategically.

And let me throw this in for good measure.

Management is not leadership. We all know “managers” who are not leaders.

Do not consider “I demand/command it management” as strategic communication.

Connecting is essential!
How can you connect?



To truly communicate, “connecting” is essential.

Communication is not just speaking at or even with someone or emailing back and forth. It is connecting, being “heard,” and being understood. It is driving your message forward in the way that you mean it to be taken. And this doesn’t always have to be positive—but you do need to connect.

If you start by asking this question, you are ahead of the game.

THE FIRST TIP that I can give you is walk down your hall once a week and say, “What’s the biggest success you had this week?” or “What’s the new thing that you discovered?” Let your employees tell you, and then say, “Great,” or “I appreciate that,” or “I know that was a big challenge, good job.” And follow that with a simple, “Thank you!” Then leave. No, “But...” Just a genuine “Thank you!”

And yes, you have to ask and say thank you in a positive way.

It doesn’t matter what they say in response, or what level of work you think they do, just say thank you. You can criticize or correct later, after you think about it, and in private.

This is critical because there is an old truth...

A large red parallelogram is positioned on the left side of the image, tilted slightly to the right. The background is a smooth gray gradient that transitions from a lighter shade on the left to a darker shade on the right. Centered across the image is a quote in a white, italicized serif font.

*People don't care how much you know,
until they know how much you care.*

Practice this regularly.

At first your employees will be suspicious and think something is up, but just keep going.

If you are genuine, this alone will change your employees attitudes about you and about their work.



5 Strategic Points to Improve Communication

Elevate Yourself as a Leader

5 strategic points....

Set the stage

Know your audience

Keep them engaged

Be consistent and persistent

Ask for action

So let me give you **five strategies or pieces of strategy** that will help you connect, communicate and enhance your ability to lead.

And as I said earlier, if this is new to you—or to someone you are coaching—pick one and WORK IT. Then, when you have that down as habit, pick another.

The five points we'll work with are:

- Set the stage
- Know your audience
- Keep them engaged
- Be consistent and persistent
- Ask for action

Strategic point 1....

Set the stage

Point number one: **Set the stage.**

What this means is put things in place before you want to communicate with someone to give yourself the best opportunity to communicate with someone. This may start 15 minutes before you want to communicate—or years before.

So let's talk about the easy part of setting the stage for communication.

Opportunity

Place

Audience

Create the environment....

Topic

Time

So let's talk about the easy part of setting the stage—the tangible elements of setting the stage—**creating an environment where communication can happen.**

- **Choose the place**—in person, by email, by skype. Which is the most appropriate for what you want to accomplish. You can dole out information in anyone of these places—but if you want to actually communicate, will the “venue” work? Really what is the method or venue of your communication telling about you or the message?
- **Choose the time**—advertisers say later in the day, later in the week, later in the month. Think about how the scheduling. First thing in the morning, last thing in the afternoon will kill a meeting or presentation.
- **Opportunity**—If we're in budget crisis, it might not be time to ask for a raise. If someone has a horrible week, it may not be the time to make your pitch.
- **Audience**—is the audience the right audience for your message? And is the audience mix appropriate? Combining subordinates and supervisors for a feedback session may not get you the level of open communication you want.
- **Topic**—is this the right topic for this audience—or to make our point? Does this topic need to be taken off line so the rest of us can leave?

Informed

Open

Receptive

Create a willing audience....

Engaged

Available

Now something more challenging—especially if communications is difficult for you.

Creating a willing audience.

Are the people you are trying to communicate with:

- Open to you or your team?
- Available (physically and mentally) to “hear” you?
- Receptive to what you want to communicate (and this –if you are going on information alone is often a BIG No)?
- Informed enough to be open to and understand about the message?
- Engaged with you or by the subject?

Your chances of communicating go down if your audience isn't with you. SO how do you make this happen?

Well, we are back to connecting...

Strategic point 2....
Know your audience

How many of you even know what I mean when I say “**know your audience?**”

Know who you are speaking to, and all of the things here that will follow shortly.

Respect your audience—cater to them so they can “hear” you when you communicate and are more likely to act.

Your AUDIENCE can be one person or a group.

Regardless of the type of communication—written information, verbal, a phone call, a meeting, a document, or a presentation—you have an audience.

As I was working on this, I was thinking about the examples I am using, and one common thing that seems obvious to me is that the “author” in each case forgot he/she had an audience—that is someone they were actually trying to communicate with—they were creating content without concern for whether someone would engage with it.

Who are you talking to?

What “language” do they speak?

What turns them off?

What do they want?

Who are they?

- How are they different than you? You have to recognize that first—and you need to meet them where they are.
- **What language do they speak.** You probably shouldn't speak in terms your audience can't connect with easily. IE: using the word "configuration" versus "set up."
- **What turns them off?** What circumstances will automatically have your audience put up a wall to what you have to say?
- **What do they want?** Put what is in it for them up front.
- If you talk about things that touch on what they want from what you have or need you will be more successful.

Who are you talking to?

Is this the right audience?

What group(s) make up your audience?

Where are they focused?

What are their concerns?

What do they want?

Who are they?

First—**are they the right audience**—don't waste your message on the wrong people. You are ideally looking for people who can act. If you end up with the wrong audience do you have people who can become advocates?

- **Are they different than you**—meaning no-technical? You have to recognize that first—and you need to meet them where they are.
- **What do they care about**—what are their concerns?
- **What do they want?** Put what is in it for them up front.

If you talk about things that touch on what they want from what you have or need you will be more successful.

What “language” do they speak?



What “language” do they speak?

Administrative/Business
Academic/Student Success
Recruiting/Retention
Efficiency/Costs
Glitz/Trends
Easy solutions

What language do they speak?

Don't speak in terms your audience can't connect with easily.

"Configuration" versus "set up."

When you say configure, despite the fact that most people know what it means, they have to think about it. It feels technical, from a technical expert, in a technical conversation. Most people question whether they DO know what it means, thinking, "Maybe in technical terms it doesn't mean what they think it means."

You have covered two more paragraphs, and they are still questioning the meaning of "configure."

You could have said set up, and everyone would be comfortable.

What will turn them off?

Inherent difficulties
Down time
Mismatched features
No perceived benefits
Not what they want
And that old favorite...change

What do you want?
What do they want?

Translate what you want into what they want.

What will turn them off?

If there are areas that you know will turn off your audience, avoid those issues—at least in early communications or, be prepared to address their concerns. You can bring those issues up, if you have a palatable solution ready to go.

If you really want to communicate what you want, start thinking about it in terms of what they want.

Put what is in it for them up front.

Cable story: We want buy in to put in XYZ cable from administrators. My question was , “Why would they want that?”

His answer, “Because it is the latest technology.” Again I asked, “No Why would they want that?” Another answer, “ it is XYZ compatible and has a 100 year warranty.” And again I asked, “No, why would THEY want it?” Another answer: “Because it saves IT a million dollars per year.” Then I explained to him, that THEY want it because it makes their computers go faster, they get their work done quicker, students can contact people around the world, etc.

If you talk about things that touch on what your audience wants, you will have more opportunity to connect and you will be more successful.

Strategic point 3....

Keep them engaged

How can I engage them so...
they are willing and able to
“listen”?



While you have an opportunity, **take the time to create a relationship or develop interest.**

Don't try to "make the sale" (your point, your pitch, your demand) on your first "touch" if you haven't engaged your audience and don't have buy-in.

People like to talk about their ideas, concerns, and needs. To connect with people...

Ask questions—If, you have trouble coming up with questions just start going through the who, what, where, when, why, and what if....

Don't include all of the details—provide those in an attachment, in a handout, in a follow up meeting or document.

BLAH

BLAH

BLAH

and yeah I almost forgot...

BLAH

Have you ever been on the receiving end of this meeting, or email, or presentation...it goes something like this...

Blah, Blah, Blah, and more Blah.

It's painful, right.?



A large red parallelogram is positioned on the left side of the image, tilted slightly to the right. The background is a solid gray color. The text is centered over the gray area.

Become a master at
asking questions.

Become a master at asking questions.

- It is non-confrontational.
- It engages others and let's them speak.
- It allows your professional team to shine.

Asking questions to build relationships is very effective.

- It let's people speak, and feel important.
- It helps you understand your audience.
- It allows you to collect important information.
- It allows you to hold your cards, while learning the hand your audience is holding.

The greatest challenge in asking questions is disciplining yourself.

Stop telling. Start asking.

Be careful about tone.

These are not questions that
communicate well...
Let's practice.

Who
What
Where
When
Why
How

Would you...
Could we...
Should we...

Asking questions rather than “telling” requires discipline.

- Stop telling people stuff—that is pushing your message on your audience.
- Engage them with your content and draw them in—especially note what’s in it for them.
- Questions allow you to engage people, and make them feel important and valued.
- Asking questions help get comments, ideas, and information out of people who typically don’t contribute.

Start asking questions to allow your audience to share with you. And then, you with them.

Be careful about the tone of your questions. You are not grilling your audience like a lawyer, you are exploring with them.

A little help learning to ask questions...

- Start with the five W's:
- Who, What, Where, When, Why

Add a complimentary modifier...

- You're the professional here,...5 w's (i.e. What do you think?)
- I trust your judgement...5 w's (i.e. How would you suggest we do this?)
- That is interesting, tell me more...
- I am struggling with XXX, what do you think we should do?
- Who do you think...
- How would you...
- What would you suggest...
- Why would that be a great idea...

Regardless of the
communication method...

You and me

Phone-Skype

Meeting

Email

Presentation

Regardless of how you communicate, know what you want to say and get that said.

You are better off saying something multiple times, than saying many, disparate things one time.

- Do not include all of the details.
- Provide additional information in an attachment, in a handout, during a follow up meeting, or in a document.
- When you have an opportunity, take the time to create a relationship or develop interest, before trying to share information.

Engage your audience!

Grab their attention.

Have a clear message.

Know “their” touch point(s).

Make it quick.

Know what you want to say and get that said.

- Make it clear and in their “language.”
- Know what they care about, and touch on those things.
- Be concise, and get to the critical points first.

Strategic point 4....

Repeat your message

It is okay to repeat your message—but this doesn't mean resend the same email or say the same.

I hear this a lot, “If we inundate them with email they will stop paying attention.”

That is true if you make multiple attempts to communicate:

- Using the same old stuff
- With content that screams *this isn't important*
- Without a clear, stated BENEFIT for your audience
- With content that is “read-prohibitive”—meaning it so long or without purpose that people don't know why they are being forced to read it (or listen to it)

In essence—you can't send the same message if it does not attempt to communicate with the audience every time it is sent..

This is also a common comment in documents. People will often point out repeated information. But, people rarely read entire documents—they read chunks of information.

You can repeat information in documents if you are judicious, and it is done with strategic intent and purpose.

Parse your message...
and spread it over time.

Don't include
every detail in one touch.

If you have a lot of detail, break it into multiple messages.

- You can stretch a message over time
- Vary the content
- Send it to different audiences
- Put a different message in the subject line to pique interest

Multiple touches increase your opportunity to convey a message.

Not the same content over and over

Leverage over different audiences

Same message—different media

Tie a new spin to the content

Create opportunity with spin

Strategically thinking about sending a message over time, as several messages, allows you to send shorter, clearer messages.

- You get multiple hits—over time and during different times of day.
- You do get to convey your entire message—just not in one big, long , exhausting breath.

Strategic point 5....
Ask for action

The “ask” is the most strategic part of your communication.

- Why are you communicating?
- What do you want or need?

Don't forget to ask!

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Know what your “ask” is
before you start.

What do you want?

Think strategically.

- How can you build your case?
- Will you need to build it over time?
- Will a relationship with the audience help you?

What do you want them to do?

Why do they want to do it?

Give it a date.

Ask for action.

And above all, ask yourself...

Have I made a connection?
If not, this could be you...



What do you want?

Think strategically.

- Present what you want in a way that frames your request as what they want.
- Make sure you give the request a date for completion.
- Ask for action. Tell you audience what you need them to do.

Before you ask for anything...

Make sure you have made a connection.

A connection ups the probability that your request will be considered.

If you jump in without checking for buy-in, this could be the perception you create...

What can I do
you for?

Have I got a
deal for you!



What about now?

Trust me!

So what's it
gonna take?

If there is no connection...
delay the ask.

Make additional touches.

Build the relationship.

If there is no connection—or it is the “wrong” time, don’t blow your opportunity.

- Work toward additional opportunities.
- Make additional touches.
- Build the relationship and try again.

My first ask...

Put one strategy into action.





PICK JUST ONE THING

5 strategic points....

Set the stage

Know your audience

Keep them engaged

Be consistent and persistent

Ask for action

Five Strategic Points:

Is there one thing you can try to put into action?

Remember the five points:

- Set the stage
- Know your audience
- Keep them engaged
- Be consistent and persistent
- Ask for action

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