

LEADERSHIP

**SUPPORT
INTEGRITY
INFLUENCE
TEAMWORK
MOTIVATION
MANAGEMENT
CONTRIBUTION
RESPONSIBILITY
COMMUNICATION**

Effective Communication: The Essence of Influential Leaders

Running a country is a lot like running a cemetery; you've got a lot of people under you and nobody's listening.

- Bill Clinton

If you are a leader, it can be easy to relate to former president Bill Clinton. It can be easy to blame the people under leaders, characterized as followers, because they can frustrate a leader to death if the leader cannot effectively lead or if the followers do not follow in the right direction.

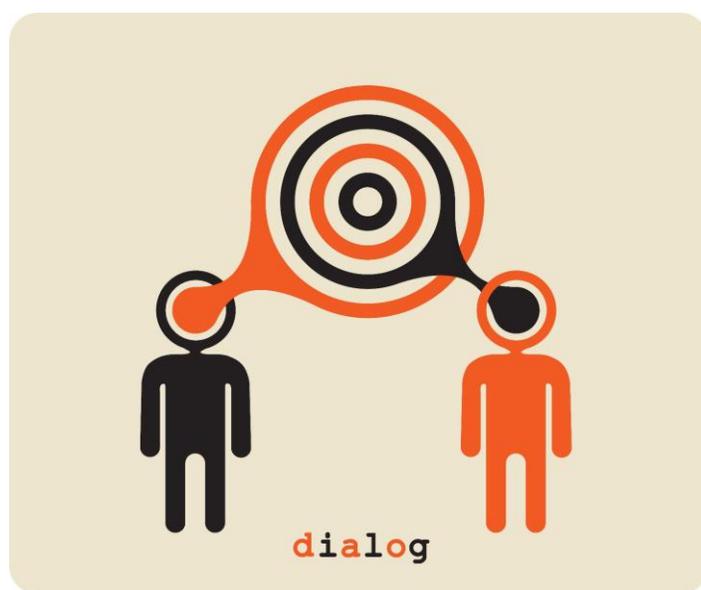
But consider the following:

- Why are your followers not listening to you?
- Do they not comprehend the message being delivered?
- Are they not motivated to contribute to the goals that the message describes?
- Do they disagree or feel that they cannot perform the tasks necessary to achieve the message's goals?

Leaders should reflect on all of these questions while delivering any message or even when preparing a message that will be delivered to their followers later. Giving the follower the benefit of the doubt that they comprehended what you were saying not only helps them to feel comfortable in their role as a follower, but it also helps leaders develop a better reputation.

The Elements of Messages for Effective Communication:

- Framing
- Priming
- Context Sensitivity



The Message

Effective communication always starts with a message. Some leaders struggle with delivering their messages in a way that is comprehensible to their followers although they believe there should be no misconceptions about the message. The truth is, while people talk to one another every day perceiving language and communication as an easy skill, delivering a message as a leader requires that the message be

tailored to the follower's preferences. This can sometimes prove to be an unpleasant and rudimentary task

of the leader, but it is necessary to accomplish in order to deliver the most comprehensible message with the least room for variability. The goal of delivering a message to a follower should be to get them to act in the desired way that the message represents. If a leader wants their followers to complete a task in a short amount of time, then they will need to deliver their message one way. If a leader wants their followers to complete a task only after another event has been completed, then they will have to deliver their message another way. It is up to the leader to deliver their message in the way they feel will influence their followers the most which should convey that a task must be completed in the exact way the leader wants. If that message is delivered in the best way possible, then the leader should expect the most effective results and their goals coming to fruition.

Framing the Message

Now that you have a message, the important thing to do, as a leader, is to frame your message in a way that is most influential to your followers. There are many parts involved in this step including focusing on the language, the thought, and the forethought of the message. The language that is chosen to represent the message should be selected in a meticulous way. Language is the ultimate tool for persuasion, so utilizing effective language while delivering a message will place leaders in a position where followers will be more likely to listen. In addition, the language selected should be apparent and obvious. This will ultimately help clarify the message that the leader wishes to deliver in a comprehensible manner and will also boost influence. Moving on, thought of the message should be considered. If a message is to be delivered so that followers will accept and embrace it, then a leader must place great thought by reflecting on the internal framing of that message. This is where it is important that leaders utilize the mental models of their message based on their underlying goals. It is important to use thought and reflection to confirm that a message is still related to its underlying goals and values. Doing so will allow for more congruency between the leader's character and the message they deliver. Last, forethought is something a leader should embrace because it will come in handy if impromptu communication evoking circumstances should arise. By judging the possible questions that will be asked in the future, leaders can prepare themselves to maintain congruency and avoid delivering mixed messages. By practicing forethought, a leader steps into

the realm of being almost completely prepared to handle any kind of situation that will either help or hurt them when persuading others to follow – but further discussion of this will come next

PRIMING & SPONTANEOUS COMMUNICATION

The art of framing can prove difficult for even the most experienced leader, although the best leaders have a keen ability to practice the technique. Another skill that leaders should brush up on to help them with forethought is the use of priming. Priming, in communication, is a way to activate values, missions, visions, anticipations, and/or



desirable language before communication even starts. While the idea of using priming as a technique can seem slightly manipulative, it can be used for good as well. The whole goal of using priming techniques is to place an idea about a message before it is even delivered. In order to do this, a leader must demonstrate high values and focus on a particular context. Followers will begin to realize where the message may be heading and form their own opinions or support for the message before it is delivered. While they are developing these opinions, it is important that the leader evaluates and reflects on all aspects of the message while cutting any ambiguities or loose ends in order to create perfect clarification when communicating the message. It is also a good idea to prepare for spontaneous communication by studying all aspects of the message as well as contingencies that could develop from the idea.

It is better to cover oneself than to be unprepared and threatened of loss of integrity or congruency. Remember though, if you are caught in a bind, it is better to repeat your message with its underlying values loud and clear instead of wavering into unknown or undesired territory only to have followers discount anything said in the future. Once the leader delivers the message, after the preceding context and ideas, the followers will be not only have formed opinions on the message, but they will be internally satisfied that they “guessed” what the message would be. This is very powerful because if followers agree with the

leader, then they will show excitement for predicting what the leader was going to communicate. If they do not agree, then it is a good thing that the leader prepared for spontaneous communication before delivering the message.

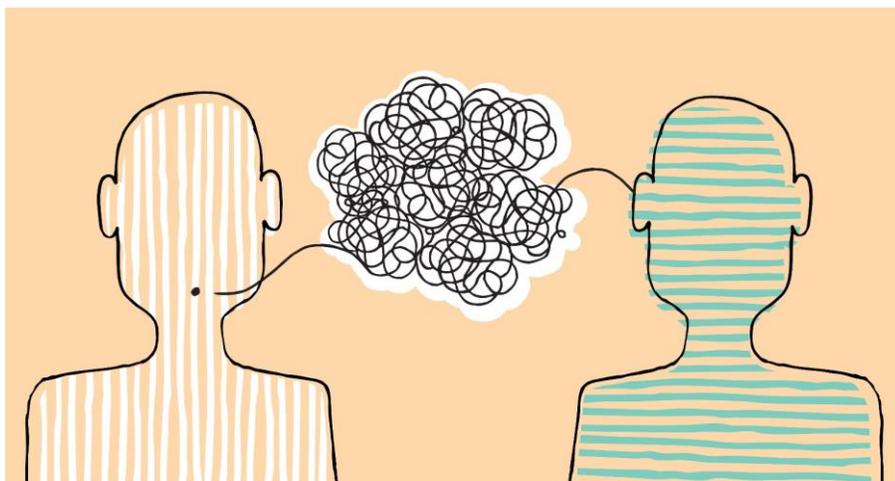
CONTEXT SENSITIVITY

When it comes to communicating, talk is cheap, and listening to followers, understanding how they think and what they expect will often place a leader on the right path to deliver an effective message. Paying attention to the context of a situation before, during, and after delivering a message is crucial for success.



A leader needs to be able to interpret and evaluate a context to impact the flow of communication when constructing and displaying their message. To do this, a leader should examine contextual influences, their own permeability, consistency, reality, and timing. This paper has already touched on consistency and reality by explaining the importance of tying messages to mental models and making sure that the message is congruent with values and goals. It is also important to examine the contextual influences of followers by analyzing their culture and their values. In addition, a leader must be permeable meaning that they must be able to embrace new ideas, beliefs, and behaviors. The leadership world can often be sporadic, especially when communicating messages to followers, and leaders need to be able to adapt to new situations by embracing new notions. Last, timing is one of the most important and effective tools of communication. Leaders should learn when to talk about specific parts of a message and when to conceal other parts only to reveal the additional details at a later and more appropriate time. This does not mean that leaders should hide the truth from their followers. Instead, they should carefully select which parts of a message should be revealed at certain

times in order to build up to the best message deliverable. What kind of leader wants to ruin their surprises anyway?



AVOID MIXED MESSAGES

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DIVERSITY IN COMMUNICATION

Again and again, it seems that any and all organizational advice mentions diversity somewhere. While it may sound like a broken record to some, one cannot express how important diversity is in the workplace! The reactive approach: dealing with lawsuits, dysfunctional teams, workplace critical incidences are all



things encompassed by a lack of diversity and can be avoided with diversity training and/or other proactive approaches centered around diversity. Besides sexism, ageism, and racism to name a few, many other discriminatory beliefs hinder performance. In communication alone, not understanding or recognizing different perspectives can diminish performance processes and outcomes. In addition, active listening to one group of people or employees over others also raises many potential consequences. Through diversity training, effective communication practices can be achieved to make sure everyone in your organization feels respected and will perform to help the organization succeed.

CONCLUSION

Leaders need to plan, execute, and reflect on their messages conveyed to their followers. Credibility is a rare achievement in the present world, and while manipulative language and persuasion can inspire followers, this feat is only temporary. If leaders want to tap into the essence of becoming a long term, credible and influential leader, then they must provide effective communication. Honing in on the tools discussed above will prepare any leader to do just that and more.