

How to communicate effectively so others take your ideas seriously

So you have an idea! Something interesting you want to do! You might need to start to tell people about it. Maybe you are looking for support and permission from others or maybe you want to apply for a grant. Whatever you're going to do you need to communicate your ideas in such a way that will maximise the chances of people understanding you. By making sure you are heard and understood to begin with you will maximise your chances of gaining support. The problem with communicating ideas is that we often assume that we have communicated effectively, and that anyone who does not receive your ideas with enthusiasm is unintelligent or short sighted. The truth is communication is more complicated than that. There are many things that can prevent us effectively getting our message across.

Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) tells us we are responsible for making sure others have fully understood us. This article conveniently condenses a lot of tips from many sources will help you maximise the chances that they will. It will help you avoid some common pitfalls and think about what information different people are looking for.

The principles outlined below can be applied in many different situations, whether it is giving a talk, or writing important letters and emails.

1. Start with the end in mind

- What result do you actually want? Plan what you wish to say around the result you wish to achieve. Think about what you want people to be doing, saying, feeling and believing as a result of what you say. Now ask yourself what you need to say to achieve that.
- Remember to tell people exactly what you want. Be specific.

2. How will you communicate?

- How will you make your proposal? What will be the best mode of communication? Is there some creative way you can communicate your message? What are the advantages and disadvantages of your chosen method? Do you need a combination of methods?
- Where will you communicate? Do you need to put people at ease? Would there be a benefit in taking the person or group to a neutral location, away from familiar surroundings and distractions? A walk in the woods, coffee shop or conference centre.

3. Consider the information needs of different personality types

The Myers-Briggs® model tells us different personality types tend to look for different information. Some prefer specific details, others just the big picture. Some prefer a

logical proposal that appeals to their head. Others prefer one that appeals to their heart. When preparing your message think about the following:

iNtuition: what is the big picture? Give people the overview of your idea/proposal. Use inspiring pictures, stories and quotations. Inspire people by exploring the possibilities, links, connections, relationships and future implications.

Sensing: what are the details? Give people all the relevant facts and the practical realities of the situation. Show them you have really thought things through. Think about the costs, measurements, timescales, organisations involved, personnel needed, equipment, buildings and training required, etc. Try not to give too much detail otherwise you may bore some of your audience. A supplementary handout may help those who want more detail

Thinking: what is your logic and reasoning? Tell people the logical implications of your proposal. Talk about models and principles and where appropriate give Bible verses that support it. Tell them the advantages and the flaws of your proposal. The assumptions you are making. Discuss the logical effects on the organisation and the wider world. Show how it will effect: efficiency, budgets, the bottom line, existing roles and structures, the environment, etc. Quote any books, magazine/newspaper articles, experts and academic studies that might give weight to your proposal.

Feeling: what will the effect be on people? Appeal to people's hearts and values. Discuss what effects your proposal will have on people. Tell them how it will impact relationships and morale. Discuss how it will unite people. Show how people will be supported through any changes. Indicate how your idea creates teams, builds relationships and collective ownership. Ask yourself if your proposal will conflict with strongly held values and beliefs of others? If so consider what can be done to make your proposal more acceptable? Show how what you are asking for will contribute to their vision/mission.

End your proposal with a summary of the main points.

4. Other useful tips and questions

- Stories are powerful. Where possible try to engage people using compelling stories and anecdotes that illustrate key aspects of your proposal.
- Be honest about any flaws in your ideas as this can really give you trust and credibility and show that you have thought things through. The people you are talking to may even have solutions.
- Create a strategy for handling the inevitable questions and resistance. When you propose something there is a process of thinking and acceptance people need to go through. People need time to absorb information and think about it. Don't interpret questions or resistance as rejection. It may just be that they require more information or time to reflect.
- Listen to your critics. They may be the key to your success. They will often have points you have not considered. Thank them for them and reflect back to them your understanding of their concerns. Tell them you have taken note and will consider their comments further.

- Try to use the word 'we' rather than 'I' in your communication as it engenders team and community.
- Don't shame or use guilt trips to try to win people over. It will create resistance. Take care not to tell people what they 'ought', 'should', 'must' or 'need' to do. These are words that are often used to make people feel guilty and are used to manipulate. Go through your document or talk and remove them where possible. You are then more likely to engage people's free will.
- When giving your proposal at a meeting try and set up the room in such a way that will ensure equal participation. Circular meeting tables create equality. Long boardroom tables, raised chairs, stages, platforms, pulpits, or sitting behind a large desk can create power distance.
- Where appropriate try to engage the people with questions. People's own answers are generally far more compelling than the ones you give them. Ask yourself: What other advantages do you see our proposal as having? What problems do you have that our proposal might help fix? What disadvantages are there? Allowing a group to discuss them can help them see your proposal is good and begin to embrace it. Don't be shocked however, when you get answers to your questions you don't want, or have not considered.
- Humour can help. It is not always easy, but if you have a natural talent for humour have a go, but run it by someone else first. Humour relaxes people and oils the cogs of communication. It's hard to dislike someone who is funny and endearing and therefore harder for them to say no to you. A humorous YouTube video relevant to your message may be better than relying on your own humour.
- Exaggerated, strongly worded language or threats can damage your credibility. Emotional and overstated predictions of the negative consequences of not cooperating with you will not help. If you make predictions use a logical argument and maybe historical examples to back yourself up.
- Show what you plan to say to an honest critic.
- For tips to help you write a really charismatic and persuasive speech watch the Nancy Duarte talk at TEDx East, <http://youtu.be/UfQF3DXG-S4>