

Introduction

This booklet is about interpersonal communication. And it boils down to one very simple idea: if, before you communicate, you know what you want, who you are talking to and you take account of that person's needs and wants, then you are more likely to get what you want. The problem for most of us isn't the theory. After all, that's common sense. It's the practice that many of us struggle with. And because effective communication eats up time we tend to ignore one obvious point - communication is a two-way process. Without feedback it's just broadcasting. Hopefully, this booklet will remind you of the things you already know and help you to find the time to put that knowledge into action.

reputation

March 2002

Author's note: throughout this booklet "they" or "them" has been used instead of "himself or herself". Hope you don't mind.

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1. In an ideal world...

Getting people to do things for you should be pretty straightforward. As long as you are clear about what you want them to do and by when then that person should be able to say yes or no. If your relationships are built upon honest foundations, if you are always clear, if when you ask someone to do something they either do or tell you why they can't, then this booklet will probably not offer you much. But if you find the art of motivating others challenging from time to time, then you might find this booklet useful.

This booklet is largely about communicating within your own organisation, or where you have time when you are communicating with outsiders. The same principles apply.

But it's fair to say that communication is likely to be more effective when it is:

- Honest
- Courteous and respectful
- Appropriate
- Timely
- And where it takes account of others feelings

Feelings

When you talk to people about why they decide not to do things for

other people often they will not focus on the task at all. People will often readily admit that they could have done it if they had wanted. But they don't want to. And when you probe that often boils down to the way that requests were made. Simple things like saying please and being honest about the task make a big difference. Added to that, none of us like being taken for granted. We like at least to feel that we have choices in our lives, even though the reality is that few of us really have.

The right feelings

It's one thing to make people feel as good as they might about what you are asking them to do, it's another to deliberately set out to make them feel bad for not doing so. Guilt, as we all know, can be a powerful tool. And its use is all too common. But before you use it as a means of getting your way, think about how it will sit within your overall relationship. And if it's the only way that you can get things done (and for this, review your techniques over a period of time), then you may need to take a close look at your interpersonal communication.

People will judge you by your communication

When you ask someone to do something that person will make a judgement about you. They will know how they might have made the same request. Or how others, whose skills they respect, might have done so. That's one indicator of your interpersonal communication. On top of that there are the Three Cs.

The three Cs

Consistency

People will look for consistency in what you write or say. Inconsistency rings a warning bell. And they will check that your body language is saying the same as your mouth or pen. If you say, “I really value your contribution” but fail to look the other person in the eyes, then you may undermine what you are saying.

Congruence

Does your communication all fit together? If you are saying things that don't fit together then you will potentially undermine part of your message. We all like to see congruence in the world - it doesn't really exist, the place is full of contradictions, but that doesn't stop our quest to find it.

Coherence

Does your communication make sense in and of itself? This is as much about planning as anything. It's about thinking ahead and looking at what you write or say from the point of view of the receiver. Crucially, it's about unearthing the assumptions that determine what you say so that everyone can appreciate the point you are making. When we expect too much of our receiver then we can allow our messages to become incoherent.

2. Start with outcomes

Before you communicate, you should try to be clear about the outcome you want. Much of our communication is habit-driven (why are you doing this? We always do). Remember that anything you send to anyone will be communicating with many other messages. There's a good chance it will be ignored anyway. And every time someone ignores your communication you potentially confirm in his or her mind that you are a poor communicator. That will make it easier to ignore you the next time you do so.

At least be honest with yourself

Sometimes your outcomes will be about display. You will want to be seen to be doing something. Or you will want others to see you as you would like to be seen. For example, using complex language before an audience of peers might be about demonstrating your intelligence and grasp of complexity. The result - that they don't understand fully what you are saying - might help to establish (at least in your mind) that you are perhaps more intelligent than they thought you were.

Boil it down to basics

One simple question: what do I have to say or do in order that the person I am communicating with will do what I want them to do?

If your communication is outcome-focused, a number of things follow:

- You should know who the person is
- What motivates them
- How they see themselves
- How they see you
- How much attention your message is likely to get
- The best time to communicate with them
- What your message might be competing with
- What behaviour will indicate success?

Write your outcome down

It's a good idea, especially if you're unclear about your communication, to write down exactly what you want to happen. This simple step is surprisingly effective. It can help take the impulsiveness out of your communication. It would probably help most people to write down an achievable outcome before sending emails. The result of over-eager emailing is that the medium is becoming damaged as an effective form of communication. But writing it down doesn't mean sharing it with the world. Keep it to yourself but use it to drive your communication and help you to stay focused.

Some outcomes are hidden

Writing down your desired outcome doesn't mean sharing it with everyone. On many occasions you will be seeking to bring about

changes in behaviour that you wouldn't want to make public. That's okay. So don't share it. But at least know what you are trying to do. Communication is a form of currency. The more it is misused the less it is worth.

3. Audiences - who are you communicating with?

One size never fits all. The most effective communication is one to one. For most purposes that's too expensive. But it's the only communication where one party can fully take account of the other party's interests. And where there is immediate feedback, you know straight away whether you're getting your message across.

If your communication is to be effective you will need as much information as possible about your audience.

Do you know them?

If you really know the other person you should be aware of:

- How they see themselves
- How they see the world
- How much time they are likely to have
- The situation in which they are likely to receive your message
- What specific words they like and dislike

Do you really know them?

It may be, having looked at these questions, that you don't really know them at all. Here the point is: do you think it matters - will you get what you want anyway?

A lot of communication fails because those communicating don't really know the other person at all. A typical example is where one person is trying to persuade another to do something at work. The other person nods their agreement but doesn't do it. The first person then chases them and agrees a new deadline that comes and goes. Before long it escalates, as these things do, and what started as a simple series of requests becomes a management situation.

If you've found yourself in this situation, take a look at these questions.

When you ask someone to do something for you, do you:

- Have a good idea of who they are before you do?
- Put it to them in a way that they would feel comfortable with?
- Rely upon your position - I'm the boss?
- Rely upon indirect associations - the chief executive (or someone important) thinks this is a good idea?
- Rely upon direct associations - I've been asked (by someone important) to ask you to do this
- Rely upon force - do this, it matters (because I say so).

Get to know the other person

If your communication is failing to get through it might simply be that you don't really know whom you are communicating with. You might think about spending some time simply watching and listening to this person.

Listen in

Try to find out what kind of person are you dealing with. Their words will tell you something about their background, their class, their education, their professional training, and their favourite subjects of conversation. Words will also tell you how they see themselves. It's likely that they will have particular words or phrases that they repeat. Keep a mental note of these. Listen in particular to how they see the world (it's all about power or it's all about gain or whatever). That organising concept (there may be more than one) will be important when it comes to communicating with them.

Listen harder

Here listen for the things they are not saying. What's in between the lines? Think about what you might expect them to say that they may choose to avoid. Don't expect to do this on one occasion. If you are struggling to get your message across (and you have to) take the time to really get to know the individual. But in a non-threatening way. Listen here for hopes (where they would like to be), fears and areas where they might feel discomfort or awkwardness.

Look at yourself listening

You'll only hear things if you really listen. But do you listen? Is listening for you simply waiting for a space to speak? Do you encourage the other person to speak by nodding and cueing them (making mmm sounds so that they will continue to speak)? Do you ask open questions that allow them space to say things without having to worry that they're saying the wrong things?

Now look

A person's working space will tell you a lot about them. If you've been happily firing off emails without knowing what it looks like at the other end you might be missing most of the picture. Go and take a look. They may share a computer, or work in a very busy space where the phones never stop ringing, or they may be out at meetings.

You'll see the person

We do tend to display ourselves in our working space. It's likely that you'll see family pictures and other personal artefacts that tell you not just how this person is but how they want you to see them. This is vital information because these are the keys that will help you to unblock your communication (if there's a problem) or establish communication on the right terms (if you're doing so for the first time).

And remember, how we dress is a key part of our display vocabulary.

What is this person about?

Try to distil down what you know of this person into one sentence that captures them. Essentially, what drives this person? It may well be that work is not their principal driver at all. Rather it may be that they live for their personal lives or their hobbies. Fine. When you know that you will understand how you might approach them in future.

4. The other party - yourself

Failure to communicate can all too easily be blamed upon other people. It's worth looking at yourself. You might be the problem. In the real world we often don't see ourselves in this way partly because it's easy to send out messages and get someone else to sort out the problems that doing so can cause. And it can't be denied that the way we will shape our communication with others usually without giving it a second thought.

How do you see the world?

The kind of world you think you live in will have an impact upon the way you communicate within it. If you are a senior manager you might believe the world to be a predatory place, with different managers all competing for position. Or it might be a political place with everyone either competing for power or influence or both. Or it might just be a cynical place where you've just got to get on with things. Ask yourself the question. It's the same world but how we see it will often determine our actions.

How do you see yourself?

Literally, what kind of person do you think you are? This matters because you will probably create that persona through the way that you write and speak. So, for example, if you see yourself as a widely-read, intelligent and witty person you may find yourself making literary references, lofty comments and passing occasional insightful remarks during the day. You would do this in order that other people

see you this way. It may, however, put some distance between you and the person you are communicating with because that person may not share your frame of reference.

How do people really see you?

This is probably the hardest question in the booklet because it's hard to gather in objective data about yourself. Asking the question begs more questions - why would you want to know? But it is worth finding out whether the way that you communicate might be seen as an asset or a barrier. Start by asking close colleagues or friends.

What price are you prepared to pay?

You might discover that you are not connecting with your audiences (in the widest sense) because you seek to communicate in a language that nobody speaks, using references that nobody knows and in a form that people find difficult. Probably not an uncommon situation. But the rub is this: if your mode of communication suits you more than the would-be receiver (either because it saves you time or allows you to sustain your self-image) are you really prepared to change? Good communication comes at a price.

How do you like to communicate and does it really work (what does that tell you about your attitude to communication?)

This booklet is built on one key assumption: that you will know why you are communicating and you will choose the medium, message and the appropriate time to do so in a way that will bring about the outcome you want. You might find that in your situation the best outcomes could be achieved by being face to face. But you may not

like eye contact or have the time to meet with people. You might prefer email - it's at least efficient. If you have difficulties with effective communication it may be that you don't really want to give it the time that it really deserves.

Look at your own comfort zones

We all like to make things as easy as we can for ourselves. So we will tend to communicate in places and at times that suit us. But they may not suit others. It's easy to organise communication around ourselves (maybe that's why emails are so popular) and forget the impact that will have on the outcome. Bear in mind that the way you communicate as well as the message you send will have an impact upon how the recipient feels about the message.

5. The crucial currency - credibility

To connect with someone you need to have credibility. You will need to determine where the credibility is going to come from. You will also need to know what units of credibility matter to the person you are seeking to communicate with.

Is it coming from your job title alone?

Inside your organisation much of your credibility will, at least in the first instance, come from your job title and position. Similarly, when sending internal messages, the fact that you work there will add some weight. But you might find that you rely upon this weight to make your message count. Again, the only real ways to find out how credible you really are is to strip away the all the weight that comes with your office and see what's left.

What units do other people measure it in?

Crucially, the units of credibility that you use to give your message weight have to be valued by the person that you are communicating with.

Sources of credibility

Endorsement

A high credibility person says, "Trust John" he knows what he's about. Because the endorser is already established and we may trust their judgement the credibility can be transferred.

Association

A similar process. Here you will align yourself alongside an existing symbol of credibility and bask in the reflected value. For example, “I’m working with the chief executive on this and I’d like your help”.

In both of the above cases, the other source of credibility needs to remain credible. If you use the chief executive as your source of credibility and they get sacked then your stock may fall too.

Symbolic

This is where we make judgements about someone’s credibility on the basis of the symbols that they are able to muster before us. We will have certain expectations about the symbols that others will have access to and we will make a judgement about them in those terms. For example, we may expect the chief executive of the organisation to have her own office, to wear nice clothes, to drive an expensive car and use to use a personal data manager. When we see those things they help to confirm that they are credible in our eyes.

Historical

When we do things, and over time gain a reputation for those actions, we will accumulate credibility. We’ve all the phrases such as “talk to so and so - they get things done”. Being aware of perceptions about you in at work in will give you some sense of your current credibility score.

Be clear about your source

You should know where your source of credibility lies and what

makes your stock rise and fall. If it's invested in a number of people thinking that you do a pretty good job, keep an eye on those people. Your fate may be in their hands. And think about the impact of your communication should your stock falls ("nobody returns my phone calls anymore").

Think about how you might increase your credibility

Sometimes our communication is not taken seriously because we are not perceived to be sufficiently credible. And maybe that's why we sometimes resort to having to say, "oh, the chief executive asked me to ask you to do this". You won't sort out your communication issues unless you first address your personal matters. Try to understand why people may see you as they do. Look for the associations that others make with your name. Look at what affects your credibility stock - what events or things are currently determining how others perceive you? What you will really need is honest, frank opinions. If you are very sensitive to others' views, you might find this a bit challenging.

6. Making connections: getting attention

Okay, you know why you want to communicate - the outcome that you want - you know who you are communicating with and you've got a pretty good idea how they might see you, let's take a look at some other the other elements of successful interpersonal communication.

But there is one essential component - attention. Without it you will be talking or writing to yourself.

The next time you get a chance, watch someone either reading a newspaper or leafing through some post. Keep a note of how long each communication gets. The chances are you will be measuring their attention in seconds. We live in an over-communicated world now. Look at your own postbag, all of those pieces of unsolicited mail falling on to your hall floor every morning. The reality is that most of them will end up in the bin unopened (unless you are a student of junk mail or get very little post anyway).

Talk to "me"

Many writers have observed that the one sound most of us love to hear is that of our own name. And while that's probably true it's also shorthand for "me, the things that interest me and the things that will make my life better". The more you talk to the "me" in your audience, the more attention you are likely to get, provided, of course, that those "mes" believe that you can deliver any promises

you might be making. When you were finding out about your audience in section 2 you will have built up a picture of that particular “me”. Now’s the time to put it to good use. Write your communication or speak your message in a way that allows the other person to hear that there’s something in it for them.

You are not the “me”

“I’ve got a problem” is not something most people want to hear. So what, I’ve got enough of my own is what the other person could well be thinking when you say that. It’s an example of self-focused communication. But if the person you’re talking to is someone whose self-image is that of a fixer (one who solves other people’s problems) then you might use that. You might say, “I’m really struggling so I thought I’d have a word with you because if anyone can solve this, you can”. That subtle shift will both get their attention (their “me” is the fixer and you are talking to that person) and give them an opportunity to reconfirm their self-image.

The right time is the right time

Timing matters. Think about when is the best time for that person. It doesn’t always follow that the quiet time is best. For example, the person may be driven by excitement and adrenaline. So when their up to their neck in things to do going to them with one more task might give them an opportunity to get even more excited and busy. It’s a judgement you will have to make on the basis of knowing who they think they are. But it’s unlikely that the right time for you is the perfect time for others.

The place

Place is often used as a tool. Asking someone to do something in front of others can be effective. But if doing so is about being seen to be asking (or worse, telling) people to do things then that can be counter productive. Look at the worst case: you're up to your neck in stuff and you dash into the next office and bark that such and such needs to be done (and quickly) and then dash out again. Your action will leave an echo to be heard in the moans of the staff who feel aggrieved that you may not have chosen the right place to talk to them. Common enough, though.

Choose a place that will help you to get the outcome you want.

The medium

Your choice of medium is important. Email, by default, has become the new medium of choice. But look at your own in-box. How much attention do you really give it? It can be easy to ignore - it's not as interactive as face to face. It's best not to have a medium of choice because it probably says more about the priority that you put on communications. Think outcome: which medium is likely to get you the outcome that you want? For some that will be email. For others, nothing less than face to face will be right. It depends upon whom you are talking to.

The medium can be the messenger

In interpersonal communication, there isn't usually much of a choice of media. In mass communication there are all sorts of channels - everything from letters through to mass circulation dailies. All the

same, the choice of email over personal hand-written letter will say something. The question is: what do you want to say?

It's a question of balance. Email can appear very informal. Letters, particularly typed on official paper, can be very formal indeed. Both can, of course, be changed. Email which uses formal language and none of the loose conventions that have grown up can feel very austere. Typed letters, where you have written in "Dear so and so" and personally signed can be softened. And softened still further with the addition of a personalised p.s.

The emotions

Emotions are easily ignored at work, unless they are seen as a specific problem. Strange really, since how we feel about something or someone is probably a strong determining factor in whether we do what they want us to do. But in the day-to-day rush we are likely to ignore how someone might feel about what we want them to do. No time for that. We just want them to do it. Before you communicate, particularly on a sensitive manner, think about the emotional state of that person before they read, see or hear your request. And then think about how to manage the reaction that they might have so that their final state of mind does not cause them not to want to do what you want them to do.

Other ways of optimising attention

Broadly, you should assume that you will get the most attention for your message - whether spoken or written - at the very beginning, and that this will decay rapidly (or less so) depending upon how

interesting the rest of the message is.

Each of these techniques is designed to appeal to people as they see might themselves.

Headlining

Adding a clear title that speaks to your audience will ensure that they will hear or read some of what you have to say. For example, “I want to talk to you about such and such” as opposed to, “if you have a minute or two I think I’d like to talk through some issues which may be of interest to, or may not...”. By the time you get to the end of the second sentence the other person’s attention might well have flagged altogether.

Layout

This applies, of course, to written communication. Think of your eye as a small creature seeking to navigate its way through a giant block of apparently unending text. Not appealing. Changing the layout so that the eye meets lots of small paragraphs broken up with bullet points is more likely to engage most of us.

Paragraphing

We’re back into niching territory here - the length of the paragraph will change depending upon the audience you are trying to reach. In the main, follow newspapers. If you’re audience sees itself as highbrow, intellectual, complex then err on the side of longer paragraphs. If they don’t then move towards shorter paragraphs.

Sentence length

The same applies to sentence length. Again, you will find longer, more complex sentences, particularly with polysyllabic words strewn throughout, in text designed for people who consider themselves to be at the higher numbers end of the IQ scale. You are also likely to find more complex sentence structures. But think about how you will word things. Don't just start writing and stop when you run out of steam.

Buzz words

At any time in an organisation there will be words or phrases that say to others "he/she belongs here". They are indicators that you are part of things. Listen out for those, they will be important in helping to establish yourself with audiences. Don't worry that they may not always be meaningful. Their meaning rests in establishing yourself as "one of us".

7. Making your words count

In the end, much of our communication at work is about words. So let's take a look at them here.

Be honest with yourself about the desired outcome

If you really want to connect with someone you'll find words that allow you to get your message across in way that doesn't threaten or worry them in any way. Choosing words that they don't understand (perhaps when they feel they should) could make them feel insecure. Using in-words might make them feel "out". Specialised vocabulary might confirm your sense of self (perhaps if you have a professional training) but may result in them perceiving you to be an expert, but one they don't understand. If these are the outcomes you want, then fine, but if not look again at your vocabulary.

Think about using other people's words - their own

One set of words that will get another person's attention is their own. If you listen closely to the way that someone else speaks and then use the same vocabulary then you will get their attention. Subconsciously, they will begin to feel an affinity with you. But you will also start to hear who they are - to a degree, we both reveal ourselves and build our identity through our language - and that is critical if you want to connect.

Jargon can help you to connect

Contrary to current belief jargon is not only desirable but also

crucial. Jargon - known lingual shorthand - allows people working in the same environment to quickly share information without long elaborate explanations. Jargon is a specialised language. And like all languages it's only a problem when you are speaking or writing to someone who doesn't speak the lingo.

Create some currency

Another way to make your language interesting to other people is to build words and phrases that they can then pass on to others. Memorable phrases can become currency. Think of effective sales letters - the average person spends a third of their life in bed, that's why you need to buy one of these... - that kind of currency can become something that you will then pass on to others (did you realise that the average person spends 13,140,000 minutes in bed?)

The way you say it

The more that you know someone the more you are likely to know the way to put something to that person. If you are talking or writing to someone for the first time, then you might want to speak to someone who knows them. Gather in information from people who know that person. And use it to frame what you write or say.

Reduce your point to a simple message

If you've got something to say to someone, spend some time thinking about the best way of putting it so that it can be boiled down to a simple sentence. You might choose to elaborate in due course. But if you are absolutely clear about your message it's easier

to take on board issues such as how best to put it to whom and at what time. Where you are less clear there is a great danger of making it up as you go along. Some interpersonal communication is too important for improvisation.

8. Synergy - beyond communication

Getting people to do what you want them to do can be a real challenge. Think about how much time in your work you are actually tied up in problems caused, at least in the first place, by poor communication. But communication is a part of human relationships.

Where is this person going?

This depends upon how much you have listened to and know the people you are dealing with. Let's not assume that because someone works down the corridor from you that they actually want to be there. Their ambitions may lie elsewhere. The more you know about where someone sees themselves the more you will be able to effectively communicate with them because you can take account of that. It may not affect what you have to say to that person. But it may have a big impact on how you say it.

How can I help them to get there?

And it could cause you to take that a stage further. If you develop a relationship with someone which is based, at least in part, on your ability to help them achieve their goals then they are probably going to be more interested in doing the things that you want them to do. Imagine, for example, that a member of your support staff wants to leave and that until now has manifested itself as distraction and apparent laziness, you might find that an acknowledgement of this new reality will allow you to help them to leave on their terms.

Would they want me to?

They may not. Your relationship with them to this point might be such that your help is the last thing they would want. But at least now, if you have done enough to establish who they really are, you will be better informed when you next communicate with them. And you will know more about yourself.

t's not just the words

It would be a mistake to think that if you put the right words in the right audience, then your outward communication will be sound. Life is not that simple. When we listen to someone (or read what they write) we will be looking for indicators that tell us they mean what they say. The reason honest communication is so attractive is because all of the indicators of truthfulness are lined up alongside each other. We will all look for little indicators that tell us that someone is lying. We might look for eye contact (or did they look away?). We might look at whether the person shuffled from side to side. We will listen for "slippery" words - words that allow the person not to fully commit to particular point of view. We might listen for a lack of conviction in their voice.

When you are communicating in the context of a relationship, then there is more opportunity to build a bond of trust between yourself and the other person. It makes it easier both for you to put your point across and for that person to honestly respond.

9. Barriers to communication

Even if you follow all of the steps outlined in this booklet you will still fail to get your message across. This section is about some of the barriers you will face and how you might get over them.

Interference

The truth is that anything you send to anyone or anything you say to anyone will be in competition with other sources of communication. If you are going to be effective you need to know what those are. Do you, for example, know how much email people in your organisation get? If you did, you would be able to judge whether it was ever worth sending an email to a colleague. But the interference might be desirable. Your message - which will probably mean work - is possibly a lot less interesting than other sources of distraction.

If you are going to connect when there are lots of distractions you need to give people a reason to listen to your message. Find something that they would want and put that at the beginning. One person I came across in a training session said she always put the phrase "I have some chocolate cake - would you like some?" in the header section on emails. It's an extreme case (and can be expensive) but it illustrates the point.

What your name means

Since you are so much a part of any message you send out, you really need to know what words go through people's minds when

they see your name. Again, knowing this will help you take account of it. We've all heard the phrase, "he (or she) only comes in here when he (or she) wants something". What associations do you have? It may be that if your messages are not getting across it's as much to do with your history and your general reputation as it is anything you might say or do now.

Too many competing priorities

Or it may be that your request is simply too far down the priority list to get any attention at all. Again, if you fire off pieces of communication without taking account of the audience in any real sense then it's little wonder that you might not get the reaction you want. The solution here again is to know as much as possible about the audience you are communicating with. And then in finding a reason to cause that person to reprioritise in your favour - talk to the "me" in them.

The medium protects you

Of course, we all know that face-to-face communication is threatening. And in truth as much to the person speaking as to the person listening. And that's because there is higher risk. We all know how it might feel if you ask someone to do something and they say, "no". That would cause a problem. You would need to think about how you would react. In short, you would need to do something about it. Many people don't like to confront that possibility and would far rather shoot off a few strongly worded memos.

But it's not communication. It's simply sending out messages. Unless you take account of the reaction of the other person - and possibly adjust how you put out your message - it's a one-way non-exchange. If you find difficult communication too much, then you probably need to look at your own skills as well.

10. Measuring success - the need for feedback

Communication without feedback is a pretty sure route to failure. It's vital that you get feedback. Without it you will not be able to adjust your message to get the outcome you want.

What exactly were you looking for?

At the outcome stage, what exactly did you want? Was it that someone should understand your point of view? If so, how will you know they did? If you wanted that person to take action, which action was it? And how will you be in a position to observe?

It's a good check for achievability

Some outcomes are not achievable. I came across one local authority that wanted to change staff perceptions around best value using e-bulletins. Didn't happen. The e-bulletin editor had to assume too much of the audience (that they should, for example, share a common definition of best value) to even get a toehold in that outcome. What's more, the lack of interactivity (and feedback) meant that the problem wasn't discovered until it was too late. The project was doomed to failure.

Making adjustments

Feedback will allow you to change the way that you communicate. If you are a champion e-mailer but people simply don't respond

then you will probably want to try another method. But you might also want to talk to some of the recipients of your e-missives to find out what they thought. The key thing here is honesty. If they say, “great email but I just didn’t have time” then they might not be telling you the whole truth. Honesty can hurt - “I saw it was from you but in truth I know that most of the stuff you send I don’t understand so I simply deleted it” - but it’s the only way you can improve your communication.

Make it as easy as possible to listen

There is no question that feedback can be uncomfortable. You might discover when you really listen to what people think of your communication that you’ve been failing to get your message across for ages. That can feel very threatening. But if you really want to improve your communication you need to hear that. And that means picking up small signals (did you look at that report? I really didn’t have time) because the other person might not want to hurt your feelings. If you show yourself prepared to listen and you don’t condemn anyone for being honest then you will get more and more feedback.

11. Pushing hot buttons

The idea here is simply bringing together all of the bits from the previous sections. In other words, if you know someone, know what motivates them, understand and take account of the way that they see you, put a request to them in such a way that allows them to see, however small, a benefit, then they are more likely to do what you say. The reality is that we all like to have our hot buttons pushed.

A hot buttons checklist

- Do you know the person you are talking to?
- Do you know what motivates that person?
- Do you know how they see themselves?
- Do you know how they see you?
- What do you know about you construct the world?
- What techniques do you usually use to get people to do things for you?
- Do they normally work?
- How does this person measure credibility?
- Are you credible enough in their eyes to make a decent connection?
- Do you know how they see the world?

- Do you know what words they use and why?
- How much attention are you likely to get?
- Why might they want to do what you want them to do?
- Do you know the best medium for communicating with them?
- What's the best time?
- What's the best way of putting your proposition to them?
- What kind of feedback might you expect?
- How else will you know if your communication is working?

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Hot Buttons

Notes on interpersonal communication