

## Authentic and Effective Communication

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We very often hear, "For us to be successful we need to have authentic and effective communication." Those two adjectives are rarely used properly.

When we talk about being authentic, what is it that we are actually looking to accomplish? Are we looking for senders who express themselves freely and openly without regard to other individuals' feelings, or are we looking for senders who know how to take their authenticity and conform it into a manner of communication that can be accepted by the receiver?

In our world of business (and in our personal lives), we need to know how to use this ability to mold our communication into an open and honest message that the receiver readily can accept.

The ability to use authentic communication correctly can lead to the success of the second magical word: effective. An individual who takes the time to tailor his or her message to meet the needs of the receiver will have a better chance of achieving success than an individual who wantonly throws out opinions.

For us to be successful when communicating, we must do our research, first on the topic we are trying to communicate. Do we have the basic knowledge to hold a discussion, or do we need to find further information to clarify our opinions and make a bigger impact?

Secondly, we must research our audience — with whom are we going to be communicating? What is their background, knowledge, acceptance of the topic to be discussed? These are only a few of the groundwork elements that must be completed to be successful.

Finally, we must prepare ourselves to be ready for all possible obstacles that might be presented during our communication. Do we have the necessary background material to support our opinions or recommendations? More importantly, if asked for our opinion, would we be able to provide it in a manner that will be accepted as being authentic and effective, or would it be perceived as opinionated?

Although authenticity is important, it is more important that we are effective when we communicate. What is it that we want our receivers to understand, and are we presenting it to them in a manner that they will fully understand? As we begin to prepare our communication, if questions arise that we aren't sure how to answer, how will receivers accept that same information? The receivers might have similar questions, and more importantly, we could lose the possibility of acceptance, openness, agreement or approval for the information we are communicating.

How do we overcome the misuse of authentic and effective communication in our day-to-day conversations and begin to use them "magically?"

We need to begin by understanding our own limitations when it comes to communication. We have to realize just because we are being authentic, it doesn't mean we are being effective. We have to understand that we have to tailor our communication to the level of our recipient. In our efforts to be authentic and effective, we have to realize we are not always able to capture the acceptance of the receiver, but it is our responsibility to give it our best effort to try and capture that acceptance.

It is important to recognize limitations that might exist during communication (i.e., age, culture, sex, ethnicity, education, etc.). Once we recognize the existence of these limitations, we can begin to gain additional knowledge to help overcome them. This additional knowledge also will allow us to stay focused on the topic of discussion and will help in communicating confidently, clearly and accurately.

Although the recognition of these limitations will help us to stay focused and on point to deliver an authentic effective form of communication, there are other factors that need to be discussed.

We all don't communicate and interpret in the same manner — everyone communicates in a way that is comfortable for them but might make it difficult for the individual receiving the message to interpret.

Vice versa, everyone also has formed their own manner of listening. We listen for those key points that are of interest to us and pay no attention to the surrounding details.

One of the many tools that are available to us to help better understand not only our preferences for communicating for how other individuals prefer to communicate is the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI). Ned Herrmann developed the HBDI more than 25 years ago while he was working as a head of management education at General Electric.

The HBDI measures a person's preference for right- or left-brained thinking and for intellectual, more visceral or gut-oriented thinking. The model combines these two dimensions to create four quadrants (A through D). Quadrant A is the Rational Self (Analyze), Quadrant B is the Safekeeping Self (Organize), Quadrant C is the Feeling Self (Personalize) and Quadrant D is the Experimental Self (Strategize), with each quadrant representing a different thinking-style preference.

Based on this information, individuals and/or teams can better predict, understand and improve their problem-solving, idea generation and communication patterns.

With this information, you can better prepare yourself for communicating. If you know in advance the preference of the individual with whom you will be communicating, you will be more effective in delivering your message because you are now delivering it in a manner that person understands. Accordingly, he or she will be more willing to invest their time to listen to you.

Herrmann's research has shown that although we clearly prefer some quadrants over others, we all have access to each of these quadrants.

If you prefer communicating from the Experimental Quadrant, your preference will tend to be to challenge established policies, to think outside the box for solutions and look at the big picture.

On the other hand, if you prefer to communicate from the Rational Quadrant, you will tend to want to gather facts, and look at ways to solve problems logically, and you will want to make your point clearly and concisely.

The Feeling Quadrant will be more likely to be more intuitive, expressive and sensitive, in contrast to the Organized Quadrant, which focuses on plans, details, how things will get done and timing.

The challenge now is getting each of the examples to understand one another and accept what the others have to say. The answer to the challenge is to recognize there might be existing limitations based on individual preferences for communicating. Once we acknowledge their existence, we can begin to overcome them by adapting our preference to their preference.

This doesn't mean we give up our preference completely, but that we attempt to adapt it so that it will be accepted during the communication process. The process starts by choosing the right information, organizing it in the best way and presenting it effectively within the known preferences.

These are the cornerstones of developing an approach to authentic and effective communication. When practicing, experiment with different levels of enthusiasm or styles of delivery until you feel comfortable with your natural self-expression, especially if you will be preparing to deliver your information outside your normal preference.

If you don't take the proper amount of time to research, organize and present your information in a clear, concise and accurate manner, you might come across as stiff, awkward and ineffective.

Taking the time upfront will make you and your communication come across as well-prepared and, more importantly, authentic and effective. With proper preparation, you will be able to pay close attention to what other people are saying and how they are reacting.

Your audience will find your ability to pay close attention flattering, and it will let the audience know you're interested in its ideas.

Additionally, you will avoid letting the communication shut down when one person doesn't understand the other.

This misunderstanding can lead to a communication breakdown, and it might have a negative impact on your ability to communicate authentically.

Communicating authentically is not an easy task. What we believe is authentic might be perceived as being unknowledgeable, unprepared and, in some cases, rude.

At times, authentic communication feels like risk and takes courage. It reflects your experience, not an absolute reality. We use authentic communication as a method to be understood, not necessarily to meet agreement.

Ultimately, the use of authentic communication needs to be invited, welcomed and appreciated by both the sender and receiver of the communication transaction.

We have to realize that just because we are being authentic doesn't mean we are being effective. For our communication to be accepted as being authentic and effective, we need to build a blueprint of our communication, which needs to be clear, concise and accurate. It also has to meet the needs of the individual or group who will be receiving it.

Communicating with one another isn't always easy. Even our closest friends and our co-workers sometimes have difficulty understanding what we are trying to say. We need to slow down and realize that just because we know what we are saying, someone else might not.

For our communication to flow easily back and forth and not break down, we need to take a deep breath, organize our thoughts, remember to whom we are speaking, adapt it to their understanding and then, with any luck, we will be able to provide authentic and effective communication.

This information is not all inclusive, and it should be used as a foundation. There are numerous suggestions and methods that can be used to help in the preparation of our communication that will make our authenticity and effectiveness work hand in hand.