

SPEAK SMART, MAKE YOUR MARK

HOW TO
COMMUNICATE WITH TACT,
CONFIDENCE AND POISE AT WORK,
EVEN IN STICKY SITUATIONS.

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the cover consisting of multiple thin, white, wavy lines that flow across the page, creating a sense of movement and depth.

Dean Shams

**Do you sometimes feel frustrated that you are heard but never understood?
Have you tried to communicate something that got lost in translation despite your best intentions?**

This book will give you everything you need to communicate consistently in the style of true leaders.

In an age of instant messaging, witty and confident conversations are something that many individuals do not practice much, especially with the excess use of emoticons.

While the world perceives itself to be ever more so connected through technology, ironically we are losing touch with face-to-face communication. Dean Shams reveals the art of speaking strategically and confidently to access greater business potential and opportunities.

Lydia Neo
Director of Business Development
Helios Media Design Pte Ltd

Dean, in his latest book, has provided insightful perspectives and practical tips on effective communication that are not only useful to beginners but also for seasoned practitioners across all fields and expertise. A very good resource, indeed!

Zhul A Rahim
Partner
Rodyk & Davidson LLP

Dean gives his readers amazingly simple yet so effective tips and practical ideas to put into practice in various situations and circumstances. He also presents examples of problems and positive suggestions to intervene when communication is not effective.

Highly recommended reading to help you make your mark!

Dr Ramesh Tarani
Educator, Entrepreneur, Management Consultant

Cool stuff! I have known Dean for the longest time, and it is so great to know that all these skills that he has been using effectively have finally come out in a book! This will definitely help everyone get better and understand their own communication skills. Way to go, Dean!

MSL Jayantthi
Business Development Manager

This book has made me view communication in a new light. I felt I communicated well before, but there was much that I wasn't doing or didn't realize before. This book is a valuable resource.

Nicholas La Port
English Language Trainer



Tact is the art of making a point without making an enemy.

- Isaac Newton

Speak Smart, Make Your Mark

How to communicate with tact, confidence and poise at work, even in sticky situations.

Please note that this is only a 2-chapter extract of the full book.

You may pass on this extract to anyone in its entirety. You are not allowed to change any part of this document.

To buy a copy of the book, please go to www.SpeakSmartMakeYourMark.com

Dean Shams

PRAISE FOR *SPEAK SMART, MAKE YOUR MARK*

Having studied diplomacy, and worked as a teacher and academic developer in Australian universities, and as an adviser in the community and government sector in Australia, I have witnessed first-hand how clear, open and self-aware communication is so often the critical factor separating success and failure. Poor communication comes from poor self-awareness and is ultimately self-defeating.

Speak Smart, Make Your Mark is a timely resource for leaders in both the private and public sectors to enhance effectiveness in moving from plans to results and bringing the whole team with you. It is also a great tool for aspiring managers to develop self-efficacy by stepping into the shoes of others seeing how they define you by the way you communicate.

Unlike other publications on ‘communicating effectively’ that merely provide how-to lists of language tips and platitudes, this book gets to the heart of the issue - our mindset.

The gap between who we are and who we are perceived to be comes down to the verbal and non-verbal cues we give our professional colleagues. If we get, this we can start growing into more authentic communicators. We too often underestimate people’s ability to see through hollow scripts or words that our heart is not invested in, winning trust is about learning to speak confidently with your own voice.

Speak Smart, Make Your Mark shows you how better self-awareness and genuine attentiveness to other’s communicating with you, makes a lasting difference.

Stuart Whitman

Australian Educator and Political Adviser

It sounds so simple: *say what you mean!* But all too often, what we try to communicate gets lost in translation despite our best intentions. We say one thing, the other person hears something else, and misunderstandings, frustration, and conflicts ensue.

Fortunately, you can learn how to communicate more clearly and effectively. Whether you're trying to improve communication with your spouse, kids, boss, or co-workers, you can improve the communication skills that enable you to effectively connect with others, build trust and respect, and feel heard and understood.

Speak Smart, Make Your Mark suggests new ways to understand the people with whom we interact, first by listening and then by understanding what our perceptions, channels, and motivation are.

Having known Dean for several years, both personally and professionally, I immediately sensed that in his inimitable direct, clear and concise manner, Dean would have put on paper easily picked up skills and techniques that he has put to such effective use in his work as a successful PR professional.

Dean gives his readers amazingly simple yet so effective tips and practical ideas to put into practice in various situations and circumstances. He also presents examples of problems and positive suggestions to intervene when communication is not effective.

Highly recommended reading to help you make your mark!

Dr Ramesh Tarani

Educator, Entrepreneur, Management Consultant

Free Resources

To get instant access to author's latest free articles, MP3s, videos and other resources, head over to www.DeansResources.com

Copyright © 2016 Dean Shams

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher, except for inclusion of brief quotation in review.

Speak Smart, Make Your Mark

How to communicate with tact, confidence and poise at work, even in sticky situations.

Author: Dean Shams

Publisher:
Kinetiq Buzz Pte. Ltd.
20 Maxwell Road
#09-17, Maxwell House
Singapore 069113

Website: www.SpeakSmartMakeYourMark.com

Email: books@kinetiqbuzz.com

ISBN: 978-981-09-8225-6

Speak Smart, Make Your Mark may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fundraising, or sales promotional use. For information, please email **books@kinetiqbuzz.com**

This book is dedicated to all those who struggle to communicate with influence and impact.

Speak Smart, Make Your Mark

How to communicate with fact, confidence and poise at work, even in sticky situations.

Disclaimer:

All the information, techniques, skills and concepts contained within this publication are based on the experiences of the authors and of the nature of general comment only; and are not in any way recommended as individual advice. The intent is to offer a variety of information to provide a wider range of choices now and in the future. Should any reader choose to make use of the information contained herein, this is their decision, and the contributors (and their companies), authors and publishers do not assume any responsibilities whatsoever under any conditions or circumstances. It is recommended that the reader obtains their own independent advice as we all have widely diverse circumstances and viewpoints.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DEAN SHAMS helps executives and leaders create a strong executive presence, connect with others better and become more influential. He trains them to communicate with diplomacy, confidence and poise, especially in difficult situations.



He brings with him almost two decades of experience in a career that revolves around communications. He founded his own public relations practice, KinetiqBuzz, in 2005 after seven years in the training and education industry.

Dean works with business owners and directors from a wide range of industries to identify their key brand messages and present them in a clear, concise and compelling way. He further trains these leaders on how to articulate themselves in different media situations with confidence and flair while keeping their communications always on point. His articles have been published in various national media such as Straits Times, Business Times, business and lifestyle magazines.

He is a certified NLP practitioner and ACTA trainer. He was appointed as an adjunct lecturer at Marketing Institute of Singapore Training Centre in 2015. Dean was an Executive Council member of Marketing Institute of Singapore between 2013 and 2016. He served as the Honorary Secretary and spokesman in the last two years.

He has delivered seminars at MNCs such as Pepperl+Fuch, Oracle, Glaxo Smith Kline, OCBC, AIA and Singtel.

He welcomes your connection on Facebook and LinkedIn.

Contents

INTRODUCTION 17

No matter what line of work you do, it is in your best interest to become a masterful communicator. Research shows that communication skills are consistently valued over technical skills at the workplace.

CHAPTER 1: MINDSET THEN SKILLS SET 27

Most people who want to improve their communication tend to work on improving their language skills. And then they wonder why nothing really changed. The truth is, without having the right mindset towards communications, no amount of language proficiency will help.

This chapter deals with the basic mindsets needed to be able to communicate effectively with anyone, even difficult people.

CHAPTER 2 : KNOW THE DIFFERENT STYLES OF COMMUNICATIONS 35

People resort to three different styles of communications in different situations - passive, aggressive and assertive. Being able to identify the styles will help you be aware of your weaknesses and move yourself into the more useful assertive style to command your executive presence.

CHAPTER 3: THE HARDEST PART OF COMMUNICATION - LISTENING 53

Two monologues do not make a dialogue. Learn what it takes to listen actively to the other party in a conversation. The better you are at listening, the better you will be at communicating. Listening is more than just being quiet and letting the other person talk.

CHAPTER 4: THE ART OF ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS 65

We don't always say what we mean. In the communication process, asking the right questions can open doors to better understanding. The quality of your questions can make a significant difference in the quality of response you get from the other party.

CHAPTER 5: THE POWER OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT 71

How often do you make the other party feel felt? This one technique alone can help people perceive you as the good friend and colleague they have always wished for. Wouldn't you like that?

CHAPTER 6: IF YOU HAVE TO SAY IT, OWN IT 81

We often blow the fuse in others without even realising it. The fault lies in how we verbalise our experience. Change the angle, diffuse the bomb. It's quite simple, really.

CHAPTER 7: THE SMALL CHANGES THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE 87

Words have weight. They are triggers to good and bad emotions. Being aware of this can help you reach through people's filters and side step their hot buttons. Learn how to substitute words to put yourself in a better light with your bosses and colleagues.

CHAPTER 8: SPEAK YOUR MIND AND SPEAK IT RESPECTFULLY 101

We are all entitled to an opinion. But what makes people upset is not the opinion itself; rather, it is how the opinions are expressed. Learn how to express it well and never be tongue-tied the next time someone asks, So what do you think?

CHAPTER 9: GIVING THE DREADED FEEDBACK 115

People hate receiving feedback from their bosses because it is mostly done badly. What if you are put in a position where you have to give corrective feedbacks? Would you end up hating yourself? Not if you do it the effective way.

CHAPTER 10: DEALING WITH CRITICISMS 129

Criticisms can make you lose your confidence and keep you up at night fuming with anger. You need to respond to your critics with confidence and poise with the techniques shared here.

CHAPTER 11: THE A.R.T OF THE POSITIVE NO 141

Being rejected can be tough. Being the rejector can be tougher. It has been said that if you can't say no, you don't have real control over your life. You can say no to unnecessary and annoying requests in a tactful and diplomatic way.

CHAPTER 12: NO NEED FOR DEMANDS, JUST MAKE REQUESTS 151

You can't seem to get work done because your colleagues are being uncooperative. There is no need for raised voices and poison emails. Just make a firm 4-step request.

CHAPTER 13: MAKING AN AUTHENTIC APOLOGY 165

Even the best among us foul up. To err is human, to ask for forgiveness is, well, just smart. Saying sorry can cut the fuse to future bitterness and conflict. Say it wrongly and you make the situation worst. Learn to say it right and reduce the conflicts in your life.

CHAPTER 14: HOW TO GIVE AND RECEIVE COMPLIMENTS ELEGANTLY 175

We love getting compliments, yet we don't give enough of it to others. But we know compliments help foster good relationships. Most people hold back a compliment because they don't want to be seen as a bootlicker or a fake social butterfly. Learn how to pass a compliment authentically and elegantly.

CHAPTER 15: CULTURE COMPLICATES COMMUNICATION 191

This chapter deals with how culture influences the way we communicate. It helps us understand our colleagues in a borderless multi-cultural workplace.

CHAPTER 16: DEALING WITH THE 5 PEOPLE YOU MEET IN (WORKPLACE) HELL 203

Our assertiveness is most tested when dealing with difficult people. This chapter identifies the five most common types of difficult people at the workplace. Learn how to deal with each of these types with greater confidence.

CHAPTER 17: IT'S NOT ABOUT TRANSFORMATION. IT'S ABOUT EVOLUTION. 217

Even the most masterful communicator slips up now and then. Being masterful at communication is not about making zero errors. You need to have the right mindset on your path towards becoming spontaneously assertive. There will be signs that tell you that you are on the right path.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 222

Before you read on...

For some reason, the English language does not have a gender-neutral pronoun. It would be quite awkward to pepper the book with 'he or she' or 'one' just to maintain neutrality. It makes for clumsy reading. Some writers have started using 'they' as a substitute. This would only confuse the reader, I think.

So I have taken the liberty to use the masculine pronoun 'he' to refer to a person in general. Also, in any given situation, you may be communicating with one person or a few. So I figured using 'the other party' would be a more effective way of referring to both possibilities.

INTRODUCTION

How miserable are you at work?

I know that was a brutal way to start a book. But if you were completely happy at your workplace, you wouldn't have picked up this book anyway. So I'd rather be honest right off the bat.

No matter how you rate your misery, chances are it is not caused by what you do for work, rather, it is always about who you do your work with.

It has been said that you can choose almost everything in life - the city you live in, the job you chose, your spouse, your clothes, etc. But there are two things in life that, without a doubt, you have absolutely no choice over - your family and your colleagues. Interestingly, they are the very groups of people who can bring immense joy or immense pain into your life. At the same time, without them, life will seem quite incomplete.

In a 2013 survey in the USA, lack of open and honest communication was cited as the number one cause of low employee morale. The study only validated what we have known all along, ineffective communication between managers and employees makes a significant difference to a team's engagement levels.

The same study also cited that the best remedy for low morale is also communication. The difference lies in knowing efficient from effective communications.

Differentiate effective communication from efficient communication

Let's make it clear, communicating efficiently is not necessarily effective. You need to know the difference if you ever want to become a masterful communicator.

Efficient communication is when you get the essential message across in the simplest most direct manner.

Take the following message:

“The meeting has been changed to 3 pm tomorrow due to unforeseen circumstances. Sorry for any inconvenience caused.”

This message contains the essential information transmitted with minimal words. So it's clearly efficient. But is it effective? An effective message is one that acknowledges the fact that there is a human being at the other end receiving the message and creating his own meaning out of it. There are so many different ways a person can react to the message. He could be happy that the meeting is canceled and now his time is freed up for more urgent work. He could also be upset that he might have put aside work to prepare for a presentation and now his effort is wasted. If there was some kind of explanation that came with the cancellation notice, he might accept the message with greater understanding.

So the simple and efficient notice is not effective at all. There is no explanation given or acknowledgment of any inconvenience caused by the affected parties. The token template apology comes across as an afterthought and doesn't help in fostering understanding. But it gets the message across.

Now consider this version:

“The meeting has been changed to 3 pm tomorrow. I am sorry that it may cause some inconveniences on your part, but we didn't have a choice. The key decision makers have been called back to the job site for some urgent assessment work.”

It may be a longer message, but notice how it takes on a more human tone. It is not efficient, but it is certainly more effective simply because it

takes into consideration the receiver of this message. Effective communication aims to verify and validate the message being communicated. As such, it tends to be open to two-way exchanges.

There are times when efficient communication is appropriate, say, in giving technical instructions, but in most situations at work so long as you are communicating with another person, effective communication is always better.

In a productivity-obsessed country like Singapore, we have come to believe that anything efficient is good. Our communication style has increasingly come to mimic this.

Furthermore, in an age of social media and with the world becoming flat, email has become our main mode of communication at work. Today, we rather email our colleagues sitting a few tables away than stand up, walk to him and have a conversation. We rather send a text message than call someone on our phones. The written word has dominated our communication. But the written word is also more tedious compared to a conversation. So we subconsciously value efficiency over effectiveness.

How often has someone made your blood boil over with a curt email or text message? For every time that happens, a seed of discontent and conflict is sowed. Not many of us have the skills to address a miscommunication as it happens. So we supposedly let time heal the wound. But as long as it is not acknowledged and addressed, time will only allow the seeds of discontent to germinate and hold root. Then long after we have forgotten the negative incident, we begin to wonder why we just can't get along with certain individuals.

Even our colloquial English is about eliminating filler words and getting to the point quickly. It is an efficient form of communication for sure. Unfortunately, lots of times, it is usually the filler words that make a positive difference between sending a clear message or sparking a miscommunication.

It is time we bring effectiveness back into our communications. In the words of Stephen Covey, Efficiency is for things, not people.

It is time we bring effectiveness back into our communications.

*In the words of Stephen Covey, **Efficiency is for things, not people.***

Communications skills trump superior technical and professional proficiency

Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman, two thought leaders in the area of leadership development, wrote an article in the Harvard Business Review in July 2014 about a survey they did to determine the competencies/skills that are important at different levels of management. They wanted to know why some skills are ranked differently at different levels of management and if there is any skill that is universally important at all levels.

They surveyed 332,860 bosses, peers and subordinates on 16 competencies that they thought are critical to the roles of leaders and managers at the various levels. The study unearthed six competencies that were consistently marked as most important for any level, be it supervisors, middle managers or senior managers. All executives surveyed said that a balance of these competencies is needed for management roles at all levels.

Competencies consistently voted as most important for all management positions include:

1. Inspiring and motivating others
2. Displaying high integrity and honesty
3. Solving problems and analyzing issues
4. Driving for results
5. Communicating powerfully and prolifically
6. Collaborates and promotes teamwork

The others include:

7. Building relationships
8. Displaying technical or professional expertise
9. Displaying a strategic perspective
10. Developing others
11. Taking initiatives
12. Innovative

13. Championing change
14. Connecting the group to the outside world
15. Establishing stretch goals
16. Practicing self-development.

As you can see from the ranking, communication ranks above technical and professional expertise and are expected at all levels of management. I would like to view number seven, building relationships as a corollary to having good communication skills. I can't imagine anyone with average or poor communication skills being able to build strong relationships.

My point here is that if you aspire to be upwardly mobile on the corporate ladder, you cannot afford to wait till you get some altitude before you work on your communication skills. You have to start from the ground level, so that by the time you reach to a level where people are looking up to you, you already are communicating powerfully.

If you aspire to be upwardly mobile on the corporate ladder, you cannot afford to wait till you get some altitude before you work on your communication skills.

Human resources consultancy firm Hudson did a survey on 477 employers and 1,292 employees in Singapore in November 2013. They found that bad managers were the top reason workers will reject a job offer. 74.3 per cent of employees would reject the job if they think that the quality of their boss was below average.

You don't want to be the reason your department is short of staff.

What effective communications can do that stress-relieve therapy can't

Stress-relieving workshops are always popular in HR staff welfare plans. Yoga, meditation and all sort of exercises have been prescribed as stress management tools. In my opinion, they address the symptoms like how painkillers reduce your physical pain but don't really heal the inflammation.

Sure, stress at work come from many sources, but I wouldn't be too presumptuous to say that poor communications are the leading course of it. According to a University of Stockholm's study, an executive in a big organization typically has meaningful interaction with an average of 15 other individuals. You will agree with me that as long as you are working with another human, miscommunication and conflict is bound to happen. By that logic, you could potentially be dealing with up to 15 interpersonal problems at any one time!

Then take into consideration that people generally don't usually make efforts towards resolving miscommunications and conflicts as it happens. They rather vent to other people, i.e. potentially 15 other colleagues. So theoretically, your interpersonal frictions can be magnified 15 fold! The thought itself can create anxiety. No wonder stress relieving workshops are evergreen.

Now, consider this. What if you had the communication skills to address miscommunications as it happens? Then ideally, the chances of a miscommunication snowballing into conflict drastically reduce! It implies that you will be a happier person at work, and the chances of you becoming the source of miscommunication also reduce in tandem. (I would like to think that happier people are less likely to be sucked into a conflict than those who are perpetually on the edge of misery.)

So instead of just going to the wellbeing courses to reduce anxiety and stress, why not work on becoming a masterful communicator? It might be the panacea you are looking for.

“The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives.”
Anthony Robbins

What makes a masterful communicator?

You won't know the answer to that question unless you know what good communications is. I have come across so many different ways of defining good communication, but this one has to be the best, both for its accuracy and simplicity.

Good communication takes place when a message sent equals the message received.

message sent = message received

This is not just about words used. There are three levels to communications,

- what is being said
- how it is said
- what is not said

The blend would also include emotions and unsaid expectations and intentions - three of the most common blind spots in any interaction.

Hence, the masterful communicator works towards sending out clear, concise and powerful messages, adjusting his style and medium to ensure his message gets across optimally. He is able to manage competing expectations by being able to express his thoughts, opinions and ideas in a diplomatic and tactful manner, even in moments of flared tempers. And therefore, he is more at peace with how he behaves. He doesn't need to spend sleepless nights thinking about what he should have said and how he should have said it.

The masterful communicator works towards sending out clear, concise and powerful messages, adjusting his style and medium to ensure his message gets across optimally.

The masterful communicator takes all that extra effort not just for the sake of others, but more importantly, he does it for himself. Only with quality communications can you forge better relationships. These are essential precursors to less drama in one's life that ultimately leads to a happier existence.

It does sounds like a tall order, doesn't it? But it is not, really.

When you have the right mindset, the right skills and the right practice, it will become second nature to you. It is as true as any skills you have mastered in your lifetime.

Keep in mind that most conflicts are not marked with raised voices and angry words. Conflict does not necessarily equate to an argument. At the simplest level, it could just mean an unresolved miscommunication that initiates negative emotions that puts you 'in conflict' with another person. These are the ones that usually go unaddressed, and hence, unresolved. Over time, they seep into subsequent interactions with the other party. We show our dissatisfaction and contempt with snide remarks, cold shoulder and sabotaging one another's work. The relationship sours, leaving a trail of unnecessary mishaps. So, forget about being charismatic or charming if you haven't mastered the art of connecting.

Let's stick to the facts? Not!

Somebody gets worked up over some unmet expectations with someone else. They call for a truce. One of them says, "Let's stick to the facts". Like a magic spell that person is automatically conferred a higher level of professionalism and objectivity.

But the truth is far from it.

As much as we would like to think of ourselves as highly intelligent and logic driven creatures, the truth of the matter is that we are actually emotional creatures. A lot of decisions we make in life are based on emotions and then we use logic to justify them. This applies at work too. The faster you come to accept this, the easier you will find dealing with people in general.

Conflicts arise not because of facts. It arises because of conflicting perceptions, intentions and values we assign to the facts.

Conflicts arise not because of facts. It arises because of conflicting perceptions, intentions and values we assign to the facts. Facts alone do not make the whole story. There is always the emotion factor. More often than not, we ignore it, thinking that there is no place for emotion at work. It's just business, nothing personal, as they say. But not addressing emotions just means that a conflict is not fully resolved. The seed of discontent will remain in the person who is wronged. And that will only lead to many more interpersonal problems in the future.

I strongly believe that we need to acquire the skills to express our emotions in a tactful and effective way. This has been addressed in chapter 5 of this book.

Before we start our journey...

My intention of writing this book is for you to create a strong executive presence by being the person everyone wants to work with. This cannot be achieved without having healthy relationships with people you work with. No doubt that there are many factors that make up a healthy relationship, at the same time, I strongly believe that meaningful communication is the foundation of all healthy relationships, be it at work or home.

A healthy relationship is not one that is devoid of miscommunications. It is one where miscommunications are quickly addressed before it turns into conflicts. Being able to express your thoughts, ideas and opinion in a tactful and diplomatic manner are key to this. Less conflict, less stress, a happier you! A happier you will connect with others more positively. And the positive cycle continues.

It is good to note here that there is no such thing as a natural born communicator. The only reason that person seems to have the 'gift of the gab' is because of consistent practice. Even if you are an introvert, you can learn to be a masterful communicator. I know this because I did it. So can you.

Key Points

- Research shows that being able to communicate powerfully is regarded more highly than technical expertise.
- Bad managers are the top reason why people reject a job offer or quit their jobs. You don't want to be the reason why your department is short of staff.
- Know the difference between effective and efficient communication. If you have to interact with another human being, be an effective communicator. Keep efficient communications to relaying technical instructions.
- Good communication takes place when a message sent equals the message received.
- A masterful communicator works towards sending out clear, concise and powerful messages, adjusting his style and medium to ensure his message gets across optimally.
- Conflicts arise not because of facts but because of differences in perceptions, intentions and values we assign to the facts.
- Having good communication skills can help reduce the chance of conflicts happening at the workplace. Less conflict means a happier you at the workplace.
- You can create a strong executive presence by having healthy relationships with people you work with. And meaningful communication is the foundation of all healthy relationships. Being able to express your thoughts, ideas and opinions in a tactful and diplomatic manner are key to this

CHAPTER 1: MINDSET THEN SKILLS SET

Have you been learning how to improve your communication? And then you wonder why you are still not getting any better at it or that putting the new skills into practice makes you feel like you are pretending to be someone you are not.

That is because there is more to communications than just a set of behavioral skills. The missing component is mindset. Just like anything worth achieving, mindset plays a huge role in the process. So is becoming a masterful communicator.

The Three Things Most People Don't Know About The Communications Process

1. Every individual experiences the same situations differently

Have you ever wondered why the other person did not understand your instructions or explanation despite you making it so simple? Over reacted or was indifferent to your comments? Is so against or for certain types of people?

It is easy to put labels on others, but in actuality there is some science behind it.

Some clever psychologist worked out that at any moment, our five senses are bombarded with two million bits of information.

As amazing as our brains are, it cannot handle that huge amount of information. It is limited to processing approximately 2,000 bits of information per second.

A lot of the information reaching our senses are thus filtered out by deletion, distortion and generalization. We experience it all the time. We are just not aware of it.

Here are some common proofs of the perceptual filtration process:

We experience deletion when we stop hearing the humming of the air conditioner in the room. We stop paying attention to the trees on the sidewalk. When we read through a newspaper, we take notice of some article and completely miss others.

We experience distortion when we misconstrue someone's actions as being something totally different from the actual intention. When we brainstorm for new ideas to solve problems.

We experience generalizations when we prescribe certain stereotypes on people. When we assume that if someone else has achieved a feat, so can we. In fact, all forms of prejudices are generalizations. Technically, it is called a cognitive bias, be it in the positive or negative.

After all that filtering, what our brain actually pays attention to is only 134 bits of the two million that comes at us. Do you realize how much less we perceive than what is actually happening around us?

So accept the fact that your reality is filtered. So is everyone else's. On top of this, your mind makes meaning of the information based on your past experiences, belief systems and mood.

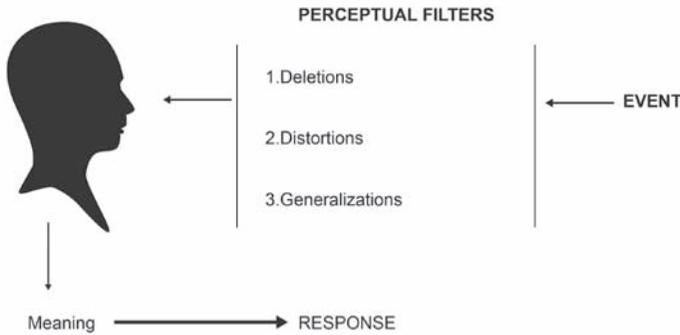
Mood makes meaning change

Imagine if you had just won a million dollars at the lottery. The next day you go back to the office feeling like you are on top of the world. Your boss says something nasty to you. How would you react?

You probably laugh it off with an "I quit" in his face.

Now imagine if you had lost your life savings on the stock market. The next day your boss praises you in front of the whole department. Your level of happiness would probably be muted and momentary at best before you go back to feeling miserable.

The meaning of the communication can drastically change because of your mood.



Perceptual filters affect our interpretations of events.

Past experiences and beliefs create expectations of future outcomes

A popular belief among executives is that male bosses are easier to work with than female bosses. We know that this is not always true, and it should be taken on a case-by-case basis.

But given the popularity of this belief, if you had a horrible female boss before, you could quickly conclude that the belief is true after all. And you will dread the idea of working for another female boss in the future. And if you are 'unlucky' enough to work for one, you will tend to distort and delete your experiences with her just to support your belief that she is not easy to work with. On the other hand, if you were to work with a horrible male boss, you would have just attributed it to bad luck.

In 2013, 59% Singaporean employees said that they have no preference on the gender of their bosses, but a significantly larger proportion indicated that they feel happier working for a male rather than a female boss. Only 7.5% preferred female bosses. Is this a case of a popular belief or past experience affecting preference? One can only wonder.

There have been cases where the new staff gets the wrath of an external vendor through no fault of his. It was all because the previous staff in that position had a bad relationship with the vendor.

Think about it, what are some beliefs and past experiences you have about individuals or groups of people that affect the way you communicate with them?

Being aware of this one kink alone could help you relate with others much better.

Most discussions around challenges and issues at the work base are made to look objective and fact based when in actual fact, the final decision made are usually based on the decision maker's past experiences and beliefs.

KEY POINT:

To become a masterful communicator, you need to be curious about their version of the story. The key word here is "curious".

To become a masterful communicator, you need to be curious about their version of the story. The key word here is "curious".

Having that mindset will set you wanting to know where they are coming from. What kind of experiences they had to make them react to situations the way they do. A lot of times, knowing this alone could make you a more understanding person.

2. Own your communication. Make it 100%

In an argument, it is common to hear,

"Why didn't you tell me so?"

"If you didn't understand what I was saying, why didn't you ask me?"

Such words are uttered because one party assumes that it is the other party's responsibility to make sure that the message has been understood well.

Let's take a look at how effective communication works:

1. Sender sends a message
2. Receiver hears/read and responds
3. Sender then clarifies
4. Receiver confirms

It implies that it is not a question of the Sender or Receiver taking responsibility. It is both.

So, be it a Sender or Receiver of communications, it is your 100% responsibility to ensure that the message sent is equal to message received.

This is where the previous point comes into play. You need to make sure that the way you communicate to the sender makes sense to him because your message is bound to be filtered before it forms meaning in the other person's mind. You have to ensure that the meaning formed is the meaning intended.

On the other hand, when you receive a message, it is your responsibility to seek clarification, even if you think that you got it. This is ever more important when the message is an instruction. How often have you given or taken instructions only to have been misinterpreted and the deliverables are so far off from the original intention?

More of this will be dealt with in the chapter on Active Listening.

If you adopt a 100% ownership attitude towards your communication, you will soon start to see miscommunications reducing in your life. I don't have to repeat what the value of this will be to your sense of well-being.

3. Communication is a lot like surfing

We have all seen the image of the surfer in a rip curl balancing on the board so adeptly that even as the waves changes forms he continues to glide through the chances. He knows that he has no control over the

Be it a Sender or Receiver of communications, it is your 100% responsibility to ensure that the message sent is equal to message received.

waves. He knows how to change his stance and adapts his balance to the changing waveforms.

There will be times when he would fall over, but he knows exactly what to do to get back on his board.

You don't expect to control how the other party communicates with you. All you can do is to have the right mindset and skill set to be able to maintain your balance and composure when communications become turbulent.

Being a masterful communicator is very much like that. You don't expect to control how the other party communicates with you. All you can do is to have the right mindset and skill set to be able to maintain your balance and composure when communications become turbulent. You adapt with different styles and circumstances.

The most important mindset you can have is to know that how you respond to an event will largely influence the outcome of the interaction.

If you are feeling miserable and wondering why you are taking on the work of your three colleagues, it could be because you didn't know how to say no to them. Maybe you believe that saying no to others' requests will mean that you are unkind and selfish.

Imagine if you are able to say no in a respectful and firm manner. The outcome would be vastly different. You probably will have more time to do your own work and produce better quality of it while you are at it.

This is one of the fundamental tenets of Neuro Linguist Programming (NLP), which is frequently encapsulated elegantly in an equation:

$$\text{Event} + \text{Response} = \text{Outcome}$$

$$E + R = O$$

Being a masterful communicator also means being human. At times, emotions will get better of you. You may react in an inappropriate manner or say the wrong things. But you know how to get your balance back. And that is more important.

There are individuals who insist that people should accept them as they are with a “love me, love my dog” attitude. I can’t say if this is a good or bad belief. But I can say that it is not a useful one. It only means that you will only get along well with people who communicate just like you. That would be in the minority indeed. The more flexible you are with your communication styles, the better you can build rapport with people. Why wouldn’t you want that?

3 Mottos of a Masterful Communicator

In summary, take on the three mottos of a masterful communicator:

1. What I perceive is not reality, it is only what I make out of it.
2. I must take 100% responsibility for my communications.
3. I always have a choice on how I want to respond to other people’s communications with me.

Key Points

- All information you receive through your sense goes through the three perceptual filters - deletions, distortions and generalizations. They influence the way you make meaning out of events happening to you.
- Everybody perceives the same reality differently.
- To communicate well with others, especially in sticky situations, it is best for you to have a mindset of curiosity. Try to understand where the other party is coming from and what the map of their world is.
- Take 100% responsibility for your communications. Be it as a Sender or Receiver of information.
- Accept the fact that you cannot control how the other party will react to your communications with them. But you can always control how you respond to theirs. Therefore, you have the power to influence the outcome of any interaction you have with anyone.
- Having the right mindset is the most important ingredient in becoming a masterful communicator.

You may pass on this book extract to anyone in its entirety. You are not allowed to change any part of this document.

To buy a copy of the book, please go to www.SpeakSmartMakeYourMark.com