

# COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP

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“Communications is the problem and the answer” is a line from a popular rock song. This phrase frames the notion very well. Communications is the basis to success or to failure. Show me a failed organization or relationship and you can trace the failure to communication. Equally, find a community or setting that is vibrant and growth-oriented, and you will discover a group that communicates well.

This potency so intrigued me that I chose to do my doctoral work in the area of communication effectiveness and the notion of “educational seduction”. Clearly, if we are going to promote change, shift the culture or make something new happen we must be able to effectively or even seductively communicate.

Communication is a process by which people send and receive messages in such a manner that a close approximation exists between the messages sent and the message received. Communication effectiveness is to manipulate or maneuver the process to enhance the potential for communication success. Communication seduction is to use methods or methodologies to lure the receiver into wanting to know or understand more about the message sent.

In the process of communication you have two entities, with unique spheres of experience coming together in some element of commonality. This implies that the communicator has 2 major frameworks to initiate the communication. The first is the known element of commonality. That is, if two people find themselves in a class together, the first known element is that both individuals have chosen to take the class. The features of this known element are the class name, reputation, instructor and topic matter. All of these things offer initial fodder for communication.

The second framework is that of assumptions the people may make of each other. That is, each person has a sphere of experience that is a compilation of all the things that have happened to them; the family history, education, life experiences and the like. These aspects are not fully known, but assumptions can be made. This is done with direct observation and opportunities to check the accuracy of assumptions through initial communication.

By using both of these frameworks, the known commonality and the assumptions of the individuals experiences, the communicator will code a message that they hope will most effectively be understood and decoded. At this point of the process, the coding, the message gets constructed with words, gestures and

affect and then delivered. The actual decision about which words to use, the specific gestures to apply, and affect to incorporate are made based on the two frameworks. As the message gets sent it is hoped that it will be decoded, understood and then a relay message that builds on the first message will occur.

Now all of this sounds sterile as we discuss it in this context, but the process happens so quickly that we often do not think through all the ways we might be able to enhance or seductively construct the message. Consequently, the process of communication falls prey to so many distractions and distortions that the net-result is that most communication is not effective. In fact, in many situations, it is amazing that things get communicated at all.

Using the two frameworks in a thoughtful way will begin to enhance the communication, but research has shown that adding the dimension of expressive affect will ratchet up the effectiveness to a seductive level. Since the early 1970's researchers have manipulated a number of variables to find ways to enhance the communication process. Most of this research was kicked off by a social scientist by the name of John Ware. His work was spurred by a study he conducted in 1975 and was published in both academic as well as popular journals as the "Dr. Fox Effect."

Fascinated by the notion of communication effectiveness, Ware conducted a study at the University of Illinois where he hired an actor, wrote a non-sense script, invented a bogus Dr. Fox, complete with an impressive bio and then invited local social workers, counselors, teachers and psychologists to a contrived lecture. He prepped Dr. Fox and did a couple rehearsals where Fox practiced an expressive approach to the script and then carried out the study. Close to 100 professionals came to the free lecture sponsored by the University of Illinois. Dr. Fox spoke on the topic of "mathematical game theory and behavior" for an hour, answered question and then left the stage to arousing applause. John Ware then did a simple exit evaluation of the lecture with basic questions about Dr. Fox. He asked if the audience had heard of him, read his books and found his theories useful.

As you might imagine, the majority of the members of the audience loved Dr. Fox. Some of them had heard of him, a few had read his books and the majority said that they thought his theories were useful! All of this attention and the lecture was non-sense! This so amazed John Ware that he coined the term "Dr. Fox Effect" and began the exploration of a body of knowledge now known as "educational seduction".

For people interested in change, the concept of educational seduction is useful. Cultural shifting is about influence and action. Ware discovered what many generations had known, some people could so influence others with bogus information as to get those same people to do positive or negative things. Hitler,

Manson, Jimmy Jones among others had a seductive ability to influence followers to do cruel and harmful things.

My interest in this concept was just the opposite. If Ware proved and history acknowledged that some people could seduce others to do wrong or negative things, there were possibilities that the same impact could happen with positive and constructive elements. This, obviously, is not earth-shattering information. Indeed, we know there have been many people who have used the gift of communication seduction to promote positive and valuable things.

Further, I was intrigued about how seductive communication could be used by change agents or gatekeepers to promote new people, ideas or products within the context of the community. Given the goals of the change agent, or the natural influence of the gatekeeper, if this energy could be coupled with educational seduction theory, amazing things could happen.

To test this positive approach, I conducted a similar experiment as Ware, but instead of non-sense content, I inserted viable and useful information. To further test the difference between styles, I manipulated two distinct communication approaches, but kept the content positive and viable. I hired an actor and had him learn the content for a college class lecture. He delivered the lecture to 2 similar classes, but in 2 distinct styles – direct and expressive. The direct style was focused, but very business-like. The actor stayed mostly at the podium and used a serious and direct affect. The expressive style had the actor moving much more and inserting vocal inflection and gestures. My study continued to verify what Ware had initiated. Expressive communication style had greater impact on the audiences I researched.

So in the notion of change and communication effectiveness becomes an important and useful concept. The more we can engage the audience we are attempting to influence, the easier the cultural shift.

Thus leadership, be it from the change agent or gatekeeper, is a process that must be analyzed and understood. Given the pace and energy of our world today any advantage for the leader is critical. If we are to lead change and become more effective gatekeepers the component parts of leadership explored in this chapter become essential.

**“The significant problems we face today cannot be solved at the same level we were at when we created them”**

**Albert Einstein**