

Let me ask you something. What was the difference? Think about the best leader you've ever been around. Someone that made you feel valued and valuable. Made you feel like you understood exactly what you were supposed to do and why it mattered. Someone who could inspire, encourage, and get the best out of the people they led. I bet that leader was also an excellent communicator.

Now, think about the worst leader you've ever been around. Lack of a clear vision, vague emails, little ability to rally people towards movement. Long meetings that went nowhere, confusing expectations that led to even more confusing outcomes, never knowing if you're actually winning or not.

Okay. What was the difference? It wasn't intelligence. It wasn't pedigree. It wasn't even personality. It was communication. So then, what is communication? More specifically, what is effective communication? And why is it so important? What's the difference between simply talking and just transferring information and doing it in a meaningful, memorable way that actually enacts long-term positive change?

That's a good question. You see, leaders communicate in a way that affects long-term positive change. And they don't just communicate; they connect. They connect them to their audience. Connect their audience to the message. Connect the listener to a next step. And ultimately, they communicate to affect a positive change in and through those they lead.

See, there's a monumental difference between talking at people and truly connecting with them. And the leaders who understand that difference, they communicate just differently. And let's just say their communication makes a difference.

As a leader, we are responsible for great communication. That's part of what leaders do. They build teams that actually function. They cast vision that people actually want to follow. They champion next steps that people actually want to take. So, here's the big idea I want to carry throughout everything we're about to cover. Effective leaders communicate with intention, clarity, and connection.

Let's dig in. Intention. Great communication starts before you communicate. Setting the foundation. Here's a mistake a lot of leaders make. They walk into a meeting, they walk into a conversation, they walk into a presentation, and they just start talking without ever asking themselves the most important question in communication. What do I want my audience to think or do differently afterwards? What do I want my audience like audience, don't just think big platform; it could be two, it could be 2,000. What do I want my audience to think or do differently after they hear this?

That's not a small question. That's a big question. That's the whole game. Because if you can't answer that question before you speak, you're not leading a conversation. You're just making

noise. Remember Charlie Brown's teacher? "Wah, wah, wah, wah, wah." And the people on the other side of that conversation, they're going to feel it. They may not be able to name exactly what's wrong or what's missing, but they're going to walk away feeling like something just didn't land.

John Maxwell, in his book *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect*, says most people approach communication with themselves in mind: what they want to say, what they need to cover, how they feel like they want to talk about things. But the most effective communicators, they flip the script entirely. They begin with the audience in mind.

So then ask yourself before any type of communication, verbal, written, otherwise, who am I talking to? What's their background? What do they know? Why do they care? And what would make this immediately relevant to their world? What positive change do I desire to enact? That's what great communicators do. They do the work before the words come out. They study their audience. They simplify and clarify their message. Because if it's a mist to you, it's a fog to them.

You see, great communicators know their big idea. It's the one thing they want people to walk away with, and they build everything else around that. They say it over and over and over and over again. So before your next important conversation, your next team meeting, your next presentation, ask yourself, "What's my big idea? What's my one thing? But what's the mist I need to clear up so it doesn't become a fog to everyone else? Because great communication starts with intention.

Next is clarity. Great communication uses the right words in the right way. Clarity, tone, the power of language. Once you know what you want to say, then you can begin to talk about how you say it. There's a communication model that I think is the clearest framework for any leader to help create clarity. It's three words. Information, inspiration, action. Information that is spoken with inspiration that leads to action. Most leaders are great at information. They can tell you all the facts, all the data, all the details. But information alone doesn't move people. You can have the best idea in the room and still lose the room if all you do is deliver the facts. Information is important, but it is not enough to lead to action.

Imagine you're going on a road trip. You got your GPS, you got your snacks, you got your playlist, but when you pull out the map, all that shows you is a list of turn-by-turn directions. No destination, no context, no idea of where you're going. Left, right, slight left, exit, ahead, left, right, right, left, another left, followed by a whole bunch more directions.

Now listen, you'd follow it technically, but you wouldn't be inspired by it, and you're probably not excited by it. And you certainly wouldn't begin with that road trip with this end in mind. Like, what's it going to be like? Now, imagine someone sits down with you and says, "We're driving to the most beautiful coastline you've ever seen. We're staying at a cliffside, newly built,

modern, short-term rental with floor-to-ceiling windows, an infinity pool, and 24-hour concierge service. It's going to take about six hours. Every mile is going to be worth it. Suddenly, those directions aren't just directions. They're steps toward an exceptional trip that will end in million-dollar coastline views. Okay, I'm in for that. That's the difference between information and inspiration.

And it's important to remember that the nonverbal portion of your communication is very important. More than half of what people hear and perceive comes from what you see. Your body language, your posture, your facial expressions, your presence. All of that is nonverbal communication. That means you can have the perfect words and completely undermine your own message with how you look while you say them. Fair or unfair perception, meaning the audience's perception, is reality. So, think about a time that someone told you, "I'm fine," and everything about the way they said it communicated the exact opposite. Their words were fine. Nothing else was.

See, leaders face this problem all the time. How they say it speaks significantly louder than what they say. So what does this mean practically? It means your tone has to match your message, or your inspiration will fall flat. If you're casting a vision that should excite people, you better sound and look excited. If you're having a difficult conversation that requires humility, your posture needs to communicate openness, not defensiveness. Like, like literally no crossed arms, no scowl. Your actions and your words must be consistent because when they're not, and this is important, people will always trust what they see over what they hear.

One more thing about language. The best communicators speak in a way that connects, not in a way that impresses. Scripture says, "Where there are many words, transgressions are unavoidable." Meaning, don't use too many or overly complicated words. Use stories. Use simple language. Meet people where they are and then lead them to where you want them to go.

Shortly after taking office, Franklin Roosevelt got on the radio, and he held what he called a fireside chat. In that, he simply said, "I want to talk for a few minutes with the people of the United States about banking." Sounds pretty clear to me. The most effective communicators in history, they didn't win people over with jargon or complexity. They used vivid, simple language that painted a picture in the listener's mind. Language that made people feel, not just understand something. Language that inspired towards action.

So the next time you're speaking to your team or even your family, ask yourself, *Am I speaking their language or am I making them speak mine? Am I bringing clarity or confusion? Is my message crisp or cloudy?* And maybe the most important question: *Is my message inspiring the listener towards positive change?* Information with inspiration leading to action. So then, effective communicators communicate with intention, clarity, and finally connection.

Connection. Great communication builds connection. Moving from information to relationship. You see, we've talked about preparation. We've talked about clarity and inspiration. But there's a third dimension to great communication that ties it all together. And it's the one that's the hardest to fake. Connection. Here's how we define it. Connection is the ability to identify with people in a way that increases your influence.

Notice what that definition doesn't say. It doesn't say you have to be the most charismatic person in the room. It doesn't say you have to have the best stories or the sharpest wit. Connection is about, isn't about just personality. It's about focus. What are you focused on when you're communicating? Are you focused on yourself, or are you focused on the person that is in front of you? Listen, we've all felt the difference.

There are people that talk to you that make you feel like you're the most important person in the room. They are locked in. They are engaging. They are asking good questions. They are listening. They're like actually listening, not just thinking about the next thing they're going to say, not just waiting for their turn to talk. And you leave those conversations feeling seen and valued and energized and even more committed to them and the mission.

And then, and then, there are people that make you feel like you are simply a means to an end. They're going through the motions. They're distracted. They've already decided what they're going to say before you finish your sentence. So, which of those do you follow more willingly?

You see, Brené Brown is one of the most watched TED Talk speakers of all time. But here's what's interesting. Her communication style isn't flashy. She doesn't use elaborate slides or complex data. What she does is she disarms her audience almost immediately by leading with her own vulnerability. Vulnerability is one of the surest ways to connect with your audience. People may be impressed with your accomplishments, but they're going to connect with your vulnerability.

And she's a speaker that people don't just listen to; they trust and deeply connect to. And much of her audience carries their, her ideas as their own. Much of her audience respects her and carries everything she says as their own ideas. And that's the power of leading with connection. Brené Brown has said that connection is why we're here. It's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives. And leaders who believe that, who really believe that, they end up communicating most effectively.

See, connecting well requires a few intentional skills. First, find common ground. Before you dive into details or become all business, find something you have in common. What commonality do you share with your listener? See, a shared experience, or a shared challenge, or a shared hope. It doesn't take long, but it changes everything.

Also, in, in most conversation or in smaller communication settings, remember to listen way more than you talk. Use the 70/30 rule. It's an excellent way when leading a discussion. You don't talk more than 30% of the time, and the room gets the other 70. Now, let your good questions steer the convo. The most trusted voices in any room are usually the ones that have asked the most thoughtful questions because thoughtful questions build connection.

And don't forget, remember you're supposed to capture interest early. You have a very short window at the beginning of any conversation to earn someone's attention. So use that window well with a story, with a question, with a bold statement, with a, with a moment of genuine connection. At the very beginning of any talk, it's a great time for a hook, a question, an interesting fact, some kind of connection point that piques interest and grabs the attention of the audience.

See, connection doesn't just build relationships. It builds something bigger than all of us. It builds healthy culture. And that kind of culture doesn't just happen because someone put values on a wall or on a poster. It happens because a leader decided to communicate with heart-to-heart connection, one conversation at a time.

So, in conclusion, the leader who communicates well leads well. Can I just encourage you? No matter how you feel, if you are a leader, then you are a communicator. And good news, you can grow in great communication. Great communication isn't a gift that some people are born with, and others aren't. It's a discipline. It's practice. It's a series of intentional choices that any leader, any person can develop over time. And the leader who communicates well leads well.

Remember, communication starts before you open your mouth with clarity about your big idea and your audience in mind. It comes alive through the right words, and the right tone, and the right presence, moving people from information to inspiration to action. And it becomes truly powerful when it's rooted in connection. When the people around you feel genuinely seen and valued.

So here's my encouragement. This is what I want to leave you with. You can practice this. You can, you can actually get better at this. So, think about maybe one of the most important communication opportunities you have in the next week or so, a meeting or a conversation or presentation, just something where, where it really matters. And then ask yourself, *What's my one big idea? What do I want people to think or do differently when this is all over? Am I speaking to my audience or at them? Am I leading with information or am I leading with connection?*

You see, everyone communicates, but very few connect. And everyone communicates, but very few communicate in a way that actually inspires change. So, what if we do it differently? Let's communicate wholeheartedly with intention, with clarity, and with connection.