



## What We Have Here... Is A Failure To Communicate!

Communicating is a large part of what managers and project managers do all day. And unfortunately, all that is collected in just the one word – communication. We say the word, roll our eyes and throw up our arms to show the sheer hopelessness of it. But the good news is, like anything else we do, if we break it down, it's much easier to tackle. I've decided that life is too short to become a communications PhD, if I simply want to use communication as a tool to support my main function.

Communication classes teach the old reliable "Who, What, When, Where, Why and How" as the essentials. As a business person, I know that there is much more to the art of communication, so I rely on my analysis skills to

break it down a bit further. I believe the three most important communication tasks are: 1. "Know thy audience" – know my audience's stake in the communication. 2. "Know thyself" – understand my own motivation in communicating (What do I want?) and 3. "Select thy vehicle" – select the best communication method (or methods) to dispatch the message.

**1) "KNOW THY AUDIENCE"** seems obvious, but understanding your audience's stake in the communication is golden. Do they have authority over some element of the topic? Or think they do? How deeply might they be impacted? Might there be a benefit in it for them? Or a cost? Is this good news, bad news or no news to them? And if

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you do not fully understand their stake yet, what an opportunity – ask! People love to be asked.

**2) “KNOW THYSELF”** is about getting totally clear on why I am communicating before I do. There are a myriad of reasons for which I may be communicating. Am I simply giving a heads-up? (Do I need to report that something has not gone according to mutual expectations?) Am I following up on a previous commitment to provide an answer? Am I adjusting expectations about when I will be able to provide an answer? Am I road-testing an idea to get initial reaction? Am I reporting status or data as a routine obligation? Am I reporting an important milestone has been reached? Am I conveying that we are starting a new piece of work? Is there new policy or a recent decision that affects my audience? Do I want a decision from the person with whom I am communicating? Or, maybe I’m just reaching out to nurture the relationship? (Never a bad idea.)

**3) “SELECT THY VEHICLE”** is wading through all of the communication methods we have today to find the best medium for this person or group, and this subject or news. It boggles my mind when I consider that a mere 50 years ago (yes, I remember) a typical manager might turn around 6–10 letters per day with the help and common sense of a wonderful secretary. Compare that to the overwhelming volume of today’s emails, phone calls, visits, message boards, blogs, faxes, online stuff, and all those

cute new gadgets that mix and match them for us. We are turning around at least 60-100 communications a day now. This amounts to about ten times as many, with only one-tenth as much time to consider and craft them as we used to take. No wonder the greatest fault of communication is the illusion that it has been achieved!

So, knowing all of this, slow down and select the vehicle you know will best suit your audience. You might want to send the same message using multiple vehicles...and you might be more effective doing so, especially with a mixed audience.

Please note: If you are looking for a decision, be sure to provide the decision maker with a full set of issue analysis information. Use the old “Who, What, When, Where, How and Why?” and pre-answer all conceivable questions in your analysis communication. If you do this, you are much more likely to get a high quality, timely decision that you can live with.

Communication isn’t just a necessary evil, it’s the only thing that gives us hope for success. So I’ll be perfectly clear about one last important thing...I want to thank you for reading my ideas, and I wish you a lovely, joyous holiday season! 🐺

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