



the.  
point Leadership  
Newsletter

## When the Leader Speakers

When great leaders speak, things happen! People become engaged. Teams gel. Customers are served. Problems are solved and products are invented. Such is the power of a leader's communication. So important is communication that it is difficult to find a leadership text that does not devote a significant portion of its pages to the topic. Unfortunately, most such works present communication as another important leadership competency with project management and strategic thinking. Communication is not a leadership competency; it is your leadership. Leadership and communication are synonymous; virtually all of one's leadership is manifested through communication. As James C. Humes wrote: "Every time you speak, you are auditioning for leadership."

We should hold leaders to a much higher standard of communication than others. Most others are measured primarily on their ability to convey information efficiently and accurately. Leaders need to do more than simply inform; they need to communicate in ways that get people (as John M. Kane once said) thinking and acting together. They need to create not just understanding, but action. In fact, leaders should be judged not by their performances as communicators, but rather by the performance of those they seek to lead. Think about your own leadership. Are the people on your team or organization more inspired, productive, and innovative because of what you communicate? Are you simply an efficient transmitter of information, or are others changing the way they think and act because of the words you choose to use?

Fortunately, great communication is an observable and learnable set of practices within the reach of all leaders. Leaders at all organizational levels can significantly increase their communication effectiveness by adopting the three universal, powerful practices that have been employed by great leaders in organizations of all kinds. These men and women connect with their constituents on a Personal level, construct an enticing image of the Future, and create a compelling Story in which everyone has a starring role.

## Personal

All communication is personal. For the leader, there is no such thing as communication that is strictly business. Unless the listeners decide to allow the leader's words to touch them personally, their words simply become a part of the organizational noise that is omnipresent today. Picture your listeners with a remote control in their hands. They can shut you off at any point when you no longer can keep the personal connection open. Great leaders communicate with us. Whether they are speaking to one person or a thousand, they can connect with each as individuals. They recognize that others are listening through lenses shaped by their interests and values, and they make it their job to illuminate these elements in their communication. They share their own driving passions and most exciting aspirations. They make others feel valued and uniquely important.

## Future

Great leaders invite others to join them in pursuit of a tomorrow that is better than today. Confidence and optimism are apparent in all their communication. Their positive, enthusiastic view of the future is obvious in everything they say whether it is ordering office supplies or presenting corporate strategy. They are, however, not simply arm-waving cheerleaders. They view their role as advancing the organization along the continuum of time. They see the organization's future as an extension of its history and current situation. In their communication, they honor the heroes and victories of the past, give voice to the realities of the present (both harsh and positive), and reveal and invite others to join them on the path forward.

## Story

Leaders craft big stories for their teams and organizations not just to be entertaining or engaging. They do so because this is the only way humans can think and relate to each other. As Isak Dinesen wrote: "To be a person is to have a story to tell." We see the world (and our jobs) through stories. It is through stories that we can connect to an organization's mission and plans. Great leaders make these plans come alive through rich, engaging stories that capture our attention. Most importantly, they help others connect their personal stories with the organization's story and enhance both in the process. And when they help us see our starring role in the stories, they elicit our very best efforts.

Great leadership communication is less about the efficient transmission of information and much more about the impact it has on others. The challenging question for all who seek to lead is this: "Are the members of my team or organization more aligned, more committed, and more engaged because of what I say and write?"

Fortunately, great leadership communication is not the exclusive domain of a gifted, charismatic few. It is within the reach of all who care enough about others to connect with them, share their most hopeful view of the future, and craft a grand story that provides a special sense of meaning and purpose.