

9 Cs for Communicating More Persuasively

As much as possible, provide a continuous communication thread.

By [Robert Pater](#) Apr 01, 2011

In this time-squeezed world, there are many ways to leverage communications. For example, you can reach many people at once through group contact, whether in person in meetings or conferences, or en masse via web video or email or other broadcast messaging.

But advanced leaders understand it's not enough to just disseminate data. That they have to go beyond a "just the facts" approach; solely transmitting information misses the strategic opportunity to further gel the organization towards higher objectives and opportunities. They know that even when "informing," their more critical mission also maybe to simultaneously persuade, widen receptivity, or invite others to consider and then embrace new ideas, tools, methods, and processes.

To accomplish these objectives, consider applying the 9 "Cs" of Communication:

1. Clear/Concise/Crisp. Reduce jargon to make it more likely others understand; use "everyday" talk without talking down. As Albert Einstein contended, if you really understand something, you should be able to explain it in simple language to anyone.

In general, briefer is better, requires less attention to absorb, easier to understand -- as long as needed information is there.

2. Complete. Explain what's expected of others, what you will do, who else is involved and what their role is, timelines for accomplishing tasks, and how you and others will know how an intervention is proceeding along the way (leading indicators).

3. Codirectional. Some communicate as if using an old-style walky-talky where the speaker's finger perpetually presses the Talk button: They only send and never receive. In contrast, the most persuasive communications build in vehicles and time for the "receiving" group to ask questions, express concerns, and to surface and release fears. Granted, this is easiest to do in a live setting, but when not, you can provide contact information for others to readily circle back to you later. And remember, you can head off a significant percent of awkward and tense confrontations by setting clear expectations in advance.

For example, Anil Mathur, CEO of Alaska Tanker Company, which in December 2010 marked nine years without a lost-time injury, contends their most important leading indicator of performance is "the quality of our Safety communications." Specifically, two-way or grassroots-up is better, top-down less so.

4. Customized. Not Canned. Effective communications specifically cite receivers' tasks, working conditions, culture, and concerns. The sender might also mention shared interests (e.g., local sports team's performance, highly visible current events).

Highest-level communications assume that others have a range of learning and communication styles that are likely to be different from the sender's. For example, rather than just tell others about a new tool (which works best for auditory assimilators), show it to them (visual assimilators) *and* find ways for them to try it soon themselves (for tactile assimilators).

Similarly, a direct tone of voice ("This is what I want you to do") most effectively reaches Literal communicators. This could be alternated with an implicit voice ("What might work best could be . . ."), which will be better received by those with an Inferential communication style.

5. Circular/Checked, where a sender sincerely and actively seeks out feedback about how her communication was received. Remember that it matters less what you wanted or thought you were saying; what really counts is what listeners heard. Building in circular communications is especially important when morale is uneven, with a cross-cultural workforce, or when senders are working in a country not native to them.

6. Cumulative/Consistent. People will better understand messages that are in accord with previous communications and that follow a previous theme, rather than those that seem to suddenly spring out of left field. Even if you wish to wholesale replace procedures or let people know of significant upcoming changes, first tie this to an overall mission. ("I want to reaffirm your Safety is critical to this business. As you know, we're also challenged with difficult times. In line with this, we've been exploring instituting the following changes.") As much as possible, provide a continuous communication thread.

7. Considerate/Concerned/Contact-full. Communicate respect for others' work and concerns. Clearly show you have some idea of the challenges, concerns, obstacles with which they work and live. Be careful not to come across as clueless, blasé, or superficial.

8. Celebratory. Let receivers know you appreciate their previous efforts. Thank them for their contribution to whatever degree of success you've had to this point. Too many communicators miss the mark here, focusing only on what's wrong, what has to change, where others are falling short. Don't talk only about the half-empty part. Even in Safety investigations that examine an injury, look for ways to discuss the positive actions taken that prevented an even worse outcome.

And be sure not to only communicate when things are going badly, lest you're seen as a harbinger of doom; then receivers will turn off or get defensive before you even open your mouth (or keyboard).

9. Committed to setting and reaching high expectations. That ongoing organizational and individual improvement is not only desirable but also reachable for everyone, even if this means making small steps forward. That you have a bias towards action and change, not just to "sharing" information. That highest-level Safety goes beyond just compliance, above just preventing injuries. Best communicators reveal they challenge themselves first, rather than just expecting everyone else to change.

Highest-level leaders aim to achieve Cs in Persuasion and Communication; in fact, nine of them.

About the Author

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