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Effective Communication

It's Not About You

Communication takes place in the mind of the other person, not in yours.

Think about this: Effective communication happens in the mind of the person who receives your message, not in your mind. Here's how it works:

You get an idea you want to tell your colleague. She listens as you speak; her mind drinks in your meaning. In a flash, in the theatre of her mind, the words you say trigger a projection of images, sounds, and feelings. It's as if she has a screen in the front of her head. From her memory of past experiences comes a cavalcade of sensory images.

You know you did not mystically transmit your thoughts into her mind, right? The message came from inside her mind, from her memory. All you did was induce it. That's communication.

In this chapter, you'll explore what communication really is, and how it works, and most important, you'll learn what you can do to be more effective.

What kind of communication do you need?

As you navigate through your world each day, without even thinking, you switch between two types of communication. One is simple; the other is more complex. Both are important. Each requires vastly different techniques to be effective. They are

1. *Checklist Communication*
2. *Convincing Communication*

(See **Table 1.1—*Checklist Communication and Convincing Communication***.)

Checklist Communication—best done quickly

When you just need to drop off some information, or tell people something they need to know, you're doing *Checklist Communication*. You don't need to speak directly with the person. All you need is voicemail or e-mail to send this kind of message.

Here's a sign you're doing *Checklist Communication*—You call someone and expect to get their voicemail, but instead the person answers the phone. You're slightly surprised and mildly disappointed, because you don't need to speak with them; you'd rather do voicemail. As the comic Bill Engvall says, "Here's your sign." You're engaging in *Checklist Communication*. You probably did not spend any time planning or mentally rehearsing your call; you picked up your phone and called. What you said came off the top of your head. You probably experienced no anticipation and little to no anxiety. That's *Checklist Communication*.

Convincing Communication—requires more preparation

When you have to engage in *Convincing Communication*, you want to see your listeners face-to-face, or at least speak directly with them. If you phone them and get voicemail, you probably leave a "call me back" message. You might want to warm them up and take their temperature before making your pitch. You'll want to sense their

mood and try to gauge their reaction to what you're going to propose or request. You spend time thinking, preparing, and strategizing about the call before you make it. You can expect to have some anticipation, and perhaps anxiety, before you make that call. You're doing *Convincing Communication*.

Table 1.1 *Checklist Communication and Convincing Communication*

Communication Type	
<p><i>Checklist Communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple message • Checklist of items to share • Short time to deliver • Concrete message • Listener understands • You have credibility or authority • Clear channel 	<p><i>Convincing Communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich meaning • Abstract/vague • Listener not trained/experienced • Listener not engaged • Listener cynical • You don't have high credibility • Cluttered, noisy channel

Example: Checklist Communication

Picture this—You pick up the phone to leave a message for your coworker. At the beep you say, “Hi Tina, just calling to let you know that the Beta Development Team meeting has been moved to next Tuesday, same time, in conference room E-23.” That’s it; you’re done. It’s simple, direct communication. You’re confident your meaning will be understood.

You’ve just done some *Checklist Communication*. Look at **Table 1.1—Checklist Communication and Convincing Communication**. Your message is important, but it is **simple**; your listener is **knowledgeable**—she knows about the meeting and where conference room E-23 is. The **listener knows you and believes you**, you had **sufficient time to compose** (reflect, incubate, and edit) your message, and you did **not need face-to-face communication**. The **message is simple and easy to deliver**, and the **chance that you’d be misunderstood is small**.

Example: Convincing Communication

Here’s your situation—It’s Friday afternoon and you’ve been out of town at corporate headquarters since Monday. You’re ready to fly the

friendly skies home. You check voicemail and get a message from your vice-president. She asks you to stay over the weekend. She wants you to attend a meeting early Monday morning with her and a project team. You consider this a hassle, but at the same time you realize it's a great opportunity. You're excited at the prospect of joining this team and flattered the VP wants you to be there. It's a good sign for your career.

Here's your message—You want to convey your eagerness to work with the team and appreciation of the recognition it implies. You also want to send a subtle “you owe me” message to your VP for extending your trip. You want to “push back” because you need her to approve reimbursement for the rather lavish meal you're planning to have Saturday night; and you'll need to buy a new shirt for Monday's meeting; all the shirts you brought need laundering.

Using **Table 1.1—Checklist Communication and Convincing Communication**, let's look at this message and see why it's *Convincing Communication*.

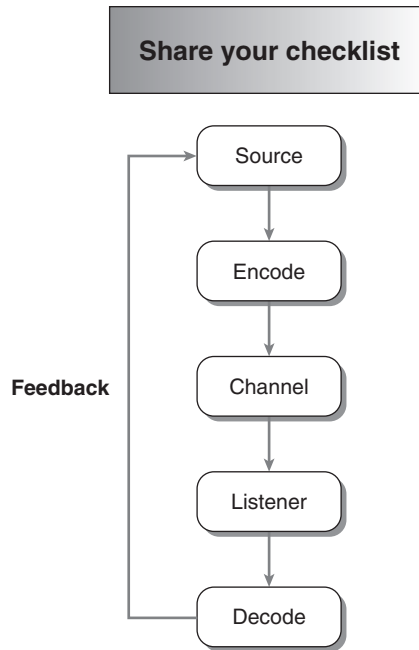
The **message is complex**. You're not just saying “yes”; you want to build some obligation. **You don't have a peer relationship** with the vice-president, the **communication is one-way**, and you have to respond promptly—you only **have 30 seconds of voicemail time**.

Convincing Communication will be the center of attention in this book.

Dominant and subordinate roles

When you send a message in *Checklist Communication*, you're the *source*. (See **Figure 1.1—Features of Checklist Communication**.) You are in charge and responsible for the communication. It's important that you say it right, that you have your facts in order. Your listener (*receiver*) plays a more passive role. The listener is like the catcher in baseball. You're the pitcher. The listener has to catch what you throw. While the listener can provide feedback during voice-to-voice communication (non-e-mail/voicemail message), the feedback is usually limited to asking a clarifying question. The listener's communication is restricted to asking more about your message.

Sure, your listener's response may cause you to modify your message so he or she “gets it right.” What the listener says will not influence or change your point of view. Feedback is largely unnecessary—that's why you use so much voicemail and e-mail in *Checklist Communication*.

Figure 1.1 Features of *Checklist Communication*

Convincing Communication

When you do *Convincing Communication*, you are working with a collection of more complex and thorny variables: mood, emotion, and meaning.

You also have more multifarious goals: You want to shape someone's opinion, you may need support, or if you're a subordinate, you may need permission. When you tell your colleague, Barney, the meeting will be at 4 p.m. on Thursday, Barney will believe you. He probably won't use his mood to color and plumb greater meaning from your *Checklist Communication*. He will not try to wring meaning from your straightforward, bare-bones message. However, if this is the fourth time you've had to move the meeting, you may well expect Barney to cop an attitude. His mood may become a factor. Your relationship with Barney, how flexible and patient he is, and how much the meeting means to him are at risk. The meaning of a 4 p.m. meeting on Thursday can become complex. He may need some gentle persuasion. Now, you're engaged in *Convincing Communication*.

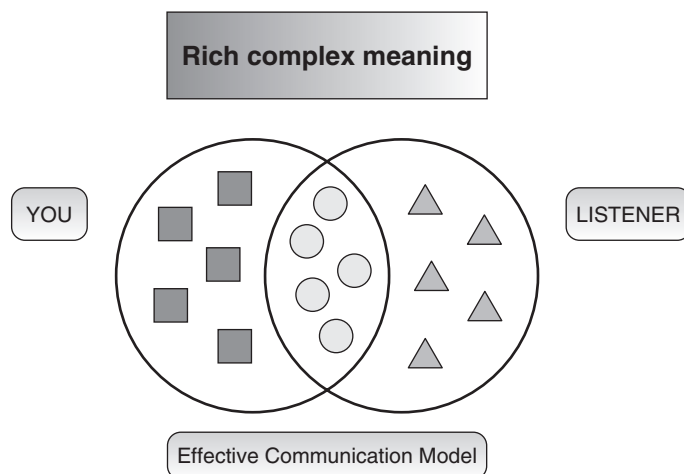
Look at **Figure 1.2—*Convincing Communication—Rich and Complex***. The two circles represent your and your listener's frames

of reference—the sum total of your life experience. For example, where did you grow up, in a big city or in a small farming town? Was your family big, with lots of brothers and sisters, or were you an only child? Did your family speak more than one language at home? Were there lots of hugs? Did you travel outside the United States? Were you good at sports, or was reading more your thing? You get the idea. The objects inside the circles (the squares, circles, and triangles) represent the symbols and memories of your life.

For example, imagine the meaning of your message: “the meeting has been moved” is a square for you, and for Barney, it’s a triangle. You have three choices in your communication strategy:

1. **Accept conflict**—stick to your square (not a good idea).
2. **Accept Barney’s point of view** that the meeting has been moved too many times, and it’s a real hassle for him—move your point of view, accepting his triangle. If you select this strategy, you won’t get *Felt Sense* (see *Felt Sense: your body knows* below), but Barney will.
3. **Move your and Barney’s point of view to a circle**: Convince Barney that moving the meeting is your boss’s idea (authority), and that it’s better for everyone attending (group consensus). You’ll both get some *Felt Sense*.

Figure 1.2 *Convincing Communication—Rich and Complex*



Nothing in common

When you were young, did you play hockey? Go cross-country skiing or ice-skate outdoors? I never have. I was reared in Florida. If we want to share our childhood experiences, we will have to find similar symbols that we both have experienced.

I've been in hundreds of television and radio commercials; I love to sail, skin dive, and scuba dive. Have you ever pulled a lobster from under a reef? Have you ever reefed your mainsail, so you could sail in and out of a line-squall storm? I've never ice fished. I've never met your spouse or your parents. I've never visited your high school. Communication is a challenge when you want to share your experience with someone else.

More on the *Convincing Communication* diagram (Figure 1.2)

The circles in the *Convincing Communication* diagram represent everything you and I have experienced in our individual lives.

In the diagram, you'll see some things you have experienced, and I haven't, represented by the triangles. Each triangle is a symbol/meaning that has a unique meaning to you, because you have experienced it (and I have not). At the intersection, the little circles are the symbols/meanings that we share in common. The squares in my area are the symbols that have meaning only to me, because you have not experienced them.

If I wish to communicate with you—I mean really engage you, your brain, your feelings, and give you strong understanding and *Felt Sense*—then I will be wise to pick symbols from your frame of reference (triangles), or from our commonly shared frame of reference (circles). If I select symbols from my frame of reference (squares), I am making you work too hard to receive my message. I am also creating a real barrier between us. Try as we might, and as motivated as we both are in trying to communicate—you just have not been there and can't understand. At best, I can try to build bridges to communication by selecting symbols/experiences derived from your frame of reference.

Simultaneous feedback

When you are engaged in *Convincing Communication*, you feel the need to see and speak directly with your listener. You want to read

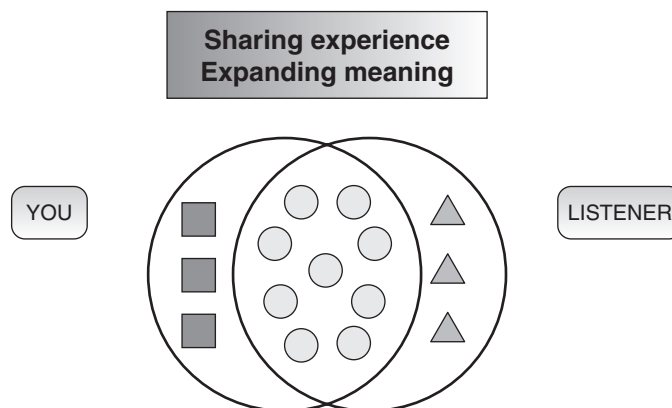
his mood, his state of mind, as you communicate with him. You can see the shifts in his body tension and energy; you watch his eyes and body posture, you see him flex his hands. All this rich information tells you how your listener's mood and emotions are being shaped, or not shaped, by your communication, and how well you are changing the meaning between you and your listener . . . how well you are moving toward the center position of green circles and expanding that space (see **Figure 1.3—Sharing Experience—Expanding Meaning**).

How the message you send gets meaning

What is your prior experience? Are you afraid of dogs? Do you love math? Is Chris Isaak one of your favorite singers? Think that French is a romantic language? Feel more comfortable with shorter men? All your complex (and not so complex) attitudes, beliefs, and orientations about the world have come through your experience. People's reactions to the symbols you communicate come from their prior experience with that symbol, and the thing(s) it represents.

In **Chapter 3—The Power and Limitations of Speaking**, you'll see how symbols became meaningful to you through your life experience. You'll also see how society defines symbols through its common agreement between people (consensus), from the environmental/social context in which the symbol operates, and from the object/concept it represents.

Figure 1.3 Sharing Experience—Expanding Meaning



Leadership: communicating your vision

The challenge of communication is to relate experience and vision from your past. When you communicate, you relate what you see, hear, and feel as you look back into your memory. Your vision for the future lets you become a leading professional, a successful person who can heal, create value, build organizations, and gather people about you. It comes from the bedrock of your experience. To lead, you must share your vision in (through) powerful, meaningful, and truthful communication. Later in this book, we'll talk more about how your listener decides if what you're saying is the truth. By truth, I don't mean *not a lie*. We seek a far more powerful truth in persuasive business communication. We seek the truth of a shared experience from our past and a shared vision for the future.

Seek to share understanding

If you wish to lead, persuade, and share your vision with others, one sure-fire goal will make you successful as a communicator: Work to share understanding with your listeners. Seek to create a feeling in your listeners that they understand. It's not enough to have your listeners agree with what you're saying—to know the facts. Persuasion and understanding are the results of an interaction between mind and body. Your mind and body work together, helping you decide if what you're thinking is accurate, is the truth. You might think of your body confirming your cognitive judgment as a "gut feeling" or "instinct"; psychologists call it *Felt Sense*.

Felt Sense: your body knows

How do people decide if they believe what you're saying? When you're thinking to yourself, engaged in self-talk, how do you decide which thoughts you like best? Of all the things you have thought about, how do you know which has the greatest appeal to you?

The answer to this important question is this: You use *Felt Sense*. Your body and mind work together, determining the degree to which the things you're thinking about are good, true, important, and real (Gendlin, 1976, 1978).

Example of Felt Sense

Imagine you're at home in the morning and about to leave for work. You grab your briefcase and bag; you head to the door. Just as

you reach for the doorknob, you get this feeling you're forgetting something. You know just how that feels, don't you? It's a rather unpleasant sensation in your body, perhaps a grab in your stomach, a tension running through your shoulders; it's a tight feeling in your upper back; a persistent sensation that "you've forgotten something."

You know from experience that these body sensations are a warning that you should go back and double-check. So, you begin to run a mental inventory of all the things you could be forgetting: File folders? Wallet? Keys? Suddenly you get a surge of feeling in your gut. You think to yourself, "That's it, it's the keys; I left them on the bureau." How did you know this was the right item on your checklist? Your body told you with a feeling, a rush of energy, that you forgot your keys. As you visualized the bureau, and perhaps saw your keys on top, you got the feeling. This feeling is called *Felt Sense*.

How *Felt Sense* works. When you get a meaningful thought, a part of your brain called the limbic system activates (Gershon, 1999). A surge of neurotransmitters is produced that resonates with cousin-receptors residing in your gut. Literally, your gut—from the back of your throat, down your esophagus, through your stomach and intestines—is lined with the same type of receptors that compose your brain. So, when what you are thinking is true, your *Felt Sense truth detector* goes off. You feel it in your gut. When you trust your gut, you'll rarely be wrong.

Everybody has this capability. Some people are able to tune into *Felt Sense* with greater facility than others.

Giving *Felt Sense* to others: great communication

When you make a superior presentation, or you're involved in a wonderful conversation with somebody you really like, you and your listener are getting lots of *Felt Sense*. As you share your past personal experiences, or relate your vision of the future, you create a *Felt Sense* in your audience.

Your listeners believe what you're saying is important and true, not just because they think you make "sense." Their bodies work with the cerebral cortex to form *Felt Sense*. The *Felt Sense* feeling tells them that what you're saying is the truth. That, my friend, is shared understanding, and what we call persuasion.

Monkey see, Monkey communicate—*Mirror Neurons*

If you thought *Felt Sense* was interesting, you will love *Mirror Neurons*. Have you ever been in a sports bar and watched your favorite team play a game? Imagine that the score was tied, the bases

were loaded, and your team hit a home run. Did you find yourself yelling and cheering? Remember how you felt? You were excited, and felt powerful, energized, and happy. That's the effect of your *Mirror Neurons* going to work (Gallese & Goldman 1998; Keysers et al., 2003; Kohler et al., 2002). How do you think the player who hit the home run felt? He felt the same thing. Through your mirror neurons, you experienced the same thing as the player.

Another example—Have you ever had your heart broken? Of course you have. Remember the time you watched the movie where the characters' marriage was breaking up? How did you feel? Did your eyes fill with tears, did your throat get thick, and did a warm flush run up the side of your head? As you reached for a tissue, and the actor reached for a tissue, you both experienced the same emotion.

Discovery of mirror neurons

Here's the story. A team of Italian scientists was mapping the brain, just as geneticists have mapped the human genome. Their goal was to identify which specific neurons were responsible for specific body functions and behavior. It was a huge task; it boggles my mind that they would attempt it. Anyway, they were working with monkeys to develop their laboratory techniques.

Picture this: The scientists have a monkey hooked up with telemetry, sitting in a child's high chair in their lab. On the tray, they've placed some raisins for the monkey to eat. You see, they were trying to find the specific neuron that fires when the monkey reaches for a raisin: the monkey's "raisin-reach neuron." You know that "raisin-getting" is an important event in a monkey's life, so it produces a profound reaction in the monkey's brain. The sensors were hooked up to a speaker, so that every time the monkey reached for a raisin, the speaker would go *SCRICH*. Well, after many attempts, they succeeded; they found the neuron. Every time Mr. Monkey reached for a raisin, the lab was filled with a loud and satisfying *SCRICH*.

The scientists went wild, celebrating and congratulating each other. Then, without thinking, one of the scientists reached over and took one of the monkey's raisins—and the speaker went: *SCRICH*. **The monkey's neuron fired when the monkey reached for a raisin, and—and this is very, very important—when the monkey saw someone else reach for a raisin. The monkey experienced the same thing when he was reaching for a raisin or when he witnessed someone else getting a raisin.**

The scientists named this momentous effect *Mirror Neurons*: neurons that fire when you do something and when you watch someone else do something.

Talk about your communication: That's communication

Thanks to *Mirror Neurons* and *Felt Sense*, humans have a great capability: We can experience something by doing it ourselves, or by watching someone else do it. Think about what this means to your effectiveness as a communicator: Just by watching someone else's experience, that experience becomes our own. When you want to be successful with *Convincing Communication*, your two best allies are *Felt Sense* and *Mirror Neurons*. You can depend upon them to produce great results for you.

In **Chapter 3—The Power and Limitations of Speaking**, you'll read about using *sense messages* to raise *Felt Sense*, and to ignite your listener's *Mirror Neurons*. You'll find that your power and capability as a communicator will take a huge leap forward. People will understand you, and as important, you will come to understand other people, as you never have before.

Chapter 1 Summary

Effective Communication: *It's Not About You*

Key Ideas

- 🔑 Communication does not happen in your mind; it materializes in the other person's mind.
- 🔑 Each day you switch between two types of communication: *Checklist Communication* and *Convincing Communication*.

Checklist Communication is simple; you can use voice and e-mail to send *Checklist* messages. *Convincing Communication* is more complex; you have to expend the effort to speak face-to-face, or voice-to-voice by phone. *Convincing Communication* has more subtle variables: mood, emotion, and meaning. *Convincing Communication* comes from *Felt Sense* and *Mirror Neurons*.
- 🔑 *Felt Sense*—Your mind and body are a truth detector (gut feeling).

