

THE

HOLLYWOODWAY

Selling Ideas Through Storytelling

COMMUNICATION THAT CREATES RAPPORT

COMMUNICATION

We can't not communicate. At a fundamental level, we are all just animals, wired to assess every communication on an axis of safety. What does this communication mean for my safety?" (What's in it for me) is always our first concern. All of our assessments and decisions are funneled through our emotions before they move over to our rational brain for further examination. Business communications are not exempt from this fundamental rule of human nature.

NON-VERBAL CLUES

In order for a listener to evaluate, "what is in it for me," (my safety) we look to both verbal and non-verbal clues with the non-verbal clues taking precedence over the verbal clues. We make decisions about meaning quickly and when we can't, such as when verbal and non-verbal messages are contradictory we become uncomfortable. If your audience is uncomfortable the path to achieving, your goals will be long and rocky.

When you and your audience are in the same physical space, they will be evaluating your non-verbal messages to tell them if what you are saying is true. They will look to the following factors to make this decision.

- Dress
- Body language
- Eye contact
- Vocal cadence and tone

Additionally, your audience's truth telling, radar, will be informed by their context, not yours. To ensure your audience understands what you mean by what you are saying, it is imperative that you have insight into their context before speaking with them.

When your non-verbal clues do not align with the words coming out of your mouth, your audience will rely on the inferences they draw from your non-verbal messages to be the arbiter of "truth."

Think of your experiences, with the "shifty-eyed salesman," the "white-coated doctor," the "young IT person," "the guilty looking child." Each one of these visual cues influences your assessment of what the person is saying to you.

COMMUNICATION THROUGH PHONE, EMAIL AND TEXTING

Business conducted on the phone provides an even greater challenge to accurate communication often it moves us to the realm of reading tea leaves. The audience will still rely on your non-verbal clues, but all they will have to go on in making this judgement are your tone of voice, speech patterns, and your behavior, (do you put them on hold to take another call, do you have everything you need to answer their questions at the tip of your fingers, etc...)

How often have you picked up the phone heard a client or significant other's tone of voice and gone, "Opps...bad time to talk about X," or, "What's up with Sue she's so snappish today?" In order to avoid miscommunications, you must monitor your non-verbal messages over the phone as carefully as your words.

Communicating through email and text make matters even more complicated. Every word needs to be thought through not just as a vehicle to convey information, but for the meaning it may have within the context of your client's world. One word or terse one-line emails and texts can often signal to a client that something is wrong, even if it isn't. Again, knowing the client and what works for them is imperative.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO MASTER

There are many, "soft," communication skills worth mastering; they are:

- Empathy
- Building Rapport
- Listening
- Questioning
- Body Language
- Persuasion

EVERY CLIENT INTERACTION IS A SALES OPPORTUNITY

If you can't not communicate, then everything you do and say becomes intimately entwined with what your client thinks of you. As you are the embodiment of your company to your client, the front line of communication, the conduit for all relevant information, what they think of you is what they think of your business. Can they trust you? Do you have their best interests at heart? This simple fact of business turns every interaction with a client into a continuous, unspoken sales and marketing opportunity.

Many of us don't like to think of ourselves as being, "sales people," but, in fact, all of us are sales people all of the time. Embracing this fact and plumbing it for your advantage while maintaining your integrity is the key to professional success.

Keeping in mind that every client interaction is a sales opportunity, it is important to set a goal for every interaction. Don't just deliver information. Instead, think through what you want the result of that delivery to be. Think of how meeting your client's needs for information can open up an opportunity for you to change perceptions, gain information to expand your relationship and improve communication.

When it is time to deliver a status report, spend more time listening than talking. What can you find out about future needs? What can you find out about potential problems or concerns? What can you offer as new and interesting information? How can you take a simple and boring interaction and spin it on its head, so client's are looking forward to what you have to offer them every time you meet?

Think about yourself when you are reading through these pages. How do you, "feel," when somebody uses these communication skills with you? How do you, "feel" about the speaker, when they don't? Your audiences are no different than you. Employ, the golden rule and you will become a terrific communicator.

RAPPORT & EMPATHY

Clients are individuals; they are not institutions. A company may have a corporate culture; it may have policy and it certainly will have needs, but it is not the human you are working with. It is imperative that you think of each member of the team you are working with as an individual with complex personal issues, pressures, and desires that influence how they view your interactions.

If you do not know your clients as individuals, you will have no way to influence their perception of you as an individual. Clients are not working with your company they are working with you. To have an optimal relationship with your clients, you need to let them know you as a person.

In order to get to know your clients as people, you will need to become open and vulnerable to and with them. As in any relationship, you will only get as much as you give. So, to get your clients to open up to you, you must open yourself up to them.

EMPATHY

To create a constructive relationship with your client, you must give them the impression that you are empathic. Empathy is not sympathy. Sympathy is all about you, how you feel about what others are experiencing. Empathy is when you identify as if you were the client and connect with their problems and situations as if they were yours.

In business terms, sympathy translates into feeling bad because there is a problem with your product which impacts your client's life, or business. Empathy is imaging how you would feel if you were the client in that situation, your frustration, your pressure from your boss, your loss of time and money, then reacting out of that empathy. Practicing empathy seduces your client into feeling you are on the same team. Some might call this, "going native," but when you are on the same team as your client, they will know it and trust you.

HOW TO BUILD RAPPORT

In order to become empathetic with your client, you have to build rapport. Rapport allows you to know and operate out of your client's context. To build rapport with your client they have to, "feel," safe enough to drop all pretense with you. To build rapport:

- **Dress the part** – When interacting with your client dress in a fashion that allows you to blend into their culture.
- **Make eye contact** – When speaking in person with the client, spend at least 65% of your time looking them in the eye. That means less time reading from papers, and more time having a conversation.

- **Use your voice as a tool** – When talking on the phone or in person with a client be aware of speed, enthusiasm, pitch, and tone, whenever possible match that of the client's.
- **Use Open Body Language** – Stand tall, don't hold yourself arms crossed, don't slump, use your hands, be animated. When sitting, consciously lean into the client when speaking.
- **Begin with small talk** – Before conducting business engage with the client as a human. The only way to avoid small talk feeling to the client like you are delaying, is to direct the conversation towards their life, interests, concerns and business. To accomplish this, you must know your client as a person.
- **Validate the client's thoughts** – A compliment even a false one goes a long way. Find common ground in a conversation even if later you are going to disagree. By finding common ground first disagreements have less of a sting.
- **Smile often and frequently** – Smiling triggers the feel good neurotransmitters dopamine, endorphins and serotonin. This not only relaxes your body, but it can lower your heart rate and blood pressure. In other words, smiling is good for you. Similarly, we have discovered that humans mirror the mannerisms of people they are in conversation with. If you smile some in your audience will smile as well. Smiling triggers feel good brain chemistry. Hence, your smile turns into a win-win for both you and your audience.
- **Reflect back your audience's ideas** – As you work your way through an interaction, constantly weave in things the client has said earlier in the conversation. This shows that you are listening to them, and you value what they have said.
- **Acknowledge vulnerabilities**- If you have made a mistake, if you agree with their point of view if your business is not, "doing right," by the client tell them what you think. Don't defend, "bad behavior," acknowledge it, and then offer a solution to cure it . Whenever possible enlist the client in crafting the solution, it then becomes their solution not yours.

LISTENING

A key to building rapport is listening to your client. Listening is not hearing. Hearing like breathing is an involuntary response to stimuli. Listening is an active behavior that requires focus on the speaker. Listening is also a whole body endeavor it is not just about using your ears and your mind.

NON-VERBAL SIGNS OF LISTENING

Just as a listener uses non-verbal cues to attribute intent to a speaker, we use non-verbal cues as a speaker to determine if listeners are paying attention. When you are listening to me, I am constantly scanning your face and body to see how you are reacting to what I am saying. If I do not like the reaction I perceive I am getting (note the use of the word perceive), then I may alter what I am saying to get the reaction I want. It is extremely important that you are cognizant of the non-verbal messages you are giving off when you are listening and consciously manipulate them to reflect the message you want the speaker to receive.

Often monitoring your body language is hard. Sometimes I find myself listening to someone and thinking, "What a load of hooley," but I know that I can't for a second show that reaction on my face. Sometimes I am listening to someone so full of themselves I want to scream, but instead of reflecting that on my face, I am beaming at them with admiration. I know that reaction is what they are looking for, so that's what I give them and my response ingenious as it may be, delivers me a happy client.

Eye contact is as important when you are listening, as it is when you are speaking. You must look at the speaker, not down at your notes, at your phone, or out the window. Think of how you feel when you speak to the back of someone's head, or a person clearly not in the room with you even though their body is sitting in a chair across the table from you.

VERBAL CLUES TO LISTENING

Use verbal cues to acknowledge that you are paying attention. "Uh huh." "And then?" "You what?" "You've got to be kidding!" The list is endless, but it is important to let the speaker know you are paying attention. At the same time, be careful that the verbal cues you choose to use aren't telling your audience that you are paying rapt attention to everything they say while waiting with baited breath for them to finish so you can jump in. We've all had that conversation with someone who is going...uhum, uhum, uhum, and we know they are just waiting for us to take a deep breath and jump in, do not be that person and expect positive results.

Ask questions to show you are paying attention? Ask questions to clarify what the person is saying? Paraphrase what they have said to you to acknowledge them. Summarize what you have heard to make sure you are on the same page.

QUESTIONS

Questions are a powerful tool in building rapport. They show the audiences you are listening, that you care and that you understand. Questions allow you to find out your audience's needs, and context. Questions can be used to build consensus and to draw out people who are not speaking in your meeting, but might be thought leaders in your client's private councils.

THE SIX BASIC TYPES OF QUESTIONS

1. **Open-ended** – Some people say these are the best type of questions. They work to elicit information. Worded correctly questions don't influence your audience with your opinion when seeking information. Open-ended questions often flatter the audience, as it appears you really care about their thoughts.
2. **Closed-Ended** – These questions often require a "Yes," or, "No" answer. They almost always require nothing more than a short answer. Closed-ended questions are restrictive and can distort the truth but are useful when seeking to influence your audience's response.
3. **Recall Questions** – Are a subset of 1 and 2. They require your audience to reflect on a previous conversation or event. They are good for getting background on a situation. Be careful with recall questions; do not assume you know your audience's context from the situation they are recalling. If you do not know the answer, you are looking for, and the context within which the information will be remembered recall questions can backfire on you.
4. **Process Questions** – A subset of Open-Ended Questions, these can be a form of recall question or a glimpse into the future. When they are the later, they are wonderful ways to gather information to reveal an audience's state of mind, or create action.
5. **Rhetorical questions** – Can be open or closed ended. Often, rhetorical questions are sarcastic or reveal your opinions and thoughts. If you are aware, they are self-revelatory, you can use them to great advantage.
6. **Leading questions** – Just as rhetorical questions they can be open or closed ended. These questions are used to move your audience towards consensus. They can be extremely effective tools when your audience does not feel manipulated or patronized by their use.

PERSUASION

If every interaction with a client is addressed with a goal in mind, then how you move the client towards that goal fits under the rubric of persuasion. Some persuasive techniques are subtle and unspoken some need to be activated. Often the difference between subtle and active persuasion is the degree to which your audience is already open to helping you achieve your goal.

Persuasion is not coercion. If you force someone into taking an action, it is not their idea, and they will not embrace it whole-heartedly. Any decision that we do not feel is our own to make is subject to frequent review and when the means is available often changed.

THE SIX PILLARS OF PERSUASION

Scarcity – When we think that we are going to lose an opportunity we are more prone to take it. People are easier to persuade to make a decision that stops them from losing something, than one that gives them something. Think of the last sale you went to, did you buy something you never thought you wanted or needed? Why, because after the sale that thing was either going to disappear, or you would lose the opportunity to save money on the purchase. It isn't merely the saving money that motivates you it is the loss of opportunity to do so.

Confirmation – The more public the commitment to taking an action the more prone someone is to take the action and stay the course. Confirmation can be an incremental persuasion technique, gain one small commitment, and you often can grow it into a larger one. Buy, the ten day gym package for a mere twenty dollars, and you will often find yourself, on day seven, in conversation with the sales person at the gym, signing yourself up for the yearly membership.

Authority – We are always more prone to buy something when someone with authority sells it to us than when, "just anyone," is the sales person. Think about Air Jordan's; were they really THAT RAD when they came on the market? Were they worth the amount of money that one had to pay for them? Think about being handed off to the sales manager to close the deal at a car lot do you buy the service contract they are recommending? Even though, we know we are vulnerable to this tactic we all fall for it.

Reciprocity – If someone gives us something, all of our socialization makes us feel guilty if we don't give them something back. Coupons that draw you into a store, the pen and mailing labels in a charitable request, free white papers for visiting a site, all exist to persuade through reciprocity.

How can you use reciprocity with your clients? One tactic is to deliver information on subjects they are interested in that aren't within your direct line of responsibility. Making your self value-added, to their work life, is a form of triggering a need to

reciprocate by disclosing information and insights to you without even having to ask.

Social Proof – If others are doing what you are being asked to do, and you respect or identify with the others you are prone to take the same action. Think of the difference between, “Operators are waiting for your call, “ and “If the lines are busy, please call back.” Lines are busy, must be worth my time, operators sitting around hummm not so sure.

Likeability – If I like you I am open to doing what you ask, even when I am opposed to the idea. If I don’t like you, you have no chance of persuading me to do anything.

THE MECHANICS OF PERSUASION

In order to persuade someone, you must appear confident. If they sense you doubt what you are saying, or are delivering the party line, you will never persuade them. In order to persuade an audience, you must know their context. You also need to know your audience well enough as individuals to know what type of argument will carry the day. Although all decisions are made in the emotions, some of us like to think we are extremely logical making a direct emotional appeal to these people will not work. Others of us like to think we, “do the right thing,” whenever possible. With this kind of person an emotional appeal, showing them (as oppose to telling them) how an action is right is always the best approach.

PAINT PICTURES WITH WORDS

To persuade someone, you need to be able to paint a picture in words that enable them to see themselves taking the action you want them to. Even logical, persuasive techniques must employ visual imagery. When painting your picture allow your audience to see the benefits of taking the action you want them to, leading them to this conclusion is a much better technique, then telling them. Once an idea is mine, I will be hard to get to change it, when the idea is yours I can easily cast if off.

As part of painting a picture, use active and inclusive words, such as “We” and “Will,” not “You” and “Can.”

Don’t create a situation where you have to turn a “No” into a “Yes.” In order to do this, know where the barriers are to achieving success and don’t start out your discussion by raising red flags. Carefully paint a picture of filing your clients needs by acknowledging and overcoming objections. Then...

LISTEN FOR THE YES, WHEN YOU HEAR IT STOP TALKING.