

How to Communicate Like a Pro by Nido Qubein

Here are six techniques you can use to help you say things simply but persuasively, and even forcefully:

(1) Get your thinking straight. The most common source of confusing messages is muddled thinking. We have an idea we haven't thought through. Or we have so much we want to say that we can't possibly say it. Or we have an opinion that is so strong we can't keep it in. As a result, we are ill prepared when we speak, and we confuse everyone. The first rule of plain talk, then, is to think before you say anything. Organize your thoughts.

(2) Say what you mean. Say exactly what you mean.

(3) Get to the point. Effective communicators don't beat around the bush. If you want someone to buy something, ask for the order. If you want someone to do something, say exactly what you want done.

(4) Be concise. Don't waste words. Confusion grows in direct proportion to the number of words used. Speak plainly and briefly, using the shortest, most familiar words.

(5) Be real. Each of us has a personality—a blending of traits, thought patterns and mannerisms—which can aid us in communicating clearly. For maximum clarity, be natural, and let the real you come through. You'll be more convincing and much more comfortable.

(6) Speak in images. The cliché that "a picture is worth a thousand words" isn't exactly true (try explaining the Internal Revenue code using nothing but pictures). But words that help people visualize concepts can be tremendous aids in communicating a message. Once Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative became known as Star Wars, its opponents had a powerful weapon against it. The name gave it the image of a far-out, futuristic dream beyond the reach of current technology. Reagan was never able to come up with a more powerful positive image.

Your one-on-one communication will acquire real power if you learn to send messages that are simple, clear and assertive; if you learn to monitor the hearer to determine that your message was accurately received; and if you learn to obtain the desired response by approaching people with due regard for their behavioral styles.

Your finesse as a communicator will grow as you learn to identify and overcome the obstacles to communication. Practice the six techniques I just mentioned, and you'll find your effectiveness as a message-sender growing steadily.

But sending messages is only half the process of communicating. To be a truly accomplished communicator, you must also cultivate the art of listening.

If you're approaching a railroad crossing around a blind curve, you can send a message with your car horn. But that's not the most important part of your communication task. The communication that counts takes place when you stop, look and listen.

We're all familiar with the warning on the signs at railroad crossings: Stop, Look and Listen. It's also a useful admonition for communication.

It's easy to think of communication as a process of sending messages. But sending is only half the process. Receiving is the other half. So at the appropriate time, we have to stop sending and prepare to receive.

A sign on the wall of Lyndon Johnson's Senate office put it in a down-to-earth way: "When you're talking, you ain't learning."

People who are poor listeners will find few who are willing to come to them with useful information.

Good listeners make it easy on those to whom they want to listen. They make it clear that they're interested in what the other person has to say.