



COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS CAN MAKE OR BREAK CAREERS

We can all read about leaders and inspirational people but the burning question remains: what communication skills are essential for a good corporate leader?

Text books tell us that the 'spoken word' has the least impact when we critique communications skills. But as it is the first consideration for most people, let's begin with some thoughts on what you might say.


"Everyone is ignorant only on different subjects."

Will Rogers 1879-1935

If we assume that most leaders are capable of putting their thoughts on paper, the first challenge is how to deliver that message. Have you taken time to consider the audience composition? Are there generational considerations? Do they have expertise in your subject matter? Is your topic confronting, enlightening or praiseworthy? Do you know the people you are addressing? The list of questions can be lengthy, but it is important to answer them before you put pen to paper.

When we speak about communication skills, the issue of self-awareness arises. As an executive you should be aware of which communication channels, venues and media work best for you. Are you good with narrative or better in ad hoc situations? How well do you arrange your speeches or notes or are you known to rely heavily on powerpoint presentations? The next question can be confronting but do you know what you sound and look like in front of audiences?

Hiring a well-respected speech writer may help with some of these issues but would it provide the best outcome? Ask anyone who works with you and I can almost guarantee that they want to see and hear the 'real you'. They want to respect you as an individual, admire true leadership qualities, witness your empathy with the workplace and see how you back your words with action. In other words, they seek



confirmation that you truly live your mantra. People do not expect perfection, they want honesty. You don't have to win the popularity contest. Loyal followers need to understand you before they will engage with you. If your head and your heart are not in the 'right place', followers and supporters will desert you.

Speech is the picture of the mind.

Proverb

To truly understand yourself it is important to check your self-awareness. Many executives have yet to explore their self-awareness. It may be confronting but it is the simplest pathway to uncovering the 'real you'. To draw an analogy, you know how important it is to study competitors. The ideal is to know competitors better than they know themselves in order to write winning strategies. Have you ever adopted the same approach in order to know yourself better? If you are unable to sit down and comfortably put yourself through this process perhaps it is time to engage the support of an executive coach.

"A desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world."


John Le Carre

Does your management style suit the time and your organisation? You may be a great speaker, but what do you see, hear and feel as you get around your organisation? Each of your senses contributes to your communications capability. People check your body language and listen to the tone of your message. Academic studies stress that your body language, 'the unspoken word', and tone of speech have a greater impact on communication than the words spoken.

A mind enlightened is like heaven; a mind in darkness is like hell.

Chinese proverb.

Coaching is the ideal forum to work through any communications issues or concerns revealed in feedback from trusted colleagues and friends.



Getting honest feedback is critical. But, it is only likely to be forthcoming if those offering the opinion enjoy a constructive relationship with you and know the input will benefit all parties. It is the only way you can honestly improve your communications skills. Discussions with your coach can centre on any issue, but in the context of communication skills, there is no better place to work through issues that affect your communications capability.

Communication skills cannot be fabricated. To be a good communicator or, possibly, an outstanding communicator, you must be very comfortable 'in your own skin'. Delivery technique and other skills can be learned, authenticity cannot. Let your executive coach help you with your goal to be a great communicator.