

MAXWELL MOMENT**Communicating With Character**

by Dr. John C. Maxwell

A well-known proverb says the following about communication:

"It's not what you say, but how you say it."

The proverb is deservedly well known. Delivery has an enormous impact on our ability to connect with an audience. Authors Dan and Chip Heath have written a bestseller, *Made to Stick*, devoted to helping leaders land their ideas in the minds and memories of listeners. Applying tips such as simplicity, emotional appeal, and storytelling to our communication reaps huge dividends.

An extension to the communication proverb, says:

"It's not only what you say, and how you say it, but also when you say it."

True enough. Timing plays a vital role in the way we communicate. Awareness of emotions, mood, and context all factor into effective communication. Given the nature of their roles, salespeople have no choice but to understand this added dimension of communication. A sales pitch delivered at an opportune moment seals the deal, but the same appeal falls flat if inserted at the wrong time.

Even if we're not in sales, we know the value of timing from personal experience. In the emotional aftermath of failure, well-intentioned criticism feels like a punch in the mouth. However, the same criticism received after we've had a chance to cool down is readily welcomed.

Delivery impacts our communication, and so does timing, but in this edition of *Leadership Wired*, I'd like to take the communication proverb one step further.

"It's not just what you say, how you say it, and when you say it, but also who says it."

For a leader, communication involves more than presentations and speechmaking. It's not an event, but rather a skill. A leader's daily behavior screams to those he or she leads. Does the leader have a track record of honesty? If so, his words carry the weight of trust. Does a leader take the time to listen? If not, she will be tuned out—regardless of a silver tongue. Is a leader likeable? If so, he predisposes people to be open and receptive to communication.

In the remainder of this lesson, let's examine the communication benefits a leader wins day by day through consistency of character.

1) Honor Your Agreements - Communication Benefit: Trust

As a leader, never make promises lightly, and when you do, go the extra mile to honor your word. If your actions consistently match your words, you'll gain an incredible communication asset—trust. I guarantee that following through on your commitments will 1) Involve a high personal cost 2) Be inconvenient 3) Be worth every sacrifice.

2) Display Emotion - Communication Benefit: Authenticity

Don't be the Tin Man on the job. Have a heart. Try not to wear it on your sleeve, but allow it to infect your workdays with passion. People suspect an emotionless leader of being only partially invested in the mission. Allowing glimpses of your joys and sorrows will endow your communication with authenticity. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

3) Embody Values - Communication Benefit: Credibility

In the 21st century, cream-of-the-crop employees are not looking for a place to work; they're searching for a cause to join. They'll be attracted to strong values, but they'll be put off if they don't see you modeling them. Be purposeful in acting out your core values and giving them visibility. When people see you insist on values and fight for what you believe, they will find you credible. In communication, this credibility inclines your people to accept your words.

4) Be Generous with Praise - Communication Benefit: Likeability

Here's a foolproof way to measure your leadership: how do you make people feel? Being generous with praise is the best way to win others to your side. People naturally want to be appreciated, and they crave encouragement, so, by all means, don't withhold your praise from them.

Credit them when they do well. Appoint yourself as head cheerleader, chief supporter, and number one fan of your people. They'll admire you for it, and you'll gain the advantage of likeability when you communicate to them.

5) Listen - Communication Benefit: Respect

There's no quicker way to earn respect than being slow to speak. Give your people a forum to express their ideas, frustrations, and observations. Better yet, inquire of them. Solicit their input and feedback. When they speak, show you've heard them. Implement their ideas when possible, and candidly explain yourself when you cannot act upon their suggestions. Follow through, follow through, and follow through. Listening isn't passive. It requires you to take notice, take notes, and take action.

If you've proved to be a leader who listens, then your people will respect your words. If you've shown openness to them, they'll be infinitely more receptive to the messages you send and the guidance you give.

FIGURING OUT FREE AGENTS

Mentally note the top four performers on your team.

- Three of them would be open to leaving your company if the right opportunity arose. ¹
- Two of them will leave during the next 12 months. ²

In a post for *Harvard Business Publishing*, Marshall Goldsmith helps leaders make sense of a job market in which career employees are extinct and free agents abound. He offers three tips for leaders wishing to avoid the revolving-door disorder that is symptomatic of high turnover workplaces.

1) Help free agents build a win-win relationship with the company.

Gone are the days when employers had clout and could easily control workers who felt lucky to have a job. Now, it's up to the employer to appeal to their people. Money talks, but other enticements speak just as loudly, if not louder. Companies can market skills development, networking opportunities, and participation in a social cause as incentives to attract and retain free agents.

Goldsmith goes so far as to suggest companies welcome free agents into, "Mutually beneficial relationships in the organization that may last beyond the term of employment." Realistically, leaders understand the temporal nature of free agency. As such, they are not averse to promoting benefits that continue beyond a free agent's tenure of employment.

2) Flexibility is key to working with free agents.

Forcing people into cubicles, rigid office hours, and one-size-fits-all policies no longer flies in the world of free agents. As Goldsmith observes, "Companies offering benefits that can be tailored to individual needs will have a huge competitive advantage." Put simply, the future belongs to the flexible.

For most of human history, business owners have required workers to conform to their rules. These days, forward-thinking leaders are more solicitous of their people's needs. Although core guidelines may be non-negotiable, companies increasingly extend liberties to their free-agent workforce.

3) Leading free agents requires candor.

Free agents aren't content to drift along with the corporate current. They want to be clear about what's in it for them, and they won't tolerate doublespeak or insincerity. While their level of self-interest may seem distasteful, free agents are less likely to disengage or underperform. After all, if they wanted to be somewhere else, they'd go. In the mind of a free agent, there's no sense collecting a paycheck at a job you despise when outside opportunities await.

As Goldsmith writes, "Successful leaders of free agents realize that loyalty and mutual respect will [be] earned – and cannot be taken for granted." At a time when employees have little or no inherent loyalty to the boss, leaders cannot ignore the motivators that drive their people. When a free agent's default setting is indifference to their place of employment, leaders have to make the difference in the way they manage.

To read more material from Marshall Goldsmith, access his leadership advice at [Harvard Business Publishing](#) online. His tips on leading free agents appear in an April 15th, 2008 post entitled, "Managing Your Employees' Self-Interests."

¹ <http://us.hudson.com/documents/us-whitepapers-Engaged-Employees.pdf> - pg. 3

² <http://us.hudson.com/documents/us-whitepapers-Engaged-Employees.pdf> - pg. 3, "Since 2003, average job turnover rate has increased from 41.6% to 45.8%"

TO GO UP, REACH OUT

The World's Tallest Skyscraper

Upon its completion, the Burj Dubai will dwarf all other buildings in the world. Some have dubbed the architectural wonder a "cloudbuster" rather than a skyscraper in an effort to describe its height. When fully constructed, the immense structure will reach over *60 stories higher* than the world's second tallest tower (Tapei 101), and it will stretch nearly a half-mile into the sky.

Climbing the Burj Dubai

For the sake of a leadership illustration, let's assume Burj Dubai's builders, as part of the grand opening celebration, chose me as a contestant to win a \$1 million prize. The \$1 million would be placed in a briefcase on the top floor (the 164th) of the skyscraper. To claim the prize, I would have to reach the briefcase in 30 minutes, without using the building's elevator.

Immediately, two constraints are apparent: time and ability.

With unlimited time, I'm sure I could climb all 163 staircases to reach the top of the Burj Dubai. I would need frequent rest breaks on the landings, time to saunter through halls to locate the nearest water fountain or restroom, and maybe even access to a comfy office chair to spend a night or two. Yet, however long it took me, at some point I would climb all the way to floor #164. Unfortunately, this contest only allows me 30 minutes, which brings us to my second constraint...

Ability. I'm sure there are Olympic athletes, marathon runners, and workout warriors in physical shape to race up 163 flights of stairs in 30 minutes. I, however, do not possess the speed, fitness, or insanity to risk a heart attack racing up an endless staircase.

Clearly, I could never reach the money on my own. To get it, I would have to rely on people. Maybe I could phone for a helicopter to drop me off on the roof. Perhaps I

could clear a landing area, and convince someone on the top floor to drop the briefcase out the window (probably not a good idea). Whatever the case, by myself, there's no way I could get up the stairs to win the prize.

Three Leadership Truths

My hypothetical contest at the Burj Dubai points to three fundamental truths about leadership:

1. Time is limited to achieve the vision.
2. Our natural ability is likely too small to achieve the vision.
3. We cannot achieve the vision alone; we need others.

With these truths in mind, how can we improve our leadership capacity?

Moving from Doer to Developer

Early in our career path, we gravitate to the spotlight. We bust our tails in order to demonstrate our talents, position ourselves for promotion, or earn a pay raise. At this stage, it's common to approach extra assignments with a "bring it on" attitude. We welcome new tasks as a means of showcasing our responsibility and trustworthiness.

However, as we ascend the staircase of success, we bump into constraints. First, we recognize the limitations imposed on us by time. We cannot accomplish everything we desire - even by working nights and weekends. We juggle the demands of leadership to achieve as much as possible, but, at some point we can't put another ball in the air without dropping one.

Second, we reach the boundary of our natural giftedness. Our wisdom and inborn talent cannot take us everywhere we want to go. Regardless of our devotion to personal growth, in our own strength, we're powerless to fulfill the vision inside of us.

From Spotlight to Flashlight

When we trade the spotlight for a flashlight, we turn the corner in leadership. When this happens, our refrain changes from, "Look at me!" to, "Where are you?" Instead of proving ourselves, we search for proven partners.

We flip the switch from doing to developing as we shift focus from tasks to people. Rather than deluding ourselves into believing we can do it all, we recruit, equip, and motivate talented performers to link up with our vision. By reaching out, rather than digging within, we ultimately climb the highest.

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Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders

by Barbara Kellerman (Harvard Business Press, 2008)

We've been warned not to drop the F-bomb. We've been told it's a dirty word. When uttering it, we're scolded for being rude, demeaning, or exercising poor taste.

In her most recent work, Barbara Kellerman sets out to redeem the F-word by de-stigmatizing what it means to be led. In the past quarter-century, the F-word, "Follower," has been equated with mindless conformity or passive compliance. A follower has come to mean someone who lets another person think and decide on his or her behalf. In *Followership*, Kellerman paints followers in a much different light by highlighting their latent power and their ability to effect change.

Her opening chapters attempt to reconcile why the field of leadership has been scrutinized from virtually every angle while the subject of followership has languished in obscurity. She concludes that the leader-centric approach has its roots in our historical context. Namely, America is a nation forged from revolution, and, as Americans, we have been suspicious of authority from our country's birth. Kellerman also deduces that humans have a psychological inclination to focus on leaders due to an inbuilt need for order, structure, and hierarchy.

In the book's midsection, Kellerman goes to great lengths to split followers into classifications based on their level of engagement. The bulk of the book is spent fleshing out a portrait of each follower type.

Bystanders - Onlookers in Nazi Germany who did not directly take part in the Holocaust, but did nothing to prevent it.

Participants - Merck employees who worked behind the scenes to gloss over the health hazards of medical drug, Vioxx.

Activists - A coalition of Catholic laity in Boston who held the church accountable for its cover-ups of sexual abuses by clergy.

Diehards - American soldiers, who put their lives on the line to aid wounded comrades during Operation Anaconda in the Afghan mountains.

In the chapters categorizing followers, Kellerman proves her merit as a storyteller. The real-world examples she draws are perfectly suited to frame her conception of followership.

Kellerman writes with a heavily academic style, rich in research and theory, and befitting her membership in Harvard's faculty. If the book has criticisms, they are its length (263 small-print pages) and its abstraction. Kellerman devotes so much time to labeling styles of followership that she gives sparse treatment to the tangible ways followers can best interact with leaders.

Followership shares similarities with books written on the subject of "leading up." Although Kellerman tries to distinguish "leading up" from following, the differences

boil down to semantics. Primarily, the book explores the nature of exerting influence from the bottom upward.

From T-shirt slogans (Second place is the first loser) to advertising tag lines (Audi's: Never Follow), we are taught to overlook anyone but the leader. Without diminishing the importance of leaders at the top, Kellerman points to the ever-increasing influence of those who don't occupy positions of power and authority. The book successfully raises consciousness about followership, but it suffers from a lack of concreteness. The studious person may find *Followership* fascinating, but the average reader will likely find the book too daunting and impractical to be of much benefit.

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QUOTES

Experience

"I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know no way of judging of the future but by the past." ~ Edward Gibbon

"A man's errors are his portals of discovery." ~ James Joyce

"You cannot help but learn more as you take the world into your hands. Take it up reverently, for it is an old piece of clay, with millions of thumbprints on it." ~ John Updike

"Life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forward." ~ Soren Kierkegaard

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