

Communication

-adapted from the book "Leading Leaders" by Mac Powell

-additional information provided by Mountain West Church

It happened again. I forgot. And this time it cost an extra \$200. I signed a new client in January and needed to fly to Southern California in March. But I failed to inform my assistant until the last week of February. Had I communicated this just a couple of weeks earlier, we could have purchased the ticket for \$399 rather than \$599. I forgot to make the call, send the email, reply to the text, or mail out the package. Each time it was my failure to communicate that cost us.

Every time I forget to communicate information to my team, it ends up costing something. It may be a loss of money, time, influence, respect, or trust. But there is always a cost. I have a friend who told me his church took a group of students on a mission trip. When their plane landed, they were supposed to take a bus to their final destination. But because of poor communication, there was confusion about who was supposed to purchase the bus tickets. As a result, there were no bus tickets, and they experienced a significant delay.

We've all been there. If you've been a leader for more than two weeks, you have probably experienced the implications of a failure to communicate. A failure to communicate, or to communicate well, will cause significant problems for a team. The Oxford Dictionary defines communication as "the imparting or exchanging of information"

may explain why you are not good at it. Zzz. Sorry, I fell asleep! If that is how you define communication, it Communication is so much more than the imparting or exchanging of information! Its also imparting who you are-your attitudes, mood emotions, opinions, preferences, ad bias. Transferring information is part of communication, but there's far more to it than just stating facts.

Sometimes, it's our failure to communicate at all that hinders our leadership Other times it's a failure to communicate the right information-we get the facts wrong and lead people astray. Still other times, we get the words right, but we do so with the wrong motive. Communication is the currency of leadership, but it's difficult to spend it well. Paul advises us to check our spirit or our attitude in the communication process. He writes, Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:6). In this session, you will learn fundamental principles for becoming an effective communicator. But before we jump into that, it would be wise to consider a character trait that will be of great value to you as a communicator.

First, let's work to define our terms:

Character: Authenticity

Leaders acknowledge they are broken and imperfect while trusting God's grace and his Spirit to conform them to the image of Christ.

Competency: Communication

Communicate clearly so others understand and take the appropriate action.

Objectives

Identify a next step to become more authentic.

Use the five tips to grow in your likeability.

Clarify what team members need to know about your personality and leadership style.

Practice intentional listening.

Assess the degree of clarity of your recent communications.

Deepen Your Character:**Authenticity**

Image management is the act of trying to be something you are not. Leaders are consistently guilty of image management, especially as they get older and their role within an organization grows. Many times, however, leaders don't have it all together, and they've not mastered the art of leading well. So they work to make other people believe something about them that's not true. People are looking for answers, advice, information, and vision. The leader knows this, so he or she feels they must strive to parade a false image.

This is especially true within ministry departments. Not only do we want to portray an image of ourselves as a competent leader, but we also know we must convey a sense of spiritual maturity and discipline that others expect from a leader in the church. We might feel frustrated, busy, maxed out, or dry, but we have to put a spin on things to make it seem like we have it all together, right? Who wants to be led by someone who seems like they don't have their act together? On the flip side are those leaders who prize authenticity, seemingly, as a way to excuse immaturity. At times, vulnerability can be used to justify sin or unprofessionalism, especially among younger leaders.

LEADING A DEPARTMENT

"I wouldn't want to be a fake, so I'm just keeping it real, or so the argument goes. knows everything, and he's not interested in us using our authenticity to coddle sin either. He wants holy leaders with integrity.

So what is authenticity?

Authenticity is acknowledging you are a broken and imperfect leader while trusting God's grace and his Spirit to conform you to the image of Christ.

Authenticity means I

- try to eliminate pretense;
- acknowledge and repent of my sin;
- strive to live a holy, God-honoring life; and
- do so in full view of those that I lead.

There is something endearing and encouraging in Paul's words to Timothy when he admitted to being the worst of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15); or, when he writes to the church in Philippi, saying that he continues to strive for holiness (Philippians 3:12). Even the great Apostle Paul had not already obtained all that God had for him.

It's not like Paul was still a young leader at this point in his career. He had been trained by Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), who was a highly respected leader in Paul's day. He had his life changed by the risen Christ in AD 36. He undertook his first missionary journey with Barnabas in AD 48, his second missionary journey in AD 51, and wrote his first five epistles from AD 52-57. It's near the end of this time that he called himself the worst of sinners, and it's even later, around AD 62, when he writes his letter to the Philippians, saying he's still striving for more.

There's an authenticity that draws you to Paul. He even told the Philippians:

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh-though I myself have reasons for such confidence,
Philippians 3:1-4

Leaders can easily fall into the temptation of striving to impress others or to cover up their weaknesses in order to maintain a certain image with those they lead. Rookie leaders may feel they lack credibility because of their inexperience. Older, seasoned leaders can feel insecure because of past failure or a fear of no longer being relevant. Paul built credibility by being authentic with his churches. He was both honest about his sin and passionate in his pursuit of holiness. He had nothing to hide.

Scripture

As you read the following Scripture, meditate on what the author wishes to communicate, and answer the questions below. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you and challenge you as a leader on how you can develop your character so that you are authentic in your everyday life.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.! came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message

and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

Here you get a sense of the focus in Paul's leadership. Paul tells his Corinthian readers when he first came to them it was not with "eloquence or human wisdom" (verse 1). Paul didn't stroll into town trying to impress them with his knowledge or his résumé. He was intent on deflecting attention away from himself and onto Jesus Christ. He knew that Jesus, and Jesus crucified, was the only hope for the people he led.

This allowed Paul to be honest about his sin; after all, it was his sin (and ours) that necessitated Jesus' crucifixion. If Paul wanted to make much of the risen Jesus, he knew that a path to do this was to own his sin and testify to the power of God to forgive sin and overcome shame and guilt.

Additionally, Paul could trust in God's power. He intentionally downplayed his gifts so that people were not drawn to wise words, rhetorical technique, or human manipulation. He wanted people to see Jesus, so he didn't have to present a polished version of himself.

The outcome of such authenticity was people putting their faith in Jesus rather than in Paul. Isn't this what we all want—for those we lead to put their faith in Jesus rather than in us? On our best days, we know we are inadequate leaders whose role in the lives of others is limited. If you're tempted to think otherwise, just try moving to a new ministry role or location. People forget about you in short order. They might praise you today, but loyalty to leaders is often fleeting. This can either deflate us, or it can prompt us to focus on pointing people to depend on Jesus. The more people are drawn to Jesus, and the less they are drawn to us, the more we are freed to be authentic with our sin and our pursuit of Christlikeness.

- What do you learn about authenticity from Paul's example?
- Who is the most authentic leader you know? What would you like to emulate from their life?
- In what area of your life do you find yourself most tempted to manage your image? How do you typically do that? What next step do you need to take to be more authentic in that aspect of your life?

Now that we have examined the character trait of authenticity, we can begin to work through the core competency for this module:

Communication—communicate clearly so others understand and take the appropriate action. As you read what follows, note how authenticity can undergird a leader's competency of communication.

Reflection Questions

How do you think your family would rate your communication on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being low, 5 being exceptionally high? How about your team? Co-workers? Boss?

Where do you need to grow in your communication skills?

Principles of Effective Communication

As I was about to cross the street, I nearly stepped out in front of a bus. Seriously. I've crossed a street thousands of times in my life. But not like this. It was my first time in Scotland, and as I'm sure you know, they drive on the opposite side of the road. While I'm accustomed to looking to my left, I'm not used to looking to my right. So with a quick glance to my left, I began to take a step, just as a giant commuter bus nearly ran me over.

Communication is like crossing a busy street. You've probably been told that communication is a two-way street. I disagree. It's more like a four-way street. And you have to make sure you look in all four directions, or else you'll be hit by the bus of conflict that often comes on the backside of inadequate or unclear communication.

First, I have to look at myself to see if I am communicating all the needed information and doing so in the right spirit. Sometimes I haven't done the hard work to get the right information, or I'm intentionally withholding or slanting information to get my desired outcome.

Next, I have to look to God to ensure that what I'm communicating aligns with his will and his Word. I need to make sure that the things I'm saying are a demonstration of his truth as best I understand it and that I'm saying it in a way that models the fruits of the Spirit.

Third, I have to look in the direction of those who are listening to me communicate. I need to seek to understand them, to have a sense of what presuppositions or fears they might have that shape how they hear the message. I need to strive to communicate in such a way that the real people before me actually hear what I'm saying.

Finally, I have to look in the direction of those impacted by what I'm communicating. While the communication may not be directly with them, others may be affected. I may be communicating with one person on the team, but it can have a trickle effect on others. I need to think about the implications of my message for those who will hear it from someone else.

It's a lot to consider. But ask any leader, and they can testify to crashes caused by a failure to look in each of these directions. The practices below are intended to help you communicate in all directions in a healthier, more effective way. When communicating to people, whether it be one-on-one, a small team, or to a large crowd, these are fundamental practices you need to keep in mind.

Practice #1: Learn to Be Likeable

Not everyone is likeable. We never think about ourselves in that category, but the truth is some leaders are difficult to like. It may be quirk in their personality, a physical trait, or a habit. Whatever the reason, some leaders are hard to like, and this factor alone predisposes people to ignore or misunderstand the things they say.

Some may argue, "My Job is not to be liked, my job is to get results." These are typically leaders who have a low retention rate of team members. It's true that leadership will often put you in positions where you are not liked or where you have to make tough decisions that harm relationships, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't care about whether or not people like you. The more they like you, as a general rule, the more apt they are to trust your leadership even when you have to make hard decisions.

A few years ago, I was studying 1 Samuel. I remember how much I liked Saul when he was first introduced in the story. He was submissive, humble, and gentle. Even after being anointed king, he went back home and farmed his land. There seemed to be no selfish ambition or unhealthy desire for power. In fact, when Samuel introduced Saul to the people, Samuel turned around and Saul was nowhere to be found!

He was hiding among the luggage. If anything, Saul seemed to be avoiding a position of power.

We all know how that story turned out. Eventually Saul turned into a power hungry, insecure egomaniac who struggled to value those around him. Over time, Saul changed, and so did his leadership among the people. He went from being a likeable young man to a train wreck waiting to happen.

Now don't misunderstand me; I am not saying your motivation is to be liked. But I am saying that a key factor, or method, for effective leadership is to be likeable. There is a difference. If I am driven by a motivation to be liked, then I will make choices based on the goal of being liked. But if my method is to strive to be a likeable person, I am considering what others need in order to be receptive to my leadership.

Believe it or not, likeability is key to effective communication.' Think about the type of person you enjoy being around. There are some traits that attract you to people. Being aware of these will help you behave in ways that are likeable because you know what

you find likeable in others. Here are five tips to get you started on growing your likeability:

Have a positive attitude

As a kid, I remember my dad telling me over and over, "Son, if you can't say something positive, it's best not to say anything at all. That is a difficult practice. It tends to be easier to be negative than positive.

But a likeable person has a positive perspective on life's situations, as well as on other people.

Get people talking about themselves

Have you ever gone to lunch with someone and listened to them talk about themselves for a full hour? It's not fun. You leave those lunches drained rather than energized. Work hard to avoid making conversations all about you when you are around others. Seek to end more sentences with question marks than exclamation points, especially if you are a young leader. People prefer to be asked questions than listen to bold proclamations.

Relate to other people's feelings or situation

People like it when others seek to understand them. One of the best ways to do this is to acknowledge the challenges, frustrations, thoughts, questions, and common failures of those you lead, so that they are aware you actually know them and hear them. If people don't feel understood, then your message has no impact.

Be interested rather than interesting

Often, we strive to get people to like us by impressing them with who we are or what we've accomplished. But the truth is, it is more us by impressing them with effective focus on them rather than in trying to get others to focus on us. Paul teaches this concept in Philippians 2:3-4, when he writes, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

Be enthusiastic

Here's a great question for self-reflection: Are people drained or energized after spending time with you? If you are enthusiastic about life, then people will often be drawn to you. We all know that life can be challenging, and our ministries can seem daunting at times. But we naturally feel more confident around people who, rather than baulking at the challenge ahead, show an enthusiastic appetite to get stuck in and see things happen.

In which of the five tips above are you strongest?

How do you see that strength enhancing your ability to communicate with others, particularly your team?

In which do you most need to grow? How do you see that growth area hindering your ability to communicate with others?

What can you do this week to grow your like ability factor?

Practice #2: Help Your Team Understand Who You Are

Some leaders attempt to maintain a "healthy" relational distance between themselves and their team. But doing so doesn't allow your team members to understand who the leader is on a personal level. This hinders communication because the words we say are always mediated through our personalities. So, people need to know something of who we are in order to make sense of the things that we say. If people do not understand who we are, then the likelihood of miscommunication is higher.

The foundation of your communication is helping your team know you. For some, this may seem like a waste of time. Why spend time letting people into your life when there is so much meaningful work to be done? The answer is simple— you'll actually get more done if people know you, trust you, and understand what you are saying.

Whenever I bring on a key volunteer or a new staff member, I share four things to help them get to know me.

First, **I share my mission**. My life mission statement is to encourage and equip leaders to become multipliers of multipliers. Knowing my mission helps my team understand my primary calling and motivation in life. My mission statement is a filter for everything I do. Without knowing my life mission, my team cannot see the core of who God made me to be.

Next, **I share my values**. Knowing my values helps my team understand my behaviors. I like to use the term "core behaviors" rather than values. I prefer "core behaviors" because it helps emphasize the behavioral aspect of values. Sometimes people view values as important, but they fail to make the connection between values and the daily behavior that makes those values a reality. Your values determine the way you behave and the decisions you make. When your team has insight into your values, it gives them the context to understand your choices.

Then, **I share my strengths**. This helps my team understand why I invest my time the way I do. I want to spend the majority of my time in my strengths zone. Not doing so is not good for the team or the organization. But if my team doesn't know my strengths, they may have unrealistic expectations of me or misunderstand why I prioritize certain aspects of ministry over others.

Finally, **I share my weaknesses**. Being aware of my weaknesses helps reduce my team's frustration with me. I'm an "ideas person, who loves starting new things. This

means I often struggle to finish the things I start. Because my team understands that, they can encourage me, come alongside me, or challenge me when they see me struggling to cross a finish line. Also, because they know my weaknesses from the beginning of our relationship, they have more grace when I fail or fall short.

Shorten your team's learning curve in understanding who you are simply by telling them what they need to know. If you don't share your mission, values, strengths, and weaknesses up-front, they will discover them over time, but it may cost you relational equity by making them find out these things on their own.

Think back to a time you were on-boarded to a new team?
What do you wish the leader had done differently that would have helped you better acclimatize?

Practice #3: Listen More Than You Talk

Leaders like to move fast, which doesn't always lend itself to listening. A large part of leadership is understanding, discerning, reading people, assessing your culture, hearing God, and then taking action—all of which require listening. I mean, really actively listening to people. I find it interesting that in Proverbs, Solomon, who was a "get it done" leader himself, repeated the instruction, "Listen" over twenty times. "Let the wise listen and add to their learning" (Proverbs 1:5).

Those who listen to in Proven will prosper; those who trust the Lord will be joyful" (Proverbs 16:20 NLT).

"Stop listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge" (Proverbs 19:27).

Solomon reminds us of the importance of such listening: To answer before listening—that is a folly and shame" (Proverbs 18:13). Perhaps he emphasized it so much because we aren't quite as good at listening as we tend to think.

Listening is a deceptive skill. Remaining silent gives the speaker the impression we're internalizing what they say. But we all know silence doesn't always equate to listening. Being a good listener involves more than just not talking. We have to actively apply ourselves to understand the speaker and discern how we should feel, think, or act in response to what they are saying.

Sometimes we remain quiet as a courtesy, but we're not really concentrating on what's being said. Listening requires work, focus, and even discernment. Listening isn't just hearing words spoken; it's absorbing the intent of the speaker. It isn't just making eye

contact; it's connecting with the soul of the one sharing. It isn't just figuring out how their words, ideas, and intentions fit into our plan, but how our resources, ideas, and gifts can fit together with theirs.

Are you listening from a "me" perspective or a "they" perspective?

Here are five good reasons to listen to team members in your ministry:

- To get to know their history, story, gifts, passion, personality, or dreams
- To help them process a struggle or a victory
- To push or drive them to more in-depth discovery or development
- To discern greater levels of how you can collaborate
- To enjoy them and for them to enjoy you

If you're not genuinely listening, you're missing opportunities to improve, grow; gain wisdom, collaborate, and make a more significant kingdom impact. And, as we've already said, by listening you are building a foundation for likeability as well.

What is the telltale sign you are a good listener? Your people feel valued, respected, esteemed, appreciated, and loved.

It's always important to remember that you are relating to people and not just communicating whatever facts you need to say. Most of us have been in the room when it was clear a leader just had a bomb they wanted to drop rather than taking the time to monitor the room, love the people, and share what needed to be said with wise, emotional intelligence.

What stood out to you the most from this segment?

What makes listening a challenge for you?

Who do you need to listen to more closely? What impact might better listening have on that relationship?

Practice #4-Strive for Clarity

I'm not one to give up very quickly, but this past Christmas, there was one task that almost drove me to the point of giving up. We bought a basketball hoop for our six-year-old grandson. My job was to read the instructions and put the hoop together. Two hours into the experience, I was convinced I was on a hidden camera TV show. The instructions made no sense. When I finally completed the job, there were several unused pieces, and the rim was facing the wrong direction.

Some leaders provide as much clarity as this set of instructions. And in doing so, they create a giber is l of frustration for their team. The less clarity there is, the higher the frustration. It's true in every aspect of life. As my friend Will Mancini says, "Clarity isn't everything, but it changes everything."?

The problem is that clarity takes effort. Just because your message is clear to you doesn't mean it will be clear to others. And when communication is unclear it makes it difficult for others to understand or follow through. As a servant leader, your role is to help your team succeed in their position. This requires you to communicate with clarity. Here are a few questions that can help to ensure you are giving your team the clarity they need:

Vision: Have I clearly articulated the short-range, mid-range, and long-range vision of our ministry area? Many times, we share the long-range vision to someone who is a short-range thinker. That leaves the individual wondering what their role is and what next step they should take. While the vision may be clear to you, they are left with a paralyzing lack of clarity.

Role: Have I communicated what I expect of them in their role?

I don't know many leaders who value job descriptions. But a simple job description can be a great tool to provide clarity for those on our team. I used to give my team a copy of their job description each December and ask them to edit it based on their current reality. Role expectations can change over a one-year timeframe, so updating them can help us keep expectations aligned.

Goals: Have we agreed upon that performance goals for the next several months? Goals are another one of those items that help us have shared expectations with those we lead. Agreeing on performance goals for a ninety-day period can bring greater clarity for those we lead.

Tasks: Have I discussed all the specifics necessary for them to complete the task successfully? We cannot lead everyone the same way. For some tasks, our team needs a high degree of direction. Telling them the specifics of what, why, and how is just what they need. But for other tasks, especially those in which a team member is highly competent, you can delegate the task and let people run with it. When delegating a task, it's important to identify how much direction a team member needs from you to successfully accomplish it.

Deadlines: Have we agreed upon a deadline for the project, goal, or task? There are times I have delegated a project only to approach the individual a couple of weeks later asking if it has been completed.

They look at me with shock and frustration because they thought they had more time to get the work done. Each time this has happened, the team member feels as if they are failing me. But the truth is I failed them by not bringing clarity around the deadline.

Accessible: Have I made myself approachable and available? As a servant leader, my role is to help my team be successful. That means I need to be available and approachable should they need my help or further clarity. More on that in module five when we talk about coaching.

One of the most important tools as you strive for clarity is to be hyperclear on the main thing you want to communicate. When information is plentiful, it is easy for those you are leading to lose focus and get lost in extraneous information. You have to manage people's attention and keep them focused on the main thing, especially in a world of sound-bite clips and YouTube videos. Your challenge as a leader is to get people to focus on the right things at the right time. Just because you are passionate about what you have to say doesn't mean people are passionate to hear what you have to say, or that they will focus on the main thing you are trying to say. Don't assume people are listening. People have other things going through their mind that distract them. So take responsibility to get their attention.

Think about your communication with the individuals, team, or group you're working with, and consider each of the following questions:

Vision: Have I clearly articulated the short-range, mid-range, and long-range vision of our ministry area?

Role: Have I communicated what I expect of them in their role?

Goals: Have we agreed upon their performance goals for the next several months?

Tasks: Have I discussed all the specifics necessary for them to complete the task successfully?

Deadlines: Have we agreed upon a deadline for the project, goal, or task?

Accessible: Am I making myself approachable and available should they need further clarity?

Practice #5-Be Quick to Apologize

"I'm sorry."

There's great power in those two words, They can radically change a relationship, restore trust, and heal wounds. But only if they are spoken with a spirit of authenticity. If you want to be proficient in delivering an apology, first think about what it feels like to receive an apology. We've all seen the little kid give a half-hearted apology to his sister after he punches her in the arm. That's not what we are after as leaders. We want to be authentic in owning our mistakes and admitting when we come up short or just blow it altogether.

Not all apologies carry the same weight. Some say, "I'm sorry, only because they were caught, to get someone off their back, or because they were forced into it. These are not apologies. They are statements that acknowledge the other person's displeasure but indicate the individual in the wrong is still refusing to recognize their part in the offense.

There are two primary reasons people struggle to say, "I'm sorry."

First, some leaders work to control how others perceive them and believe that apologizing presents them as a failure. They put "a spin" on their behavior to make sure people understand they heard them, but they don't really own the failure. "Oh, I'm sorry, I was tired. That's why I did that." Making excuses is a form of image management (an attempt to control how others see you). And in doing so, we are being deceptive. Or we place blame on others by saying something like, I'm sorry you feel that way, but.." What follows the "but" is an attempt to tell them why they should not feel the way they do. Each is an effort at image management and an outcome of our fear.

Second, some struggle to apologize because they don't like acknowledging their own brokenness. To say, "I'm sorry" is to admit my weakness, fault, or sin. For some, facing the truth about ourselves but we are also deceiving ourselves is too difficult to bear. In this case, we're not only deceiving others,

In both cases, the underlying issue is a failure to find our identity in Christ. When we live in light of God's grace, we will have the ability to deliver an authentic apology that restores harmony and trust. We don't have to crash when we let others down because we know that Jesus knows the worst about us and has forgiven our sin and covered our shame. But when our identity is not grounded in Christ, we will face great temptation to protect our image.

An authentic apology includes several elements.

First, we have to reflect on what we did, why we did it, and what went wrong. We can't do this with a rationalizing heart that attempts to prove why we were not wrong. We have to ask the Spirit to search our hearts and show us the log in our own eye.

Next, we need to sincerely own our sins or wrongdoing, even if we think some of the critique may be unfounded.

Then, we need to be sensitive to acknowledge the emotional or tangible impact our actions had on the other individuals). If we genuinely believe the best about others, we should be willing to love them by expressing remorse to them.

Finally, we should go to them and articulate the specific change we will strive to make. As much as possible, this should be clear and tangible so that people know we are serious about growing and changing.

Leaders are responsible for shaping the team culture. They shape the culture through how they communicate. And one of the most essential communication skills you can learn is the art of apologizing.

Not only will this help you grow in your personal ability to admit sin to God, but it will also affect those on your team and may help them become better at owning mistakes when they make them as well.

Conclusion

All of us want to get better at communication. We intuitively know that leadership requires communication, and we get frustrated, discouraged, and disappointed when we don't say the things we want or when people don't hear what we say. While you may not be a speaker, you still communicate a lot to those you lead. You lead meetings, events, and training. How you communicate matters. If you are a poor communicator, it will diminish your leadership impact. So this is an area you should strive to grow in even if you think you are doing a decent job at communicating right now. The greater your ability to communicate, the greater to inspire, impact, and influence your team.