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# TALK LESS, SAY MORE -

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According to the author, face-to-face communication skills are plummeting in the twenty-first century. She believes that we need to embrace three key habits to re-boot our interpersonal aptitude. In her book *Talk Less, Say More*, she sets out how to use these three principles to re-engage in a world of short attention spans and get people to pay attention to you and your offerings. Read thoroughly, you'll learn how to talk less, and still make things happen.

### **HABIT 1: CONNECT: Give People What They Want & Value So They'll Tune In**

Dieken defines 'connecting' as the ability to engage and manage people's attention in today's busy world. It's no longer enough to just make contact. We need to give people what they want and what they value in order to earn their attention, or they'll tune us out.

Today, customers now hold the power. They hold the remote control and we're just one of many TV channels. They have options, so if we want to be Must-See TV, we must connect smartly. Combine this with the fact that we've become a shortcut society. We have to win people over in a hurry before their attention spans shrinks. How do we do this?

### **Tactic #1: Focus on the needs of the people with whom we're communicating.**

We need to manage our own attention in order to win other people's interest. Are we inadvertently coming across as self-absorbed, distracted, or rushed and losing opportunities as a result? If so it's time to change focus. Dieken advises us to try some of the following:

- Show respect.
- Don't race ahead. Take time for them to digest.
- Aim for the heart, not the head. Concentrate on people's feelings first.
- Don't be a drifter. Stick to the subject.
- Focus on people, not electronics. Put away the Blackberry and iPhone.
- Watch for eye movement. If people raise their eyebrows or their eyes dart nervously, it's a clear signal that we've touched a nerve.
- Observe their lips. The lips are among the most emotional parts of the body. Drooping or pursed lips are usually an unvoiced sign of disappointment or disagreement.

### **Tactic #2: Listen for Intent: What people say is often not what they mean.**

That's why it's dangerous to be stuck on the exact words that others utter, since their intentions trump their words. What's more important is the emotion behind the words. We need to listen accurately to interpret what they really meant. How?

- Listen for repetition. It's normally the key issues that are repeated.
- Take note of emphasis. This can identify priorities and quick wins.
- Ensure clarity and gain respect by saying, "Let me see if I've got this right. Are you saying ...?"
- Don't be hijacked in meetings. Sometimes the concerns of a single individual can irritate everyone else in the group.

**Tactic #3: Avoid Code Red. Many of us create our own personal Code Red situations during important communications that prevent us from connecting effectively.**

We think only of ourselves and what we are experiencing by reacting inappropriately to comments or feedback. The antidote to losing control is to focus outwardly on our audience instead of focusing inwardly on our own needs and nuances. We are advised to:

- Follow the law of inverse proportions. The more inflammatory the question, the more calmly our answer should be delivered. Self-correct. If we make a mistake, we should acknowledge our error and correct it on the spot.
- Make midcourse changes. When we pick up on clues that our audience is upset or tuning out, we need to stay flexible and adapt.
- Don't get caught up in the "I have the floor" game. The goal is to initiate dialogue — not to launch into a lecture other could interpret as a bitter verbal attack.

**HABIT 2: CONVEY: Use Portion Control to Get Our Points Across with Clarity, not Confusion.**

Let's take stock. Our inbox is cluttered, our desk is cluttered... in fact, our mind is cluttered. We need shortcuts to process and understand it all. Just as we manage our incoming communications, we should also manage our outgoing communications to help cut through other people's information overload.

The key is portion control. Portion control is a smarter way to convey messages because it forces us to manage information effectively so that others can process it equally well.

**Tactic #1: Use the Dominant Sense. Vision is the most dominant human sense.**

Our brains process visuals up to ten times faster than mere words. Any time we can show rather than tell we can reduce the risk that the receiver will misunderstand, misconstrue or miss our message, we get results faster. The author advises we try the following:

- Show contrast. Simple graphs, before and after comparisons.
- Using contrast, we can demonstrate growth or market dominance or exploit a competitor's weakness.
- Rethink PowerPoint. Avoid too much text. Avoid too many jazzy graphics. Even PowerPoint's creators Robert Gaskins and Dennis Austin suggest PowerPoint can dress up poor content. Use PowerPoint as communicator, not camouflage.

**Tactic #2: Use Social Media.**

The appeal of social sites is both obvious and subtle. In the opt-in world people can quickly consent to have contact with us. However, if we annoy them or subsequently don't appeal to them, they can drop us just as quickly. So how do we get round that issue?

Post clear, simple ideas. Our job is to convey the essence of our message, not everything we know.

Once uploaded, it's there forever. Get someone else to check your posts before committing your content to perpetuity. Don't slip into business-speak or industry jargon. Be personal not corporate.

### **Tactic #3: Talk in Triplets.**

If, we want to save time and effort in helping people understand our messages we need to structure them in threes. Triplets are so ingrained in our daily life that we probably don't notice them but subconsciously it feels right. Want some examples?

3R's - 3 idiots, 3 musketeers, Stone-Paper-Scissor.

The Author suggests that when we structure our triplets, we should put the desired choice first. It sets the standard and creates a challenging benchmark.

### **HABIT 3: CONVINCING: Create Commitment to Influence Decisions, Actions and Results.**

The ability to positively and quickly influence others is a core leadership skill that produces superior results. It's even more important now, because speed has become critical. Convincing does not mean manipulating or arm-twisting.

The difference is intent. Manipulators focus on their own needs. They steamroll, lie or omit the truth to get what they want. Convincing is not a thunderbolt event. It's not an isolated occurrence. It's a process that unfolds incrementally to change hearts and minds and compel others to action.

If we convince in a smart manner, we'll improve our ability to sell ideas, products, services or ourselves. We will increase our ability to get things done through the actions of others.

### **Tactic #1: Sound decisive.**

Sound like a wimp and we'll be treated like one. Using weak language strips us of power and blocks our ability to convince others. Our capacity to communicate decisions is one of the most telling measures of our power and influence. When we sound decisive, we capitalise on opportunities and conquer obstacles. If we sound self-assured, people will respond with confidence to us and our contributions.

### **Tactic #2: Stop Tagging and hedging.**

Tagging means turning a perfectly good declaration into a question by adding a short question at the end. "Isn't that right? Okay? Why should anyone commit if we can't? Hedging means starting a sentence with weak words in order to dodge commitment. "I'm not an expert, but.." "I kind of feel like..." Hedging makes us sound like we doubt our own words. We're hiding behind words and giving ourselves a way out.

### **Tactic #3: Contribute to meetings.**

Do you have a habit of staying quiet during meetings, especially within the presence of superiors? A prolonged silence borne out of a lack of confidence, damages our credibility. So, what is suggested?

Use planned spontaneity. If we are anxious or uncertain in new surroundings we should prepare in advance. We should review the agenda and identify an item where we can contribute. Done properly, planned spontaneity sounds like you just thought it up and earns brownie points.

Be direct. We should avoid sounding ambiguous when making requests or telling others what to do. Indirectness leads others to conclude that instructions are unimportant and can be ignored.

Don't be invisible. We should trust our gut, stop second-guessing and get in the game. Be assertive in voice, not passive.

**Tactic #4: Create commitment, not compliance.**

The Author suggests that by transferring ownership we shift our ideas and decisions to others so they will embrace them and act on them. People should feel as they're volunteering, not surrendering. Transferring ownership helps build morale, retention, productivity and sales. It also encourages commitment to you as the leader.

Self-discovery is the most persuasive argument. It's powerful when people feel they've arrived at a decision by themselves. Therefore, if we transfer our ideas and decisions to others so they can take ownership, we're more likely to get positive results. How do we start?

Use peer pressure. Seek commitment from key influencers. Seek out the people and stakeholders in our workplace who routinely influence other people.

Tap into trustworthy, popular people. Like Oprah Winfrey supporting Barack Obama in that early stages, ask a popular, trustworthy people to help rally the troops.

Use an alternative format. We can do this in meetings by addressing everyone as a group then keying in on powerful people who will back us up and lend their support.

Get them to take a stand. When people publicly proclaim their position, they are most likely to stay true to their decision.

**In summary:**

**Connect to what others want and value**

**Convey with portion control to create clarity**

**Convince to personally commit and take action.**

**The result is applied leadership like no other!**

