

"Listen, you know how long Susan always takes to get back to you. Makes me nuts."

"Sheila takes her coffee black. Ned, you like tea, don't you? And Bruce, you're still on that decaf trip, right?"

Surface behavior insights born of frequent exposure to others are enormously useful. But they're not *all* you need to know. You also need some deeper insights. *They* can give you what you'll need in order to plan an effective and lasting communications strategy—one that motivates audiences to listen and act.

- *What's hard to know*

If it's someone—or a group—you know and work with often, it's often harder to be able to answer deeper, consequential questions.

Familiarity breeds complacency, not continued curiosity or the attention given to strangers. So, it's difficult to force yourself to sit down and look at this person or persons with a clear, analytical eye and answer hard, objective questions.

Example: Suppose you called a conference with two other colleagues about an issue at work. The content could be critical of one of them and could create new problems for the other. To help you prepare and predict what else you'd have to solve, could you answer: What are their goals, not only for this meeting but in relation to their work and their lives in general? What are their fears, their outlooks, their triumphs and disappointments on the job?

Could you predict their feelings, like: How do they feel about the upcoming encounter? What do they need from you? What do they expect will happen?

These deeper, more thoughtful questions require distancing and objectivity; a special effort. Hard to do when you're thinking: "After all, I *know* these guys already . . ."

- *The dangers of a familiar audience*

When you address an audience of people you know, not only do you have difficulty knowing the deeper answers; you are also more likely to fall into sloppy communication habits.

Sometimes you don't try too hard because you know them and they know you. The old "We all know why we're here, let's get on with it" syndrome. You don't feel you have to "sell" your buddies. This makes it less likely that you'll plan deliberately, with adequate Fore-Thought.