PENETRATE THEIR MINDS

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Communication is a kind of war, its field of battle the resistant and defensive minds of the people you want to influence. The goal is to advance, to penetrate their defenses and occupy their minds. Anything else is ineffective communication, self-indulgent talk. Learn to infiltrate your ideas behind enemy lines, sending messages through little details, luring people into coming to the conclusions you desire and into thinking they've gotten there by themselves. Some you can trick by cloaking your extraordinary ideas in ordinary forms; others, more resistant and dull, must be awoken with extreme language that bristles with newness. At all cost, avoid language that is static, preachy, and overly personal. Make your words a spark for action, not passive contemplation.

VISCERAL COMMUNICATION

To work with the film director Alfred Hitchcock for the first time was generally a disconcerting experience. He did not like to talk much on the sets of his movies--just the occasional sardonic and witty remark. Was he deliberately secretive? Or just quiet? And how could someone direct a film, which entails ordering so many people about, without talking a lot and giving explicit instructions?

This peculiarity of Hitchcock's was most troublesome for his actors. Many of them were used to film directors coddling them, discussing in detail the characters they were to play and how to get into the role. Hitchcock did none of this. In rehearsals he said very little; on the set, too, actors would glance over at him for his approval only to find him napping or looking bored. According to the actress Thelma Ritter, "If Hitchcock liked what you did, he said nothing. If he didn't, he looked like he was going to throw up." And yet somehow, in his own indirect way, he would get his actors to do precisely what he wanted.

> *The most superficial way of trying to influence others is through talk that has nothing real behind it. The influence produced by such mere tongue wagging must necessarily remain insignificant.*

THE I CHING, CHINA, CIRCA EIGHTH CENTURY B.C.

On the first day of shooting for *The 39 Steps* in 1935, Hitchcock's two leads, Madeleine Carroll and Robert Donat, arrived on the set a little tense. That day they were to act in one of the movie's more complex scenes: playing relative strangers who, however, had gotten handcuffed together earlier in the plot and, still handcuffed, were forced to run through the Scottish countryside (actually a sound stage) to escape the film's villains. Hitchcock had given them no real sign of how he wanted them to act the scene. Carroll in particular was bothered by the director's behavior. This English actress, one of the most elegant film stars of the period, had spent much of her career in Hollywood, where directors had treated her like royalty; Hitchcock, on the other hand, was distant, hard to figure out. She had decided to play the scene with an air of dignity and reserve, the way she thought a lady would respond to the situation of being handcuffed to a strange man. To get over her nervousness, she chatted warmly with Donat, trying to put both him and herself in a collaborative mood.

When Hitchcock arrived on set, he explained the scene to the two actors, snapped a pair of handcuffs on them, and proceeded to lead them through the set, across a dummy bridge and among other props. Then, in the middle of this demonstration, he was suddenly called away to attend to a technical matter. He would return soon; they should take a break. He felt in his pockets for the key to the handcuffs--but no, he must have mislaid it, and off he hurried, ostensibly to find the key. Hours went by. Donat and Carroll became increasingly frustrated and embarrassed; suddenly they had no control, a most unusual feeling for two stars on set. While even the humblest crew members were free to go about their business, the two stars were shackled together. Their forced intimacy and discomfort made their earlier banter impossible. They could not even go to the bathroom. It was humiliating.

Hitchcock returned in the afternoon--he had found the key. Shooting began, but as the actors went to work, it was hard for them to get over the experience of that day; the movie stars' usual cool unflappability was gone. Carroll had forgotten all her ideas about how to play the scene. And yet, despite her and Donat's anger, the scene seemed to flow with unexpected naturalness. Now they knew what it was like to be tied together; they had *felt* the awkwardness, so there was no need to act it. It came from within.

Four years later Hitchcock made *Rebecca*, with Joan Fontaine and Laurence Olivier. Fontaine, at twenty-one, was taking her first leading role and was

horribly nervous about playing opposite Olivier, who was widely recognized as an actor of genius. Another director might have eased her insecurities, but Hitchcock was seemingly doing the opposite. He chose to pass along gossip from the rest of the cast and crew: no one thought she was up to the job, he told her, and Olivier had really wanted his wife, Vivien Leigh, to get her part. Fontaine felt terrified, isolated, unsure--exactly the qualities of her character in the film. She hardly needed to act. And her memorable performance in *Rebecca* was the start of a glorious career.

When Hitchcock made *The Paradine Case*, in 1947, his leading lady, Ann Todd, was appearing in her first Hollywood movie and found it hard to relax. So in the silence on set before the director called, "Action!" Hitchcock would tell her a particularly salacious story that would make her laugh or gasp in shock. Before one scene in which she had to lie on a bed in an elegant nightgown, Hitchcock suddenly jumped on her, yelling, "Relax!" Antics like this made it easy for her to let go of her inhibitions and be more natural.

> *When you are trying to communicate and can't find the point in the experience of the other party at which he can receive and understand, then, you must create the experience for him. I was trying to explain to two staff organizers in training how their problems in their community arose because they had gone outside the experience of their people: that when you go outside anyone's experience not only do you not communicate, you cause confusion. They had earnest, intelligent expressions on their faces and were verbally and visually agreeing and understanding, but I knew they really didn't understand and that I was not communicating. I had not got into their experience. So I had to give them an experience.*
>
> *RULES FOR RADICALS*, SAUL D. ALINSKY, 1971

When cast and crew were tired on set, or when they'd gotten too casual and were chatting rather than concentrating on their work, Hitchcock would never yell or complain. Instead he might smash a lightbulb with his fist or throw his teacup against a wall; everyone would quickly sober up and recover his or her focus.

Clearly Hitchcock mistrusted language and explanation, preferring action to words as a way of communicating, and this preference extended to the form and content of his films. That gave his screenwriters a particularly hard time; after all, putting the film into words was their job. In story meetings Hitchcock would discuss the ideas he was interested in--themes like people's doubleness, their capacity for both good and evil, the fact that no one in this world is truly

innocent. The writers would produce pages of dialog expressing these ideas elegantly and subtly, only to find them edited out in favor of actions and images. In *Vertigo* (1958) and *Psycho* (1960), for example, Hitchcock inserted mirrors in many scenes; in *Spellbound* (1945) it was shots of ski tracks and other kinds of parallel lines; the murder in *Strangers on a Train* (1951) was revealed through its reflection in a pair of glasses. For Hitchcock, evidently, images like these revealed his ideas of the doubleness in the human soul better than words did, but on paper this seemed somewhat contrived.

On set, the producers of Hitchcock's films often watched in bewilderment as the director moved the camera, not the actors, to stage his scenes. It seemed to make no sense, as if he loved the technical side of filmmaking more than dialog and the human presence. Nor could editors fathom his obsession with sounds, colors, the size of the actors' heads within the frame, the speed with which people moved--he seemed to favor these endless visual details over the story itself.

> *The letter set Cyrus thinking of the means by which he could most effectively persuade the Persians to revolt, and his deliberations led him to adopt the following plan, which he found best suited to his purpose. He wrote on a roll of parchment that Astyages had appointed him to command the Persian army; then he summoned an assembly of the Persians, opened the roll in their presence and read out what he had written. "And now," he added, "I have an order for you: every man is to appear on parade with a billhook."...The order was obeyed. All the men assembled with their billhooks, and Cyrus' next command was that before the day was out they should clear a certain piece of rough land full of thorn bushes, about eighteen or twenty furlongs square. This too was done, whereupon Cyrus issued the further order that they should present themselves again on the following day, after having taken a bath. Meanwhile Cyrus collected and slaughtered all his father's goats, sheep, and oxen in preparation for entertaining the whole Persian army at a banquet, together with the best wine and bread he could procure. The next day the guests assembled, and were told to sit down on the grass and enjoy themselves. After the meal Cyrus asked them which they preferred--yesterday's work or today's amusement; and they replied that it was indeed a far cry from the previous day's misery to their present pleasures. This was the answer which Cyrus wanted; he seized upon it at once and proceeded to lay bare what he had in mind. "Men of Persia," he said, "listen to me: obey my orders, and you will be able to enjoy a thousand pleasures as good as this without ever turning your hands to menial labour; but, if you disobey,*

yesterday's task will be the pattern of innumerable others you will be forced to perform. Take my advice and win your freedom. I am the man destined to undertake your liberation, and it is my belief that you are a match for the Medes in war as in everything else. It is the truth I tell you. Do not delay, but fling off the yoke of Astyages at once." The Persians had long resented their subjection to the Medes. At last they had found a leader, and welcomed with enthusiasm the prospect of liberty.

THE HISTORIES, HERODOTUS, 484-432 B.C.

And then the film would be a finished product, and suddenly everything that had seemed peculiar about his method made perfect sense. Audiences often responded to Hitchcock's films more deeply than they did to the work of any other director. The images, the pacing, the camera movements, swept them along and got under their skin. A Hitchcock film was not just seen, it was experienced, and it stayed in the mind long after the viewing.

Interpretation In interviews Hitchcock often told a story about his childhood: When he was around six, his father, upset at something he had done, sent him to the local police station with a note. The officer on duty read the note and locked little Alfred in a cell, telling him, "This is what we do to naughty boys." He was released after just a few minutes, but the experience marked him indelibly. Had his father yelled at him, as most boys' fathers did, he would have become defensive and rebellious. But leaving him alone, surrounded by frightening authority figures, in a dark cell, with its unfamiliar smells--that was a much more powerful way to communicate. As Hitchcock discovered, to teach people a lesson, to really alter their behavior, you must alter their experience, aim at their emotions, inject unforgettable images into their minds, shake them up. Unless you are supremely eloquent, it is hard to accomplish this through words and direct expression. There are simply too many people talking at us, trying to persuade us of this or that. Words become part of this noise, and we either tune them out or become even more resistant.

To communicate in a deep and real way, you must bring people back to their childhood, when they were less defensive and more impressed by sounds, images, actions, a world of preverbal communication. It requires speaking a kind of language composed of actions, all strategically designed to effect people's

moods and emotions, what they can least control. That is precisely the language Hitchcock developed and perfected over the years. With actors he wanted to get the most natural performance out of them, in essence get them *not* to act. To tell them to relax or be natural would have been absurd; it would only have made them more awkward and defensive than they already were. Instead, just as his father had gotten him to feel terror in a London police station, he got them to *feel* the emotions of the movie: frustration, isolation, loss of inhibition. (Of course he hadn't mislaid the handcuffs' key somewhere on the set of *The 39 Steps*, as Donat later found out; the supposed loss was a strategy.) Instead of prodding actors with irritating words, which come from the outside and are pushed away, Hitchcock made these feelings part of their inner experience--and this communicated immediately onscreen. With audiences, too, Hitchcock never preached a message. Instead he used the visual power of film to return them to that childlike state when images and compelling symbols had such a visceral effect.

It is imperative in life's battles to be able to communicate your ideas to people, to be able to alter their behavior. Communication is a form of warfare. Your enemies here are defensive; they want to be left alone with their preexisting prejudices and beliefs. The more deeply you penetrate their defenses, the more you occupy their mental space, the more effectively you are communicating. In verbal terms, most people wage a kind of medieval warfare, using words, pleas, and calls for attention like battle-axes and clubs to hit people over the head. But in being so direct, they only make their targets more resistant. Instead you must learn to fight indirectly and unconventionally, tricking people into lowering their defenses--hitting their emotions, altering their experience, dazzling them with images, powerful symbols, and visceral sensory cues. Bringing them back to that childlike state when they were more vulnerable and fluid, the communicated idea penetrates deep behind their defenses. Because you are not fighting the usual way, you will have an unusual power.

The priest Ryokan...asked Zen master Bukkan...for an explanation of the four Dharma-worlds.... [*Bukkan*] *said: "To explain the four Dharma-worlds should not need a lot of chatter." He filled a white tea cup with tea, drank it up, and smashed the cup to pieces right in front of the priest, saying, "Have you got it?" The priest said: "Thanks to your here-and-now teaching, I have penetrated right into the realm of Principle and Event."*

--*Trevor Leggett,* Samurai Zen: The Warrior Koans *(1985)*

THE MASTERMIND

In 1498 the twenty-nine-year-old Niccolo Machiavelli was appointed secretary of Florence's Second Chancery, which managed the city's foreign affairs. The choice was unusual: Machiavelli was of relatively low birth, had no experience in politics, and lacked a law degree or other professional qualification. He had a contact in the Florentine government, however, who knew him personally and saw great potential in him. And indeed, over the next few years, Machiavelli stood out from his colleagues in the Chancery for his tireless energy, his incisive reports on political matters, and his excellent advice to ambassadors and ministers. He won prestigious assignments, traveling around Europe on diplomatic missions--to various parts of northern Italy to meet with Cesare Borgia, to ferret out that ruthless statesman's intentions on Florence; to France to meet with King Louis XII; to Rome to confer with Pope Julius II. He seemed to be at the start of a brilliant career.

Not all was well, however, in Machiavelli's professional life. He complained to his friends about the Chancery's low pay; he also described doing all the hard work in various negotiations, only to see some powerful senior minister brought on board at the last moment to finish the job and take the credit. Many above him, he said, were stupid and lazy, appointed to their positions by virtue of birth and connections. He was developing the art of dealing with these men, he told his friends, finding a way to use them instead of being used.

Before Machiavelli's arrival in the Chancery, Florence had been ruled by the Medici family, who, however, had been unseated in 1494, when the city became a republic. In 1512, Pope Julius II financed an army to take Florence by force, overthrow the republic, and restore the Medicis to power. The plan succeeded, and the Medicis took control, well in Julius's debt. A few weeks later, Machiavelli was sent to prison, vaguely implicated in a conspiracy against the Medicis. He was tortured but refused to talk, whether about his own involvement or that of others. Released from prison in March 1513, he retired in disgrace to a small farm owned by his family a few miles outside Florence.

Machiavelli had a close friend in a man called Francesco Vettori, who had managed to survive the change in government and to ingratiate himself with the Medicis. In the spring of 1513, Vettori began to receive letters in which Machiavelli described his new life. At night he would shut himself up in his study and converse in his mind with great figures in history, trying to uncover the secrets of their power. He wanted to distill the many things he himself had learned about politics and statecraft. And, he wrote to Vettori, he was writing a

little pamphlet called *De principatibus*--later titled *The Prince*--"where I dive as deep as I can into ideas about this subject, discussing the nature of princely rule, what forms it takes, how these are acquired, how they are maintained, how they are lost." The knowledge and advice imparted in this pamphlet would be more valuable to a prince than the largest army--perhaps Vettori could show it to one of the Medicis, to whom Machiavelli would gladly dedicate the work? It could be of great use to this family of "new princes." It could also revive Machiavelli's career, for he was despondent at his isolation from politics.

Vettori passed the essay along to Lorenzo de' Medici, who accepted it with much less interest than he did two hunting dogs given to him at the same time. Actually, *The Prince* perplexed even Vettori: its advice was sometimes starkly violent and amoral, yet its language was quite dispassionate and matter-of-fact--a strange and uncommon mix. The author wrote the truth, but a little too boldly. Machiavelli also sent the manuscript to other friends, who were equally unsure what to make of it. Perhaps it was intended as satire? Machiavelli's disdain for aristocrats with power but no brains was well known to his circle.

Soon Machiavelli wrote another book, later known as *The Discourses*, a distillation of his talks with friends since his fall from grace. A series of meditations on politics, the book contained some of the same stark advice as the earlier work but was more geared toward the constitution of a republic than to the actions of a single prince.

> *Even more foolish is one who clings to words and phrases and thus tries to achieve understanding. It is like trying to strike the moon with a stick, or scratching a shoe because there is an itchy spot on the foot. It has nothing to do with the Truth.*
>
> ZEN MASTER MUMON, 1183-1260

Over the next few years, Machiavelli slowly returned to favor and was allowed to participate in Florentine affairs. He wrote a play, *Mandragola*, which, though scandalous, was admired by the pope and staged at the Vatican; he was also commissioned to write a history of Florence. *The Prince* and *The Discourses* remained unpublished, but they circulated in manuscript among the leaders and politicians of Italy. Their audience was small, and when Machiavelli died in 1527, the former secretary to the republic seemed destined to return to the obscurity from which he came.

After Machiavelli's death, however, those two unpublished works of his began to circulate outside Italy. In 1529, Thomas Cromwell, the crafty minister to Henry VIII of England, somehow got hold of a copy of *The Prince* and, unlike

the flightier Lorenzo de' Medici, read it closely and carefully. To him the book's historical anecdotes made for a lively and entertaining read. The plain language was not bizarre but refreshing. Most important, the amoral advice was in fact indispensable: the writer explained not only what a leader had to do to hold on to power but how to present his actions to the public. Cromwell could not help but adapt Machiavelli's counsel in his advice to the king.

Published in several languages in the decades after Machiavelli's death, *The Prince* slowly spread far and wide. As the centuries passed, it took on a life of its own, in fact a double life: widely condemned as amoral, yet avidly read in private by great political figures down the ages. The French minister Cardinal Richelieu made it a kind of political bible. Napoleon consulted it often. The American president John Adams kept it by his bedside. With the help of Voltaire, the Prussian king Frederick the Great wrote a tract called *The Anti-Machiavel*, yet he shamelessly practiced many of Machiavelli's ideas to the letter.

As Machiavelli's books reached larger audiences, his influence extended beyond politics. Philosophers from Bacon to Hegel found in his writings confirmation for many of their own theories. Romantic poets such as Lord Byron admired the energy of his spirit. In Italy, Ireland, and Russia, young revolutionaries discovered in *The Discourses* an inspiring call to arms and a blueprint for a future society.

Over the centuries millions upon millions of readers have used Machiavelli's books for invaluable advice on power. But could it possibly be the opposite--that it is Machiavelli who has been using his readers? Scattered through his writings and through his letters to his friends, some of them uncovered centuries after his death, are signs that he pondered deeply the strategy of writing itself and the power he could wield after his death by infiltrating his ideas *indirectly* and *deeply* into his readers' minds, transforming them into unwitting disciples of his amoral philosophy.

> *Yoriyasu was a swaggering and aggressive samurai.... In the spring of 1341 he was transferred from Kofu to Kamakura, where he visited Master Toden, the 45th teacher at Kenchoji, to ask about Zen. The teacher said, "It is to manifest directly the Great Action in the hundred concerns of life. When it is loyalty as a samurai, it is the loyalty of Zen. 'Loyalty' is written with the Chinese character made up of 'centre' and 'heart,' so it means the lord in the centre of the man. There must be no wrong passions. But when this old priest looks at the samurai today, there are some whose heart centre leans towards name and money, and others where it is towards wine and lust, and with others it is inclined towards power and bravado. They are all on those slopes,*

and cannot have a centred heart; how could they have loyalty to the state? If you, Sir, wish to practise Zen, first of all practise loyalty and do not slip into wrong desires." The warrior said, "Our loyalty is direct Great Action on the battlefield. What need have we for sermons from a priest?" The teacher replied, "You, Sir, are a hero in strife, I am a gentleman of peace--we can have nothing to say to each other." The warrior then drew his sword and said, "Loyalty is in the hero's sword, and if you do not know this, *you should not talk of loyalty." The teacher replied, "This old priest has the treasure sword of the Diamond King, and if you do not know it, you should not talk of the source of loyalty." The samurai said, "Loyalty of your Diamond Sword--what is the use of that sort of thing in actual fighting?" The teacher jumped forward and gave one Katzu! shout, giving the samurai such a shock that he lost consciousness. After some time the teacher shouted again and the samurai at once recovered. The teacher said, "The loyalty in the hero's sword, where is it? Speak!" The samurai was over-awed; he apologized and took his departure.*

SAMURAI ZEN: THE WARRIOR KOANS, TREVOR LEGGETT, 1985

Interpretation Once retired to his farm, Machiavelli had the requisite time and distance to think deeply about those matters that concerned him most. First, he slowly formulated the political philosophy that had long been brewing in his mind. To Machiavelli the ultimate good was a world of dynamic change in which cities or republics were reordering and revitalizing themselves in perpetual motion. The greatest evil was stagnation and complacency. The agents of healthy change were what he called "new princes"--young, ambitious people, part lion, part fox, conscious or unconscious enemies of the established order. Second, Machiavelli analyzed the process by which new princes rose to the heights of power and, often, fell from it. Certain patterns were clear: the need to manage appearances, to play upon people's belief systems, and sometimes to take decidedly amoral action.

Machiavelli craved the power to spread his ideas and advice. Denied this power through politics, he set out to win it through books: he would convert readers to his cause, and *they* would spread his ideas, witting or unwitting carriers. Machiavelli knew that the powerful are often reluctant to take advice, particularly from someone apparently beneath them. He also knew that many of those not in power might be frightened by the dangerous aspects of his philosophy--that many readers would be attracted and repelled at the same time. (The powerless want power but are afraid of what they might have to do to get it.) To win over the resistant and ambivalent, Machiavelli's books would have to

be strategic, indirect and crafty. So he devised unconventional rhetorical tactics to penetrate deep behind his readers' defenses.

First, he filled his books with indispensable advice--practical ideas on how to get power, stay in power, protect one's power. That draws in readers of all kinds, for all of us think first of our own self-interest. Also, no matter how much a reader resists, he or she realizes that ignoring this book and its ideas might be dangerous.

Next, Machiavelli stitched historical anecdotes throughout his writing to illustrate his ideas. People like to be shown ways to fancy themselves modern Caesars or Medicis, and they like to be entertained by a good story; and a mind captivated by a story is relatively undefended and open to suggestion. Readers barely notice that in reading these stories--or, rather, in reading Machiavelli's cleverly altered versions of them--they are absorbing ideas. Machiavelli also quoted classical writers, adjusting the quotations to suit his purposes. His dangerous counsels and ideas would be easier to accept if they seemed to be emerging from the mouth of a Livy or a Tacitus.

Finally, Machiavelli used stark, unadorned language to give his writing movement. Instead of finding their minds slowing and stopping, his readers are infected with the desire to go beyond thought and take action. His advice is often expressed in violent terms, but this works to rouse his readers from their stupor. It also appeals to the young, the most fertile ground from which new princes grow. He left his writing open-ended, never telling people exactly what to do. They must use their own ideas and experiences with power to fill in his writing, becoming complicit partners in the text. Through these various devices, Machiavelli gained power over his readers while disguising the nature of his manipulations. It is hard to resist what you cannot see.

Understand: you may have brilliant ideas, the kind that could revolutionize the world, but unless you can express them effectively, they will have no force, no power to enter people's minds in a deep and lasting way. You must focus not on yourself or on the need you feel to express what you have to say but on your audience--as intently as a general focuses on the enemy he is strategizing to defeat. When dealing with people who are bored and have short attention spans, you must entertain them, sneaking your ideas in through the back door. With leaders you must be careful and indirect, perhaps using third parties to disguise the source of the ideas you are trying to spread. With the young your expression must be more violent. In general, your words must have movement, sweeping readers along, never calling attention to their own cleverness. You are not after personal expression, but power and influence. The less people consciously focus on the communicative form you have chosen, the less they realize how far your

dangerous ideas are burrowing into their minds.

> *The Lydian King Croesus had had Miltiades much in this thoughts so when he learned of his capture, he sent a command to the people of Lampsacus to set him at liberty; if they refused, he was determined, he added, to "cut them down like a pine-tree." The people of the town were baffled by Croesus' threat, and at a loss to understand what being cut down like a pine-tree might mean, until at last the true significance of the phrase dawned upon a certain elderly man: the pine, he explained, was the only kind of tree which sent up no new shoots after being felled--cut down a pine and it will die off completely. The explanation made the Lampsacenes so frightened of Croesus that they let Miltiades go.*

THE HISTORIES, HERODOTUS, 484-432 B.C.

For some time I have never said what I believed, and never believed what I said, and if I do sometimes happen to say what I think, I always hide it among so many lies that it is hard to recover it.

--Niccolo Machiavelli, letter to Francesco Guicciardini (1521)

KEYS TO WARFARE

For centuries people have searched for the magic formula that would give them the power to influence others through words. This search has been mostly elusive. Words have strange, paradoxical qualities: offer people advice, for instance, no matter how sound, and you imply that you know more than they do. To the extent that this strikes at their insecurities, your wise words may merely have the effect of entrenching them in the very habits you want to change. Once your language has gone out into the world, your audience will do what they want with it, interpreting it according to their own preconceptions. Often when people appear to listen, nod their heads, and seem persuaded, they are actually just trying to be agreeable--or even just to get rid of you. There are simply too many words inundating our lives for talk to have any real, long-lasting effect.

This does not mean that the search for power through language is futile, only that it must be much more strategic and based on knowledge of fundamental psychology. What really changes us and our behavior is not the actual words uttered by someone else but our own experience, something that comes not from

without but from within. An event occurs that shakes us up emotionally, breaks up our usual patterns of looking at the world, and has a lasting impact on us. Something we read or hear from a great teacher makes us question what we know, causes us to meditate on the issue at hand, and in the process changes how we think. The ideas are internalized and felt as personal experience. Images from a film penetrate our unconscious, communicating in a preverbal way, and become part of our dream life. Only what stirs deep within us, taking root in our minds as thought and experience, has the power to change what we do in any lasting way.

> *That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat there; and the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched; and since they had no root they withered away. Other seeds fell upon thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear." Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to him who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says: 'You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive.'"*
>
> MATTHEW 13:1-15

The historical figure who most deeply pondered the nature of communication was surely Socrates, the great philosopher of classical Athens. Socrates' goal was simple: he wanted to make people realize that their knowledge of the world was superficial, if not downright false. Had he tried to say this conventionally and directly, though, he would only have made his audience more resistant and would have strengthened their intellectual smugness. And so, pondering this phenomenon, and through much trial and error, Socrates came up with a method. First came the setup: he would make a

show of his own ignorance, telling his audience of mostly young men that he himself knew little--that any wisdom he was reputed to have was just talk. Meanwhile he would compliment his listeners, feeding their vanity by praising their ideas in an offhand way. Then, in a series of questions constituting a dialog with a member of his audience, he would slowly tear apart the very ideas he had just praised. He would never directly say anything negative, but through his questions he would make the other person see the incompleteness or falsity of his ideas. This was confusing; he had just professed his own ignorance, and he had sincerely praised his interlocutors. Yet he had somehow raised a lot of doubts about what they had claimed to know.

The dialog would lie in the minds of Socrates' targets for several days, leading them to question their ideas about the world on their own. In this frame of mind, they would now be more open to real knowledge, to something new. Socrates broke down people's preconceptions about the world by adopting what he called a "midwife" role: he did not implant his ideas, he simply helped to deliver the doubts that are latent in everyone.

The success of the Socratic method was staggering: a whole generation of young Athenians fell under his spell and were permanently altered by his teachings. The most famous of these was Plato, who spread Socrates' ideas as if they were gospel. And Plato's influence over Western thought is perhaps greater than that of anyone else. Socrates' method was highly strategic. He began by tearing himself down and building others up, a way of defusing his listeners' natural defensiveness, imperceptibly lowering their walls. Then he would lure them into a labyrinth of discussion from which they could find no exit and in which everything they believed was questioned. According to Alcibiades, one of the young men whom Socrates had bewitched, you never knew what he really believed or what he really meant; everything he said was a rhetorical stance, was ironic. And since you were unsure what he was doing, what came to the surface in these conversations were your own confusion and doubt. He altered your experience of the world from within.

Think of this method as *communication-in-depth.* Normal discourse, and even fine writing and art, usually only hits people on the surface. Our attempts to communicate with them become absorbed in all of the noise that fills their ears in daily life. Even if something we say or do somehow touches an emotional chord and creates some kind of connection, it rarely stays in their minds long enough to alter how they think and act. A lot of the time, these surface communications are fine; we cannot go through life straining to reach everyone--that would be too exhausting. But the power to reach people more deeply, to alter their ideas and unpleasant behavior, is sometimes critical.

What you need to pay attention to is not simply the content of your communication but the form--the way you lead people to the conclusions you desire, rather than telling them the message in so many words. If you want people to change a bad habit, for example, much more effective than simply trying to persuade them to stop is to show them--perhaps by mirroring their bad behavior in some way--how annoying that habit *feels* to other people. If you want to make people with low self-esteem feel better about themselves, praise has a superficial effect; instead you must prod them into accomplishing something tangible, giving them a real experience. That will translate into a much deeper feeling of confidence. If you want to communicate an important idea, you must not preach; instead make your readers or listeners connect the dots and come to the conclusion on their own. Make them internalize the thought you are trying to communicate; make it seem to emerge from their own minds. Such indirect communication has the power to penetrate deep behind people's defenses.

In speaking this new language, learn to expand your vocabulary beyond explicit communication. Silence, for instance, can be used to great effect: by keeping quiet, not responding, you say a lot; by not mentioning something that people expect you to talk about, you call attention to this ellipsis, make it communicate. Similarly, the details--what Machiavelli calls *le cose piccole* (the little things)--in a text, speech, or work of art have great expressive power. When the famous Roman lawyer and orator Cicero wanted to defame the character of someone he was prosecuting, he would not accuse or rant; instead he would mention details from the life of the accused--the incredible luxury of his home (was it paid for out of illegal means?), the lavishness of his parties, the style of his dress, the little signs that he considered himself superior to the average Roman. Cicero would say these things in passing, but the subtext was clear. Without hitting listeners over the head, it directed them to a certain conclusion.

In any period it can be dangerous to express ideas that go against the grain of public opinion or offend notions of correctness. It is best to seem to conform to these norms, then, by parroting the accepted wisdom, including the proper moral ending. But you can use details here and there to say something else. If you are writing a novel, for instance, you might put your dangerous opinions in the mouth of the villain but express them with such energy and color that they become more interesting than the speeches of the hero. Not everyone will understand your innuendos and layers of meaning, but some certainly will, at least those with the proper discernment; and mixed messages will excite your audience: indirect forms of expression--silence, innuendo, loaded details, deliberate blunders--make people feel as if they were participating, uncovering

the meaning on their own. The more that people participate in the communication process, the more deeply they internalize its ideas.

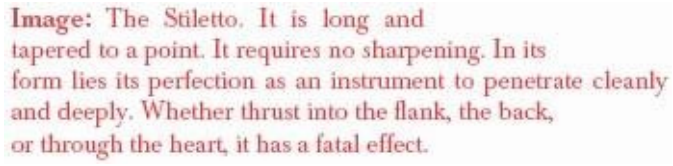
> Irony. --*Irony is in place only as a pedagogic tool, employed by a teacher in dealing with any kind of pupil: its objective is humiliation, making ashamed, but of that salutary sort which awakens good resolutions and inspires respect and gratitude towards him who treats us thus of the kind we feel for a physician. The ironist poses as unknowing, and does so so well that the pupils in discussion with him are deceived, grow bold in their belief they know better and expose themselves in every way; they abandon circumspection and reveal themselves as they are--up to the moment when the lamp they have been holding up to the face of the teacher sends its beams very humiliatingly back on to themselves.--Where such a relationship as that between teacher and pupil does not obtain, irony is ill-breeding, a vulgar affectation. All ironical writers depend on the foolish species of men who together with the author would like to feel themselves superior to all others and who regard the author as the mouthpiece of their presumption.--Habituation to irony, moreover, like habituation to sarcasm, spoils the character, to which it gradually lends the quality of a malicious and jeering superiority: in the end one comes to resemble a snapping dog which has learned how to laugh but forgotten how to bite.*
>
> *HUMAN, ALL TOO HUMAN,* FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, 1878

In putting this strategy into practice, avoid the common mistake of straining to get people's attention by using a form that is shocking or strange. The attention you get this way will be superficial and short-lived. By using a form that alienates a wide public, you narrow your audience; you will end up preaching to the converted. As the case of Machiavelli demonstrates, using a conventional form is more effective in the long run, because it attracts a larger audience. Once you have that audience, you can insinuate your real (and even shocking) content through details and subtext.

In war almost everything is judged by its result. If a general leads his army to defeat, his noble intentions do not matter; nor does the fact that unforeseen factors may have thrown him off course. He lost; no excuse will do. One of Machiavelli's most revolutionary ideas was to apply this standard to politics: what matters is not what people say or intend but the results of their actions, whether power is increased or decreased. This is what Machiavelli called the "effective truth"--the real truth, in other words, what happens in fact, not in words or theories. In examining the career of a pope, for instance, Machiavelli

would look at the alliances he had built and the wealth and territory he had acquired, not at his character or religious proclamations. Deeds and results do not lie. You must learn to apply the same barometer to your attempts at communication, and to those of other people.

If a man says or writes something that he considers revolutionary and that he hopes will change the world and improve mankind, but in the end hardly anyone is affected in any real way, then it is not revolutionary or progressive at all. Communication that does not advance its cause or produce a desired result is just self-indulgent talk, reflecting no more than people's love of their own voice and of playing the role of the moral crusader. The effective truth of what they have written or said is that nothing has been changed. The ability to reach people and alter their opinions is a serious affair, as serious and strategic as war. You must be harsher on yourself and on others: failure to communicate is the fault not of the dull-witted audience but of the unstrategic communicator.



Authority: I cannot give birth to wisdom myself and the accusation that many make against me, that while I question others, I myself bring nothing wise to light due to my lack of wisdom, is accurate. The reason for this is as follows: God forces me to serve as a midwife and prevents me from giving birth.

--*Socrates (470-399 B.C.*)

REVERSAL

Even as you plan your communications to make them more consciously strategic, you must develop the reverse ability to decode the subtexts, hidden messages, and unconscious signals in what other people say. When people speak in vague generalities, for example, and use a lot of abstract terms like "justice," "morality," "liberty," and so on, without really ever explaining the specifics of what they are talking about, they are almost always hiding something. This is often their own nasty but necessary actions, which they prefer to cover up under a screen of righteous verbiage. When you hear such talk, be suspicious.

Meanwhile people who use cutesy, colloquial language, brimming with

cliches and slang, may be trying to distract you from the thinness of their ideas, trying to win you over not by the soundness of their arguments but by making you feel chummy and warm toward them. And people who use pretentious, flowery language, crammed with clever metaphors, are often more interested in the sound of their own voices than in reaching the audience with a genuine thought. In general, you must pay attention to the forms in which people express themselves; never take their content at face value.