

# To Reach the Individual, Find the Group

*Not all audiences are created equal, and nobody's a category. To make a connection, consider how groups think about themselves.*

On the surface, the business of communication requires a message to deliver and an audience to receive it. The better the message fits the audience, the more successful it'll be. But dig a little deeper: What is an audience? Is it any collection of people in some sort of proximity? Or does an audience require individuals to recognize themselves as part of a group?

For social animals like human beings, group membership is an intrinsic part of their identity. The group is a powerful lever to encourage individuals to act. Understanding group dynamics offers opportunities for engagement that simply aren't available outside the group.

## Aggregates, Categories, and Groups

Sociologists distinguish groups from aggregates (people in proximity who don't interact or share a sense of identity) and from categories (individuals who share characteristics but don't interact). A group is any collection of two or more people who interact for some reason and who consider their identity somehow informed by that interaction.

Speaking to a group is much more effective than addressing aggregates or categories. Aggregates are superficial and situational. Nobody is a category — categories are abstractions that require members to recognize some common interest to become activated.

## How to Talk So Groups Will Listen

To create a connection between yourself and an audience, you can:

- Approach an existing group and convince them that you belong
- Approach an aggregate or category and convince them that they're actually a group based on something meaningful they have in common — preferably, something that involves you and your brand

Whatever audience you start with, Job 1 is to weed out aggregate thinking and category thinking, then dig down to the group level. That's where you're going to find the connections that prompt people to embrace a message and pass it on.