

# SHAW ACADEMY

Lesson 4  
How leaders  
communicate to inspire

**Advanced Diploma in Leadership and  
Management**



SHAW ACADEMY



# Advanced Diploma in Leadership and Management

## Lesson 4 Leaders communicate to inspire

### Lesson Pillars

Why communications matter?  
Barriers to communication  
Building situational awareness

### Key Readings

<http://www.johnmaxwell.com/blog/good-words-on-communication>

Some nice communication quotes Maxwell has gathered

<http://www.ccl.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/networksHowCollective.pdf>

Networks: How Collective Leadership Really Works

<http://theceocorner.com/effective-communication-crucial-in-leadership-and-horseback-riding/>

See Leader Communication Effectiveness Self-Assessment

### Lesson Resources: Keep a Learning Log

It is recommended that you keep a learning log. Get a small personal notebook that you can use exclusively for this course. In it, you will record insights, thoughts, reflections on previous leadership and management experiences you may have had. During key learnings in the course you will be prompted to think about a time in your past when you observed, noted or reacted to a situation. The learning log will help to build a picture of your growing self-emergence as a leader and manager.



## **Introduction**

“Every time you have to speak, you are auditioning for leadership.” **James Hume**

## **Cost of poor communications**

Did you know:

Actively disengaged employees cost the U.S. \$450 to \$550 billion per in lost productivity (2014. Gallup State of the American Workplace Report).

Poor communication in U.S. hospitals has cost the nation \$12 billion a year (Researchers from the University of Maryland’s Robert H. Smith School of Business).  
[Click here for another link that expands this finding.](#)

Projects often fail because organizations put more emphasis on rational factors than on employees' psychological engagement, and the cost to organizations is enormous. One estimate of IT failure rates is between 5% and 15%, which represents a loss of \$50 billion to \$150 billion per year in the United States. (Gallup Business Journal)

## **Poor communication comes in different forms**

Long cryptic or rambling e-mails that are misunderstood or incorrectly perceived, resulting in hurt feelings, ill will, and inaction.

Poor communication systems and processes that leaves people wondering what the proper steps are to resolve their challenges.

Long, unproductive meetings without a clear purpose and reaching no conclusion. This equals poor productivity and wastes the collective time of everyone who attended the meeting.

Not understanding a customer or the client needs generating a lack of trust.

Distracted supervisors who do not genuinely listen to their team, resulting in alienation and low morale.

Not understanding different generations, communication styles and preferences, which lead to inappropriate statements.



## **Communication is about providing clarity**

### **Leading**

If you are not leading – you are not communicating..Leadership is about “selling” the vision.

### **Recognition**

Recognition is the opportunity to re-inforce the right behaviours. Why would you not do this?

### **Feedback**

The opportunity to give feedback is at the heart of the communication relationship. It's a two way street and is rewarding for both parties

### **Direction Setting**

Leaders provide clear direction. Based off their purpose, values, vision, mission and goals leader can communicate very effectively what needs to be done.

## **Barriers to Communication**

“Great communication depends on two simple skills—context and delivery. Context attunes a leader to the same frequency as his or her audience. Delivery allows a leader to phrase messages in a language the audience can understand. ” — John Maxwell

## **Communication is about aligning your message to the audience**

Whether spoken or written, and spanning both words and actions, the message must always convey both your vision and the organization's purpose and values. What too many people fail to fully appreciate is that the message is not just what you say; how you say it is equally important. Communication is where leadership lives and breathes.

Communicate “very clearly, very consistently, and very openly” with employees so that they understood and embraced the company's strategic direction. You must communicate clearly about the organization's strategy, speed, direction, and results. But you cannot stop there. Verbally and nonverbally, the way in which you communicate – humbly, passionately, confidently – has more impact than the words you choose.

The sign of a great leader is knowing what you know and knowing what you don't know. Because humans are intuitive. We constantly read and react to nonverbal cues. As aspiring leaders, you need to be aware at all times of what you're projecting to others, whether they see you as confident and optimistic or tentative and worried. Of all the responsibilities of leadership, particularly during challenging times, communication is the most powerful and enduring.



Before you speak, know your audience. Listen and ask questions. Notice the nonverbal cues, and pay attention to people's reactions, facial expressions, gestures, and mood. Otherwise, you could be communicating the wrong message to the wrong people.

It is not only what you say, but how you say it. What you say reverberates throughout the organization. What you don't say may echo even more.

### **Barriers to connection**

The "know all" make assumptions about people, "you stop paying attention to people and miss clues that would otherwise help you to find and reach common ground with them." already know what others feel. I know what they need. I know what they want.

However, all miscommunications are a result of differing assumptions"

The arrogant boss goes one further: I don't need to know what others know feel or want. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis observed, "Nine-tenths of the serious controversies that arise in life result from misunderstanding, from one man not knowing the facts which to the other man seem important, or otherwise failing to appreciate his point of view." Arrogance builds a barrier between us and others when we hold to our way of thinking to be the only right way."

I don't want others to know what I know, feel, or think." Maxwell says that finding common ground is a two-way street. Good leaders "inform people, make them a part of what is going on, and include them in decision making whenever possible. You cannot establish common ground if you refuse to let anyone know who you are or what you believe."

Taking down these barriers is matter of choice. It means making yourself available, listening to others, asking questions, being open, being adaptable to people and situations, and most importantly, being humble. "I will think of myself less so I can think of others more." Civil rights activist Cornel West says, "Humility means two things. One, a capacity for self-criticism.... The second feature is allowing others to shine, affirming others, empowering and enabling others. Those who lack humility are dogmatic and egotistical. That masks a deep sense of insecurity. They feel the success of others is at the expense of their own fame and glory."



## **Leaders inspire through connections**

“Connectors create an experience that everyone enjoys ” – John C Maxwell

## **Communication is easy but....what's in it for me.**

### **CONTEXT**

- Listen before Speaking
- Earn the right to be heard by listening to others. Seek to understand a situation before making judgments about it. My father says “Chris you have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.”
- Understand where they are coming from
- Words are powerful, and they can build up or tear down those who hear them. Regardless of your audience or avenue of communication, the following principles enable you to communicate constructively.

### **DELIVERY**

#### **Adopt an Appropriate Tone**

- When you're emotionally aware, you're halfway to effective communication, but you still have to deliver your words appropriately. Many times it's not what you say, but how you say it. Adopt a fitting tone to address the emotional state of those around you, and your words will have their desired effect.
- Speak Persuasively
- Enthusiasm. The storytellers obviously enjoy what they are doing, expressing themselves with joy and vitality.
- Animation. The presentations are marked by lively facial expressions and gestures.
- Audience Participation. Almost every storyteller involves the audience in some way, asking listeners to sing, clap, repeat phrases, or do sign language. Spontaneity.
- Be Honest
- In an effort to persuade, leaders may be tempted to cross the line into manipulation. Leaders protect their character by using discretion in their language. They speak truthfully—even when honesty is costly.
- People are insecure. Leaders can bestow confidence by demonstrating their trust and belief in a person's abilities. People want to feel special. Leaders win a loyal following when they are generous with compliments and acts of appreciation. People are looking for a better future.
- Leaders inspire through an optimistic outlook and words of hope.
- People can be selfish – what's in it for me. Leaders learn to motivate when they begin speaking to the needs of their people.



## Connecting with others

Maxwell states that if you want friends, show yourself friendly. If you want to connect with others, become the kind of person others want to connect with. Be the kind of communicator that you would like to hear. “Connectors,” says John Maxwell, “create an experience everyone enjoys.” A big part of being an interesting person, is being interested in other people; making them feel interesting. You’ll be amazed how interesting you become to them.

In *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect*, Maxwell recommends seven things to make yourself more interesting. They were presented in the context of speaking to audiences, but as you will see, they have application to one-on-one communication as well.

**Take Responsibility for Your Listeners.** It is our responsibility to make our communication enjoyable. It is our job to add value to others. Ask “What can I do to involve others and draw them into the conversation?” He reminds us, “Creating positive, memorable experiences does more to connect families than just about anything else.”

**Communicate In Their World.** “If you want to get your message across, you have to learn how to communicate in someone else’s world.... Too often speakers are unwilling or unable to get out of their own world and say things from the perspective of their listeners.” You have to learn to connect what you want to say to what others’ needs are. “People don’t remember what we think is important; they remember what they think is important.”

**Capture People’s Attention from the Start.** People make quick judgments about us all the time. As Sonya Hamlin suggests in *How to Talk So People Listen*, “from the moment when others first meet us, they are consciously or unconsciously evaluating us and deciding whether to keep listening or simply dismiss us. She says, If we’re not captured by something in those first moments, it’s ‘Excuse me, I see a friend,’ and off they go.” If it’s all about us and our opinion, it’s more likely that they’ll look for the friend.

**Activate Your Audience.** Communicate energy and passion.

**Say It So It Sticks.** “If you want people to remember what you say, you need to say the right thing at the right moment in the right way.” Timing is important. Find common ground and say things in an interesting way. Pause. “Connecting with people is a two-way street. It is a dialogue, not a monologue.”

**Be Visual.** Paint vivid pictures in people’s minds. “Anything that can help people visually helps them to connect.”

**Tell Stories.** “Perhaps the most effective way to capture people’s interest and make the experience enjoyable when you talk, is to include stories....We use stories to make sense of our experience. And when we share them, we help people understand us, themselves, and their world.”



## **Great leaders connect emotionally**

### **Connecting One-on-One**

Being able to connect with people one-on-one is the most important skill – more important than connecting in a group or with an audience. Why? Because 80 to 90 percent of all connecting occurs on this level, and this is where you connect with the people in your life who are most important to you.

Think about how you tend to connect with friends, family, colleagues, and co-workers. Do you hold yourself to a high standard of connection and positive impact? Or do you simply aim to win every argument or steer every conversation?

### **To Increase Your Connection One-on-One...**

Talk more about the other person and less about yourself. Before a meeting or social gathering, prepare two or three questions you can ask others about themselves. Bring something of value -- such as a helpful quote, story, book, or CD -- to give to someone when you get together.

At the close of a conversation, ask if there is anything you can do to help them, and then follow through. Acts of servanthood have a resounding impact that lives longer than words.

### **Connecting with a Group**

To connect with a group, it's important to take initiative with the people in the group. To do that, do the following:

- Look for ways to compliment the people in the group for their ideas and actions.
- Look for ways to add value to people in the group and what they're doing.
- Don't take credit when the group succeeds, and don't cast blame when it fails.
- Find ways to help the group celebrate successes together.

## **How to connect**

When you can really connect with other people everything about your business relationships improve – your influence, your productivity, your teamwork. John C. Maxwell in his book “Everyone communicates Few Connect” says connecting is being able to relate to people in a way that increases your influence with them. The most successful leaders are always excellent at connecting. When you consider that most things we accomplish are the result of interacting with others, it becomes apparent how important connecting skills become. The following are five leadership communication skills I took away from John Maxwell's book that anyone can learn to do to improve their ability in the power of connecting:





Find a common ground with people – We must start by changing our focus from inward to outward. You will start to improve your skills at finding common ground when you realize connecting is always about the other person. Every individual has a different system for processing information and perceiving the world. When you realize this and strive to understand how the other person experiences the world, you will be surprised at how quickly you will connect.

Make your communication simple and easy to understand – You connect with people not by what you say but by what they understand. To communicate effectively stick to one main point, express yourself with as few words as possible, and select words that people understand. Your goal is not to convey your knowledge or the complexity of a subject but rather to simplify and communicate with understanding.

Be interesting – Remember, what is important to people is what they think, not what you think. Find a way to connect what you want to say to their needs in their world; talk about them. When you talk, add interest with positive body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, and pauses in conversation. Encourage people to interact by asking lots of interesting questions. Strive for telling stories, being funny, friendly, exciting, knowledgeable, confident, inspiring, open, authentic, and informal.

Be an inspiration to people – To connect with people at their core being is to inspire them to improve – to do things they never thought they could do. In order to inspire people they first need to know that you care about them, you understand them, and you have high expectations for them. They also must feel your passion for what you are saying, feel your confidence in their ability, and feel your appreciation and gratitude for them as a person. The ultimate inspirational lift is to give people your ideas for an action plan.

Be authentic – To successfully connect for the long term we must build trust and confidence. Credibility is built by being authentic. To be authentic you have to first be accepting of yourself; you must hold yourself accountable, speak of what you know and how it makes you feel. You must be truthful, be willing to expose your weaknesses and failures, do what you say, and treat all people the way you would like to be treated.

### **Building situational and emotional awareness**

#### **The need for authenticity: Don't be a phony**

Susan Tardencino writing in Forbes notes that leaders are authentic. Have you ever worked someone who says one thing and does another. They tell people what they want to hear. Their views morph with popular opinion. They're the ones you can't pin down, and they avoid taking a stand on just about anything. We know at an instant that they can be trusted.

However, when we believe a leader is the real deal — a person of integrity and character – we are much more likely to go the extra mile and stand by them in the best and worst of times.



Leadership guru Warren Bennis said that letting the self emerge is the essential task of leaders. Indeed, leadership is, first and foremost, all about you. People often have a misguided notion that leadership is about everyone else. But if a leader hasn't journeyed inside first to get clear on his or her values, strengths, passion and vision, their lack of authentic grounding will cause them to behave in inconsistent ways, eroding trust and undermining their leadership effectiveness. Take an informal polling of your friends and colleagues. Chances are they, like most people, are unable to answer four basic yet all-important questions:

- What's most important to you? (Core values)
- What are you good at? (Strengths)
- What excites and inspires you? (Passion)
- What do you want? (Vision)

If you don't know how to answer some or all of these questions, you're not alone. Answering them fully and honestly is not an easy task because it requires intense introspection. But the payoff can be transformational, giving you the kind of clarity that enables you to lead your life, lead others and manage your career with intention, making choices that are more aligned with who you are, and in the process, gaining the commitment and loyalty of those around you.

## Values

Our values are what we believe and stand for; our convictions about the things we deem to be most important in life. Values are the stuff of our character; the core of what drives and fulfills us. To get clearer on your values, suspend your inner judge and set aside what you believe society, your family or anyone else expects of you. If you make choices based on what you think you should care about – or shouldn't care about – then you are moving further away from the core of who you are – not closer to it. When identifying your values system, there are no right or wrong choices – just authentic and inauthentic ones. behave, the choices I've made and the way I communicate? Am I truly using my own voice?"

As leaders, job No. 1 is to surround ourselves with the right people; to build a team with complementary strengths and diverse perspectives. How can we effectively accomplish this if we don't understand our own strengths and, in turn, are able to recognize the strengths in others? Strengths are our innate talents, the things we're naturally good at. Don't focus on weakness.

When we're engaged in something we're passionate about, we tap into a seemingly unending wellspring of energy and resilience.

Where do you find your greatest joy? In what circumstance do you feel you're in the zone, in harmony with all that's around you, excelling without even trying, filled with



unending energy? Passion is what carries you through the tough times, helps you inspire others and excel at what you do.

## **Vision**

Our vision is our desired destination; the end-game we're striving to achieve. It's what we want.

Writing a personal vision statement is a very powerful, often life-changing exercise because it focuses, informs and illuminates your way forward. You describe in vivid terms the ideal picture of all aspects of your life – career, family, community, health, spirituality -- unbounded by current constraints and circumstance. A good vision answers the questions, “what do I want to be, do, have, and contribute in life?”

Developing a vision requires you to think big and long-term. Leadership may ultimately be about leading and inspiring others, but it begins inside, with each of us as individuals. Our ability to achieve greatness as leaders hinges on our ability to know ourselves, know what matters, and act in accordance with who we are. When we go through the process of exploring each of these “prongs of authenticity,” we gain inspiring and invigorating clarity that helps us be exceptional leaders -- of our lives and of other people.

## **Situational Awareness in team dynamics**

So how can you coach yourself to be more situationally aware?

**Know Yourself.** Understand your strengths, struggles, and patterns of your natural behavior. Have you found yourself with someone who told stories or information that wasn't relevant to anyone but them? Their mind is wandering as if they're on cruise control. Bumping into clueless people happens often, doesn't it? We use report tools like Leadership Behavior DNA often to help individuals and teams with a self-awareness of their natural behaviors. Having a framework for self-awareness helps to bucket your strengths and weaknesses. Personality tests like Myers-Briggs, Predictive Index, and StrengthsFinder have gained popularity in recent years, for good reason. It's not that such tests are perfect measures or predictors, but they facilitate self-reflection, which leads to better self-awareness. Our own recently developed Entrepreneurial Aptitude Test (you can take it [here](#)) measures how one stacks up in the four key traits that drive business and entrepreneurial success: Heart, Smarts, Guts, and Luck. Among a sample set of about five-hundred global entrepreneurs and business builders, about 50% were Heart-dominant, 25% Luck, 15% Guts, and 10% Smarts. We found successes and failures across all types, but understanding which core trait drives your decisions and your attitude is what is most important for increasing the probability for success.

**Know the Situations that Threaten Good SA.** Examine your response at work with your manager and your team. Is your tendency to dominate or withdraw? How could you better manage your SA and engage to respond more effectively? I worked with one team where the manager avoided any disagreements or conflict by dominating the meetings. The manager just talked incessantly until everyone was worn out and disengaged.



**Be Proactive in Your Thinking.** Set aside your own emotions or thoughts in the moment, and think about others and consider what might be going on with them in certain situations. Ask good questions to gain more insight. Then, coach yourself to respond in the most effective and appropriate way.

Be aware of others, too. You also must be an acute observer of others' strengths and weaknesses. Effective teams are made up of people who both understand and complement each other. By definition, it is impossible for any one individual to be above average across all the business-building traits. The best teams are rarely made up of similar types. On the contrary, they are composed of a diversity of excellence. If one is open-minded and objective, different types of people on a team will also help over time to further self-awareness and deepen an appreciation for the variety inherent in patterns of success. When you see people progressing towards a common goal by following different paths from yours, there is an implicit peer-based feedback loop and systemic learning in that observation itself. Having the right complement of people and a supportive learning organization allows you to see more clearly what you do well and what others do well.

### **Why is listening so important to communications**

Valerie Brown, President of Lead Smart Coaching, LLC, specializing in mindfulness and leadership training for school leaders notes that Research on listening indicates that the we spend about 80% of our waking hours communicating: writing 9%, reading 16%, speaking 30% and 45 to 50 percent of our day engaged in listening, to people, music, TV, radio, etc. About 75 percent of that time we are forgetful, pre-occupied, or not paying attention. One of the factors influencing this statistic is that the average attention span for an adult in the United States is 22 seconds.

Listening, deeply listening, is a greatly underrated life and school leadership skill. Perhaps one reason for this is that our western culture often privileges the fast-talking, think-on-your feet mode of being. Listening for genuine connection and understanding, listening that engenders trust and authenticity asks so much of us.

I was reminded of this popular wisdom about listening: When two people are in dialogue, there are actually three conversations going on. The first conversation is the external conversation between the two people. The other two conversations are each person's internal dialogue.

Real listening is hard because it is increasingly difficult to focus because of constant distraction and because attention is fractured. Linda Stone, the former Microsoft executive coined the term 'continuous partial attention'. In other words, attention is seldom fully focused.

An important first step in developing empathic listening begins with developing empathy, kindness and acceptance of ourselves as leaders. Before we are able to build bonds within teams in stable times or times of transition and change, we must build bonds of support for ourselves. Before we can thoughtfully consider others' feeling, we must thoughtfully recognize and understand our own feelings.



## How to practice empathy

### How to Practice Empathetic Listening

Find a quiet place where you can talk without interruption or distraction. Invite a conversation, following these steps. You don't need to cover every step, but the more you do cover, the more effective this practice is likely to be.

**Step One: Paraphrase.** Once the other person has finished expressing a thought, pause and paraphrase or mirror back what he or she said to make sure you understand and to show that you are paying attention. Helpful ways to paraphrase include "What I hear you saying is..." "It sounds like..." and "If I understand you right...." Be careful to avoid parroting, which can sound phony.

**Step Two: Ask open questions.** An open question is a question that you could not possibly know the answer to. Examples of open questions include: "What did you learn from that experience? How did that shape your opinion?" Open questions move the speaker into a new way of thinking. When appropriate, ask questions to encourage the other person to elaborate on his or her thoughts and feelings.

**Step Three: Express empathy.** If the other person voices negative feelings, strive to validate these feelings rather than questioning or defending against them. For example, if the speaker expresses frustration, try to consider why he or she feels that way, regardless of whether you think that feeling is justified or whether you would feel that way yourself were you in his or her position. You might respond, "I can understand how that situation could cause frustration."

**Step Four: Use engaged body language.** Show that you are engaged and interested by making eye contact, nodding, facing the other person, and maintaining an open and relaxed body posture. Avoid attending to distractions in your environment, such as checking your phone. Be mindful of your facial expressions: Avoid expressions that might communicate disapproval or disgust.

**Step Five: Avoid judgment.** Your goal is to understand the other person's perspective and accept it for what it is, even if you disagree with it. Try not to interrupt with counter-arguments or mentally prepare a rebuttal while the other person is speaking.

**Step Six: Avoid giving advice.** Problem-solving is likely to be more effective after both conversation partners understand one another's perspective and feel heard. Offering unsolicited advice is often counterproductive and diminishes connectedness.

**Step Seven: Take turns.** After the other person has spoken and you have engaged in these active listening steps, pause, and ask if it's okay for you to share your perspective. When sharing your perspective, express yourself as clearly as possible using "I" statements. It may be helpful, when relevant, to express empathy for the other person's perspective.



## **How systems leadership requires collaboration and communication**

Here is a leadership model that builds collaboration and communication at the heart of everything i.e. a systems leadership model.

The system leadership development model offers a mechanism for engaging participants in a collective process of sense-making, identity formation and collaborative action. Systems leadership must provide the capacity for organisational members to “see together” or connective leadership.

Then we must offer the opportunity for organisational members to “walk together” to build collective empowerment.

Thirdly, systems leadership must offer a forum in which organisational members can “talk together” labelled as dialogue and building on, amongst others, Senge’s work on organisational learning.

Think of connective leadership as being founded on a set of guiding principles, passions and assumptions, which, along with a number of relatively easy-to-interpret conceptual models offer a common language and mode of engagement for participants.

Collective empowerment is the programme which is structured around a series of community engagements.

Dialogue: discussion is at the heart of the programme. There is a conscious effort to eliminate possible interpersonal barriers (such as the presence of ‘experts’ and ‘non-experts’) and include and engage as diverse a group of people as possible.

### **Summary**

Why communications matter.

Barriers to communication.

Communicate to inspire

Build situational awareness



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# Thank you

