

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION

By Dr. George Kenworthy

Years ago, Marlboro cigarettes were marketed as cigarettes for sophisticated women, but Marlboro captured less than 1% of total sales. Consumer research revealed, however, that men smoke because they believe it makes them more masculine, while women smoke because they think it makes them attractive to men.

As a result of these findings, the advertisers switched their campaign away from women to men and gave Marlboros a masculine image. Rugged, weather-beaten cowpunchers were portrayed smoking cigarettes as they rounded up cattle, and the theme line invited the consumer to “Come to Marlboro country.” Because the association of cigarettes with cowboys conveyed the idea that smoking Marlboros makes men masculine, sales jumped 400%.

The idea, of course, is nonsense. Medical evidence warns us that Marlboro country is a cemetery and the Marlboro man probably suffers from cancer or lung disease. Yet because the idea that ‘smoking makes you masculine’ slipped into the mind without being clearly stated, it gained wide acceptance and boosted sales dramatically.

This is not an isolated incident. William Bryan Key, speaking about advertising, makes this unsettling statement of a Madison Avenue doctrine: “No significant belief or attitude held by an individual is apparently made on the basis of consciously perceived data.” If that stands as a fundamental affirmation behind the “word from the sponsor,” we should not be surprised that truth in advertising is hard to come by.¹

THERE ARE THREE INGREDIENTS IN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- 1. A persuasive messenger.*
- 2. A relevant message.*
- 3. A particular audience*

A PERSUASIVE MESSENGER

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, “What you are shouts so loud that I cannot hear what you say.” This dramatizes the tremendous influence of the person in persuasion. Paul put it even more pointedly, “You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men” (II Corinthians 3:2). “Ethos” then is what the persuader brings of him/herself to the message.

A receptive audience needs to know that the speakers have expertise regarding the subject; that they have authority; that they “practice what they preach;” that they are sincere.

Finally, a receptive audience needs to believe that the speakers are interested in the well being of the audience; that they care. The question is, “How can a speaker raise ethos?” “What must the speakers avoid so that ethos is not lowered even as they speak?”

The importance of sincerity to persuasion

In I Chronicles 29:5 David challenges his leaders to give sacrificially for the building of the Temple. The text indicates that they were persuaded to give what in today’s economy would equal about one billion dollars worth of gold. Note they did this only after David set aside 30 trillion dollars worth of gold from the national treasury (22:19) and 9 billion dollars worth of gold from his own pocket for the building project! (29:4,5). A sincere example motivates!

The importance of personality to persuasion

- Be open! Talk about your own strengths and weaknesses.
- Be enthusiastic! If you don’t act like you believe what you are saying is important, your audience will not likely be moved.
- Be aware of how to use “minimal clues.”

The importance of passion to persuasion

John R. W. Stott has said: “Some preachers have a great horror of emotionalism. So have I, if this means the artificial stirring of the emotions by rhetorical tricks or other devices. But we should not fear genuine emotion. If we can preach Christ crucified and remain altogether unmoved, we must have a hard heart indeed. More to be feared than emotion is cold professionalism, the dry, detached utterance of a lecture which has neither heart nor soul in it.” 1

A RELEVANT MESSAGE

What Makes A Message Relevant?

- Does It Address A Felt Need Of The Audience?
- Does It Raise To A Felt Need A Concern That The Audience Did Not Previously Have?
- Does It Come Down The Abstraction Ladder?

How to create relevance

- Use Inductive Techniques
 - Contrast Inductive Vs. Deductive Techniques
 - Explain The Functional Question
- What Does It Mean?
 - Is It True?
 - So what?

Use story

- WHAT TO DO To Tell A Relevant Story
 - Create Suspense. Don't Give The Punch Line Of The Story Away Too Early.
 - Describe The Details Of The Story In "Raw" Terms.
- Celery at its best is served raw. So is a good story. It is as concrete, specific, and close to life as possible. Compare the two reports of work camp experiences:
 - We lived in close quarters with young people from other lands. We had to learn to understand their points of view. We had to adjust to their forms of courtesy and accept them even when they seemed strangest. We had to ...

- I met Ingrid in our bunkroom and took an instant dislike to her. She wore her hems one inch below the fashion line and criticized me for chewing gum.
- The account on the top is bland and flavorless but the “raw” account on the bottom is alive.

Understand the importance of ultimate stress.

Ultimate stress is the climax of the story. The climax in the story of the prodigal son is seen in the attitude of the older brother who is very critical of his father’s compassion toward his “prodigal” son. The purpose of the story is to show that the pharisaical older son is the real prodigal of the story.

“Incarnate” the story.

- Try to see, feel, smell, taste what the characters of the story do and then describe what you “see.”
- Or, become the characters and tell the story from the perspective of the first person.

What not to do if you wish to tell a relevant story.

- Don’t Depend On Notes!
- Don’t Tell Just The Facts — Relate Feelings.
- Don’t Be Afraid To Be Dramatic.

Get audience involvement by

- Creating **T**ension
- Being **U**nconventional
- Being **L**ucid
- Being **I**llustrative
- Creating **P**assion

A PARTICULAR AUDIENCE

ARISTOTLE'S FOUR CLASSIC AUDIENCES

1. *The Trusting/Believing Audience*
2. *The Skeptical Audience*
3. *The Apathetic Audience*
4. *The Hostile Audience*

1) The Trusting/Believing Audience

- **The characteristics of this audience**
 - They usually share the value system of the speaker
 - They are not skeptical or critical listeners
 - They are inclined to “trust” that anything that they are told is true
- **The most effective methods for addressing this audience**
 - Since the participants of this audience tend to be concrete thinkers, they respond well to real life pictures that enable them to visualize the message
 - “Principle applied” messages are particularly effective with this audience
 - “Subliminal clues” help establish the authority of the speaker. The clue may be a title like “Dr.” or “Professor.” The clue might be a diploma on the wall or a picture of a significant accomplishment of the speaker. The clue may be an oral reference to an experience or skill that establishes the expertise of the speaker. The clue may reference to a position that the speaker has in an organization or group esteemed highly by the audience.
 - Methods that elicit an emotional response from the audience can be very effective. Illustrations that lead the audience to laugh, cry, get angry and become excited are usually effective.
- **What not to do with the trusting/believing audience**
 - Avoid lengthy references to historical, empirical or logical data
 - Avoid abstract concepts

- Avoid “detailed” explanations

2) The Skeptical Audience

- **The characteristics of this audience**
 - They may or may not share the value system of the speaker
 - They are not inclined to accept without question what any speaker says
- **The most effective methods for addressing this audience**
 - Logical proofs and historical and empirical data are persuasive to this audience
 - “Proposition proved” and “idea explained” messages are particularly effective with this audience.
 - Deductive presentations are usually better than inductive.
- **What not to do with the skeptical audience**
 - Avoid emotional arguments
 - Avoid supporting ideas with popular opinion

3) The Apathetic Audience

- **The characteristics of this audience**
 - They often do not share the value system of the speaker
 - They are bored and disinterested
 - Often they have been brought by a friend or relative to hear a speaker that they have no interest in hearing
 - They tend to feel that they know as much or more than the speaker about the subject being addressed
- **The most effective methods for addressing this audience**
 - Attention getting behavior that startles this audience is often effective
 - “Power stories” that captivate the imagination of the audience are effective
 - The use of tension can be very effective.

- Inductive techniques are usually better than deductive techniques with this audience. If they can predict where the message is going, they get bored and tune out.
- Utilize methods of presentation that involve the audience in the message.
- **What to avoid with this audience**
 - Avoid being too predictable
 - Avoid being too “matter of fact”
 - Avoid lengthy explanations or lengthy proofs

4) The Hostile Audience

- **The characteristics of this audience**
 - They usually do not share the value system of the speaker
 - They are not inclined to accept anything that the speaker says
 - They may feel angry toward the speaker and what the speaker represents
- **The most effective methods for addressing this audience**
 - The speaker must prove that he knows what he is talking about by citing authorities that are respected by the audience
 - The speaker must demonstrate that he is absolutely sincere. He must not be perceived to be a hypocrite
 - The speaker must show that he cares about the opinions and world view of this audience that likely has views that are very different from those of the speaker
- **What to avoid with this audience**
 - Avoid emotional argumentations
 - Avoid attacking the views of the audience
 - Avoid the use of too many personal stories

How to identify the felt needs of an audience

- Ask Them (Robert Schuler, Bill Hybells)
- Use 3x5 Cards To Identify Representative Members Of Your Audience
- Evaluate Your Audience From The Bible

Self-Persuasion Through Involvement

The effectiveness of self-persuasion was demonstrated in a famous real-life study known as the foot-in-the-door experiment. The researchers selected a number of homes at random and made personal visits to the residents. They claimed to represent an environmental group which was erecting billboards that said, KEEP CALIFORNIA BEAUTIFUL.

They asked whether or not the homeowners would be willing to display this sign on their front lawns. In order to insure that residents fully understood the request, they showed them a picture of a similar house with the sign in front. It was really quite funny. Here's an ugly 6x10 foot billboard defacing the property while urging others to beautify the state. The idea that anybody would actually choose to put up such a monstrosity seemed ridiculous. And it was—no one accepted the offer.

The researchers used a two-step procedure with another group of homeowners in order to test out their foot-in-the-door technique. They first went to the residents with a small 3x5 inch card and asked people to stick it in their window. The card contained the same appeal for the state beautification. Because the behavioral cost of displaying the modest sign was low, many people did it. This left the door open to a much larger request later on. A few weeks later the callers came back to the folks who had accepted the small sign. They presented their request for permission to put up the huge billboard. Although the majority of the people refused, quite a few agreed to take the large sign.

How can we explain this difference? The simplest answer is that the men and women who put up the first message began to view themselves differently. They observed their own behavior just as anyone else would. What they saw was a person who was concerned about the environment. Here was a man who was willing to let his friends and neighbors know the importance of protecting the state's natural splendor. They were reminded of their own commitment to conservation every time they saw the sign.

¹ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1980), pp. 38-39