

Spreading the News

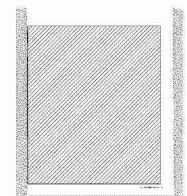
Modern workplace dynamics have become so complex that leaders have less time than ever to spend coaching and mentoring employees. Complicating matters, universities systematically churn out graduates who have learned technical skills and theoretical concepts, but not how to aptly prepare for, and traverse through, the inevitable “gray area” of a company—the environment and culture that manifests from the multi-faceted challenges and forces an organization faces. The result is a glut of entry-level and entrenched professionals who are unprepared, unequipped and unable to effectively communicate in a way that will productively impact their careers.

The importance of learning how to effectively communicate within this ambiguous environment cannot be overstated. Too many

employees and executives are ill-equipped to engage an audience—any audience—with ease and intention, and that’s keeping them from realizing their full potential and attaining a maximum measure of success. These four tactical tips can help professionals at every level become more effective communicators and gain better control of their career trajectory:

- **BECOME THE “UNIVERSAL TRANSLATOR”**

The most valued and successful person in any business is the one who can translate facts, figures and concepts into actionable ideas that make sense and resonate with his or her direct network as well as any and all constituents those ideas will be presented to. The Universal Translator does the following: steps out of his or her comfort zone or discipline; lets go of any insider department lingo or technical terms and focuses on the audience at hand; suggests specific ways others can move forward with the information relative to what’s important to them; and presents the vision, plan or theory in a way that is clear, confident and, above all, actionable. If others can understand, relate to and rally around what you’re presenting, it’s sure to yield winning results.



• **MEET BEFORE YOU MEET.** Few things are more embarrassing than getting completely derailed in a meeting. To avoid this setback, you should determine who your key constituents are relative to your topic ahead of time, set up one-on-one meetings with all of them at least a few days in advance of a big meeting, “socialize” the topic with each of the constituents individually, and make sure you understand their perspective and answer any questions or concerns that they have ahead of time. By taking these steps, you’ll gain valuable information that will help you refine your presentation, while allowing you to be poised and prepared to actually present it in the real meeting.

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• **STOP, ASK, LISTEN.** The best way to approach key conversations that need a little extra finesse or persuasion, particularly in the midst of a time-pressed schedule, is to stop and take a breath so you don’t rush into your agenda in the first five minutes of the conversation, and then ask open-ended questions, such as “What’s going on in your department?” or “How has this system helped you?” Once the person you’re engaged with has the opportunity to respond, make sure you’re actively listening—not just hearing them—and that you give them ample time to convey their thoughts without your interjection, direction or interruption.

When you do finally have the chance to speak, keep in mind people only have the capacity to absorb so much. If you provide an overload of verbose detail, you risk losing the real essence of what you’re trying to convey. Stay focused on who your audience is and what they care about to ensure that your dialogue and key points are streamlined and succinct.

• **CONVERSE WITH CLARITY.** Rather than contributing poorly to a conversation or sitting on the sidelines as dialogue ensues, a better approach is to pick the right setting and ask clarifying questions to ensure messaging remains on point and resultant activities on track. If you’re not sure where to start, the basic who, what, where, when, why and how is a sensible approach. For example, “Why are we doing this?” or “How will that work?” are some examples. The win-win with this strategy is that it fosters clear dialogue, makes people accountable to answer direct questions, and often uncovers problems that need to be addressed but would have been overlooked had this approach not been utilized.

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