

SECTION 33

Effective Communication

EIGHT ESSENTIALS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

(Adapted from Bert Decker's *You've Got To Be Believed To Be Heard*, pgs. 86-149)

Bert Decker is a Christian who leads seminars across the nation teaching persons in the business world how to be "good communicators." He has worked with the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., and has developed a growing friendship with Dr. Hershael York. The two of them will be working together on several forthcoming books on preaching.

The ideas he shares in his seminars are readily transferable to the preaching assignment, although there will not be a one-to-one correspondence at every point. Given the incredible communication technology of our day, it is imperative that we be the best communicators of biblical truth possible.

Remember: What you say is more important than how you say it. But, how you say it has never been more important!

I. Eye Communication.

"An eye can threaten like a loaded and leveled gun; or can insult like hissing and kicking; or in its altered mood by beams of kindness, make the heart dance with joy." Ralph Waldo Emerson

A. *The Basic Rules*

1. Use Involvement Rather than Intimacy or Intimidation.

2. For Effective Eye Communication, Count to Five.

A feeling of involvement requires about five seconds of steady eye contact. That is about the time we take to complete a thought or a sentence. Push for longer eye communication - beyond your comfort zone - for it's too easy to revert back to "short" eye contact habits unless you work at it.

3. Beware of Eye Dart.

When we are under pressure or feel a lack of confidence, our instinct is to avoid the eyes of our listener.

4. Beware of Slo-Blink.

This is where a person closes his or her eyes for up to two or three seconds while speaking. It conveys the message, "I really don't want to be here."

B. *Some Basic Exercises*

1. Get Video Feedback.

2. Practice One-on-One.

3. Practice with a Paper Audience.
Stick notes on chairs, or on the wall in the room where you practice your talk - and be sure to include the faces at the fringes.
4. Watch T.V. to increase your awareness and “eye savvy” by seeing *real people* in pressure situation.

C. *The Benefits of Good Eye Communication*

1. You Feel Less Nervous (like having a series of one-on-one conversations with people).
2. You Appear Confident (whether you are or not).
3. You Focus Your Thoughts.
4. You can motivate your movement.
5. You “read” your audience by seeing individuals.

Remember: Contact eyes, not faces. Look at people for four, five, or six seconds. And exercise particularly on eliminating rapid and/or distracting eye movements.

II. Posture and Movement

The most powerful visual first impression you make comes not from your clothes but from your posture. Confidence is best expressed through good, upright posture. How you hold yourself physically is an indicator of how you hold yourself mentally.

People make a lot of assumptions about us in the first few seconds after they meet us - assumptions about our attitude, our confidence, our competence, even our rank and position. Many people have posture habits that undermine trust and convey a lack of self-assurance.

A. *The Basic Rules*

1. Stand Tall.
Stand with your shoulders back and your stomach in. Also, stand straight and move naturally. Remain fluid rather than locked into a rigid position.

2. Watch Your Lower Body.

One of the most common posture problems is “going back on one hip.” This position communicates, “I don’t want to be here.” Other common variations are rocking from side to side or going forward and back from heel to toe.

3. Get in the “Ready Position.”

The Ready Position means basically “weight forward.” Lean slightly forward, knees somewhat flexed, so you can bounce lightly on the balls of your feet. You should feel like an athlete ready to move easily and quickly in any direction.

4. Move.

To make emotional contact with our listeners, we need to convey excitement, enthusiasm, and confidence when we speak. Motion is visual! Motion is energetic! Also, get rid of any physical barriers between yourself and your audience. And, beware of repetitive and mechanical movement - it can be worse than standing still.

B. *Some Basic Exercises*

1. The Miss American Exercise or Walk Away from the Wall.

2. Use the Ready Position.

Direct your energy forward, toward your listener.

3. Begin the Two Step.

The Two Step is simply a technique to help us remember to *take at least two full steps* - then keep moving. Remember, we communicate with *all* of ourselves, and movement is a reflection of energy, excitement, and enthusiasm.

4. Practice with a Paper Audience.

With Post-It notes on chairs, give your presentation to your paper audience.

5. See Your Posture and Movements on Video.

The most definitive form of feedback is video feedback. A video camcorder sees all, tells all.

C. *The Benefits of Good Posture and Movement.*

1. You Feel Taller and More Powerful.

2. You Look More Confident.

3. Your Movement Makes Eye Communication Easier (they work together).
4. Your Habit of Being “Forward” in the Ready Position Helps You Be “Psychologically” Forward.
5. Your Movement Gives Variety to the Eye of the Audience.

III. Dress and Appearance

“You never get a second chance to make a good first impression.” John Molloy

A. *The Basic Rules*

1. Be Appropriate.
There is not so much a right or wrong way to dress as there is an appropriate way. First, be appropriate to your environment and, second, be appropriate to *yourself*. Some tips for appropriateness:
 - a. Conservative is better for business.
 - b. Dress and groom up, not down. It is safer, and more comfortable, to be overdressed than underdressed.
 - c. For women, if in doubt about a pantsuit, don't. A suit, dress, or skirt and blouse is fine in almost all business settings. A pantsuit often makes a statement you might not want to make.
 - d. Pick the two or three basic colors that look good on you, and then get all your clothes in those colors. Mix and match those basics, and let accessories provide the accents (scarves, ties, etc.).
2. Dress and Groom at the Conscious Level.
3. Button Your Jacket.

B. *Some Basic Exercises*

1. Get People Feedback.
2. Be Observant.
3. Test Out Your First Two Seconds.
Remember that people form their first and often lasting impressions of you in the *first two seconds* after meeting you. Those impressions are primarily from your dress and appearance. Find out what people *really* think by asking them.

C. *The Benefits of Good Dress and Appearance*

1. You Feel Confident in How You Look.
2. You Take Less Time Dressing and Grooming When You Know What You Are Doing, and Why.
3. You Make a Positive Impression That Adds to your Effectiveness (and you don't have to *overcome* a negative first impression).
4. You Can More Easily Make Positive Changes in your Dress and Appearance Than Any Other Skill, and Thus Gain Immediate Benefit.

Remember: Be appropriate, be conscious, and be smart.

IV. **Gestures and Smile**

Gestures and smiles are the dominant visual component of spoke communication. Our gestures and smiles reveal our inner state and propel our message with energy and emotional force.

A. *The Basic Rules*

1. Find Your Nervous Gesture, and Stop Making It.
2. You Can't Overexaggerate [usually].
There is a wide disparity between how *we* perceive our gestures and expressions and how *others* perceive them.
3. Smile, and Find Out Which "Third" You Are In.
Approximately one-third of us have naturally open and smiling faces. The middle third tend to have neutral faces that can readily go from a smile to a serious and intense look. The "lower third" have faces that are naturally serious and intense (if not downright grim!) - even when they *think* they are smiling!
4. Lift Your Apples.
There's nothing mysterious about a smile, except the magical effect it has on others. The best way to practice smiling is not by moving your lips to form a smile. Think rather of raising your cheekbones. Consider the upper part of your cheeks as apples and just "lift your apples" to smile.
5. Your Smile Affects You.
6. Caution: Phony Smiles Don't Work.

B. *Some Basic Exercises*

1. Practice Exaggeration.
2. Exaggerate in a Mirror.
3. Exaggerate on Videotape.
4. Get Big.
As you exercise your gesture, look for phrases and concepts in your talk that *demand* bigger gestures. Find ideas that are larger, greater, better, more wonderful - ideas that push you into expressing them with energetic, visually dynamic gestures.
5. Imitate an “Expressor.”

C. *The Benefits of Good Gestures and Smile*

1. You Are Free To Express Your Thoughts Fully.
2. You Smile - and the World Smiles With You.
3. Your Natural Energy Can Be Released.
4. Your Open Gestures Show Your Openness, and Thus a Willingness to Listen as Well as Talk.
5. You are Capable of Emphasizing Important Points or Concepts With Ease When You are in the Habit of Freely Gesturing.

Remember: Put movement and energy into your gestures. Use *big* gestures - but make sure to gesture within your natural energy level. Affected, unnatural gestures make you look artificial and wooden. Yet even basically shy and lowkey people can express energy by practicing the exercises listed above. And above all, *smile!*

V. **Voice and Vocal Variety**

A. *The Basic Rules*

1. Make Your Voice Naturally Authoritative.
If you discover you have a high, nasal sounding voice, you can work on bringing it down into a lower register.

2. Develop the Voice on a Roller Coaster.
People associate a rich, well-projected voice with authority and competence. Avoid monotone. Visualize your voice as a roller coaster; life it over the summit, then let it plummet. This mental exercise forces you to be aware of the dynamic range of your voice and puts you in the habit of extending that range by adding variety to your voice.
3. Be Aware of Your Telephone Voice.
Research shows that your voice - the intonation, resonance or auditory delivery of your message counts for as much as *84 percent* of your emotional impact and believability when people can't see you-such as when you're talking on the phone! Does your telephone voice differ from your speaking voice? If so, why? Are you more expressive and energetic on the phone?
4. Put Your Real Feelings into Your Voice.
Put a "smile" into your voice. Be conscious of the emotional signals your voice sends. If you feel happy, excited, and enthusiastic, *let your voice show it*.

B. *Some Basic Exercises*

1. Tone and Relax.
 - a. Your head and neck.
 - b. Your shoulders.
 - c. Your face.
 - d. Your lips.
2. Breathe From the Diaphragm.
3. Learn to Project Your Voice.
Mentally *push* your voice out beyond the last row of an imaginary audience. Don't push the sound from your throat. Propel it from your stomach and diaphragm. Make your diaphragm support your voice.
4. Practice Your Pitch.
Say various test sentences in a lilting, singsong fashion, up-and-down.
5. Practice Varying Your Pace.
Try varying the speed of your delivery. Practice using a long pause.

C. *The Benefits of Good Voice and Vocal Variety*

1. You Are More Effective on the Telephone.
2. You Can Convey Emotions When You Have a Flexible Voice.
3. You Are Attractive to the Ear.
4. You Have the Capability to Emphasize Certain Points and Ideas With Vocal Energy and Variation.
5. You Are “First Brain (first impression/initial response] Friendly.”

VI. **Words and Nonwords**

WORDS: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”
Proverbs 25:11

A. *The Basic Rules*

1. Build Your Vocabulary.
Stretch your vocabulary. Don’t use words to show off, but continually be on the lookout for new words that can help you communicate in the clearest, most colorful, most interesting way for every situation.
2. Paint Word Pictures.
Our goal is not to impress, but *to make an impression*. A rich and varied language can be one of the best tools at our command for getting our point across with energy and impact.
3. Beware of Jargon.
When you are moving in circles outside your professional field, you have to speak English again! Jargon-addicts don’t communicate. They just turn people off. Jargon-addicts convey the impression that they feel superior to their listeners.

NONWORDS (The Pause) – “*The notes I handle no better than many pianists. But the pauses between the notes... ah, that is where the art resides!*”

Artur Schnabel

To communicate effectively, you must be aware of nonwords that obstruct your message. The most common nonwords are “uhh,” “ahh,” and “umm.” Others include sounds and phrases as, “so,” “well,” “you know,” “and,” “okay,” “like,” “sort of,” and similar nonsense noises we use to fill the empty spaces in our communication. As in, “Well ... uhhh ... annnnnnnnd ...” Nonwords bleed the Energy Factor right out of your message.

They make you appear hesitant, *uncertain*, incompetent. Most of us are *addicted* to using nonwords that choke the energy level and retard the effectiveness of our *communication*. But there is a way out with the help of some simple behavior modification techniques.

A. *The Basic Rules*

1. Find Your Level of Nonwords.
Listen to yourself on tape. Count the nonwords you use. Awareness will help you control the nonword habit.
2. Replace Your Nonwords with Something More Powerful.
3. Use the “Power of the Pause.”
You can pause for as long as three or four seconds, right in the middle of a sentence - and it will not only seem perfectly natural to your listener, it will give extra punch to your message.

B. *Some Basic Exercises*

1. Record Yourself
Use video-or audiotaping regularly to practice leaving pauses, and to sensitize yourself to your nonword patterns. It won't take long for you to sharpen your ear to those irritants.
2. Use Voice Mail.
3. Practice With a Buddy.
4. Practice the Pause.

C. *The Benefit of Good Words and No Nonwords*

1. You Are Memorable in Your Language.
2. You Appear Confident and Intelligent.
3. You Can Use “The Pause” for Dramatic Emphasis.
4. You No Longer Belong to the Great Mass of Nonword Irritators.
5. You Become More First Brain Friendly.

Remember: Use colorful, jargon-less language, and replace nonwords with a good three-second pause.

VII. Listener Involvement

“Your listeners won’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”
Anonymous

A. *The Eight Basics*

1. Use Drama.
Involve your listener with a strong opening. Start with a striking statement, a dramatic story, or a question that forces the listener to focus on your message. Use action and motion. Use your voice to create drama: vocal tone or pitch variation, dramatic pauses, and strong emotional content (anger, sorrow, joy, laughter).
2. Maintain Eye Communication.
Don’t look over the heads of your audience; *meet them in the eye!* Maintain three to six seconds of eye contact with as many individuals as possible. Don’t forget to include people in the “fringes.” Read the eye contact they give back to you. Gauge whether your listeners are bored, wary, hostile, interested, or enthusiastic - and *adjust* your approach accordingly.
3. Move.
Never back away from your audience - it makes you look intimidated. In fact, at both the beginning and end of your talk, it lends force to your message to take a few steps *toward* your listeners.
4. Use Visuals.
Mix assorted kinds of media in order to keep the visual dimension varied and interesting. Rehearse the visual part of your presentation so that transitions will be fluid rather than fumbling.
5. Ask Questions.
Rhetorical questions will keep your listeners thinking and focused. Asking for a volunteer (something you can do occasionally) is even more involving.
6. Use Demonstrations.
7. Use Samples and Gimmicks.
Be creative but be careful. Gimmicks can backfire, so proceed with caution.
8. Create Interest.
Most listeners today have a short attention span. Use eye contact to gauge your listeners’ involvement. Keep *your own* interest level high.

B. *Some Basic Exercises*

1. Be Creative.
Always look at what you could do *differently*.
2. Try Something New.
Push yourself to try something new.

C. *The Benefits of Good Listener Involvement.*

1. You Keep Your Listeners' Energy Up.
2. You Keep Your Energy Up.
3. You Can Get More of Your Concepts and Ideas Across When You Have the Interest and Involvement of Your Audience.
4. You Have More Fun.
5. Your Audience Has More Fun.
6. It Reinforces Other Good Communication Habits, Like Eye Communication, Movement, Etc.

Remember: You are a human being, not a book. Don't just dispense information. Involve your listener and *make emotional contact*.

VIII. **Humor**

A. *The Basic Rules*

1. Don't Tell Jokes.
Unless you are in that rare ninety-ninth percentile who can actually tell a joke successfully - with timing, delivery, and flair – *don't*.
2. Fun is Better Than Funny.
Your goal is not comedy but *connection* - creating [when appropriate] an atmosphere of fun, friendliness, and openness.
3. Find the Form of Humor That Works for You.
4. Use the Humor in Language.
The right emphasis of a single word can provoke a laugh and cement the connection between you and your listener.

B. *Some Basic Exercises*

1. Think Funny.
What makes you laugh? Find out, and use it in your own communications. Look for the humor in the serious - it is almost always there.
2. Think Friendly.
3. Write Down Your Humor.
Keep a journal or diary of observations and funny quotations, anecdotes, and stories -- especially those stories that happen to you.

C. *The Benefits of Good Humor*

1. You Will Be More Likeable.
2. You Will Have More Fun.
3. Your Listeners Will Have More Fun.
4. People Will Be More Eager to Be With You, and to Hear You Speak.
5. You will be *Much* more First Brain Friendly.
6. You Will Find More Energy and Vitality in Your Life.

Remember: Life should be *fun* - so have fun with life. Think funny, and then speak up and share that fun with others!

CONSCIOUS STEPS FOR TRANSFORMING YOUR COMMUNICATION

By Bert Decker

(pgs. 276-277)

1. Think First Brain!
2. Know Your Strengths and Weaknesses.
3. Focus on One Skill at a Time.
4. Speak at Every Opportunity.
5. Get Feedback.
6. See Yourself on Videotape.
7. Take Risks.
8. Just Do It!

PERSONALIZED IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM FOR PREACHERS (P.I.P.P.)

By Timothy Turner

1. Tape your preaching.
2. View the tape and evaluate.
3. Prioritize a “needs improvement” list.
4. Choose one area to improve.
5. Plan the changes.
6. Preach!

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

“The ability to express an idea is well nigh as important as the idea itself.” - Bernard Baruch

“There is *a big* difference between the way we see and experience our own performance and the way others see us.” - Bert Decker

“The spoken word is almost the polar opposite of the written word... In the spoken medium, what you say must be believed to have impact. Believability is overwhelmingly determined at a preconscious level.” - Bert Decker

“When the conduct of men is designed to be influenced, persuasion, kind, unassuming persuasion, should ever be adopted. It is an old and a true maxim that a drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall. So with men. If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend. Therein is a drop of honey that catches his heart, which, say what he will, is the great high road to his reason, and which, once gained, you will find but little trouble in convincing his judgment of the justice of your cause, if indeed that cause really be a just one. On the contrary, assume to dictate to his judgment, or to command his action ... and he will retreat within himself, close all the avenues to his head and his heart. . . Such is man, and so must he be understood by those who would lead him...” - Abraham Lincoln, 1842

“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson

“What you do speaks so loud I can't hear what you say.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson

“In my library are about a thousand volumes of biography - a rough calculation indicates that more of these deal with men who have talked themselves upward than with all the scientists, writers, saints and doers combined. Talkers have always ruled. They will continue to rule. The smart thing is to join them.” - Bruce Barton (1886-1967)

“. . . any preacher not in the communication business goes out of business.” - Timothy Turner

“Those who would reach the various listeners of our day must: 1) penetrate their mind; 2) stimulate their affections; 3) persuade their wills.” - Timothy Turner