



**COMMUNICATE  
LIKE A  
LEADER**

**CONNECTING**

**STRATEGICALLY**

**TO INSPIRE, COACH, AND  
GET THINGS DONE**

**DIANNA BOOHER**

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *CREATING PERSONAL PRESENCE*

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**COMMUNICATE LIKE A LEADER**

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# COMMUNICATE LIKE\* A LEADER

Connecting Strategically  
to Coach, Inspire, and  
Get Things Done

BY **DIANNA BOOHER**

*\*To all you strict grammarians  
out there: Yes, we know “like”  
in the book’s title should be “as.”  
But what do you want—good  
grammar or a good title?*



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# Communicate Like a Leader

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**COMMUNICATE LIKE A LEADER**

## INTRODUCTION

# The Challenge of Leadership Communication

*Without strategy, execution is aimless.*

*Without execution, strategy is useless.*

—MORRIS CHANG,  
CHINESE AND AMERICAN BUSINESSMAN,  
FOUNDING CHAIRMAN OF TAIWAN SEMICONDUCTOR

Just what you don't want to find in your inbox on a Monday morning: A resignation letter from an excellent employee. No reason given and no mention of another job offer. I called Rachel in to ask for an explanation.

"I just can't take it anymore." She started to tear up.

"Take what?" I asked. She worked in another wing of our building, and I was indeed clueless about why the marketing specialist was so unhappy in her job.

"I just can't work for him anymore." I did at least know the "him" she reported to as her supervisor. "I get a big knot in my stomach every morning before I come to work. Really physically sick. My husband has been trying to get me to resign for months. July has been terrible. Wally hasn't spoken to me all month. Walks right past my desk every

morning. Goes to lunch right past my desk every day. Doesn't say a word."

"I'm sorry to hear this."

"He's always angry about something he thinks I didn't do right. I never know exactly what. He just completely ignores me."

"How do you know he's angry at you?"

"Because when he is speaking, he's cross-examining me. He doesn't trust me. Every time I leave my desk for fifteen minutes, when I get back, it's, 'Where have you been?' 'Why did that take so long?' And after I hang up the phone, it's, 'Who was that?' 'What did you tell them?' I've never given him any reason *not* to trust me. He's just always looking over my shoulder, double-checking everything. And I learned to handle the client calls from listening to *him!*" She started to tear up again.

"I'm sorry. I had no idea this was happening."

Rachel had been a quick learner, picking up pointers from all our star performers in and out of the office. Consequently, she'd been able to take on more responsibility than her original job entailed.

"One day he's talking to me about his family, and my family, movies—like we're best friends. And the next day, he's treating me like I can't be trusted."

"How long has this been going on?"

"A year."

## **FROM BUDDY TO BULLY—UNINTENTIONALLY**

"People don't leave an organization; they leave a boss" has become a truism in the workplace for good reason. Emotional instability, for whatever reason, can infect the workplace and lower productivity as surely as malfunctioning equipment. Often, the person causing the retention problem has moved from buddy to bully without intending ill will. It just "happens." That boss got promoted from supervisor to manager or from manager to senior executive without adequate leadership and communication skills for the job. As a result, the boss gets stuck in micromanagement mode.

If that person happens to be *you*, this book will help you get unstuck. These strategic communication skills, attitudes, and mindsets separate those

- Professionals who succeed at the executive level from those who don't
- Star sales professionals breaking through barriers and exceeding quotas from those living paycheck to paycheck
- Millennials tagged as “high-potentials” from those labeled average performers
- Entrepreneurs who succeed wildly from those who barely eke out a living

The most visible difference in each of these situations is a person's ability to communicate vision, initiatives, assignments, ideas, and strategy to audiences at all levels in various settings.

**Emotional instability** for whatever reason can infect the workplace and lower productivity as surely as **malfunctioning equipment**.

## WHAT IS STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION?

Strategic communication forms the very core of leadership. When you as a leader speak, meet, negotiate, write, or network, you either clarify or confuse, motivate or demoralize, engage or enrage employees. And they, in return, will either give 110 percent of their loyalty, support, and skill to accomplish your mission—or disengage, divert your focus, and drain your energy in dealing with them.

The dictionary defines *strategic* as “pivotal,” “essential,” or “relating to long-term importance to achieve a plan or goal.” That's how I'll be

using “strategic” going forward in this book: those messages, meetings, conversations, discussions, or presentations that have pivotal, long-term payoff versus “routine” communication.

Back to Rachel’s situation. Fortunately, my company did get Rachel’s situation corrected by changing her reporting relationship and getting counseling for her supervisor, and she did stay with us. But similar problems occur daily in the workforce. Such situations become a crisis for all involved for these reasons:

- Micromanaged employees work and live under undue stress that often leads to job loss—either by their choice or by termination.
- Micromanagers become less and less productive under a heavier and heavier workload because they do their own regular job—and then take on the jobs of those they supervise.
- Organizations lose some of their best employees and grow less productive and profitable because professionals who get promoted for their technical skills do not learn the strategic communication skills necessary to succeed in their new leadership role.

We’ll discuss several reasons for micromanagement and how to overcome it later in the book. But for now, my point is that fewer and fewer professionals arrive at their position with all the leadership communication skills they need to master the job.

In a recent *Wall Street Journal* survey of nearly 900 executives, 92 percent said soft skills were equally or more important than technical skills. But 89 percent reported that they had a very or somewhat difficult time finding people with those attributes. And they say the problem spans all age groups and experience levels.<sup>1</sup>



## **ALWAYS TRANSLATE TO THE STRATEGIC**

As Cool Hand Luke famously said in the movie by the same name, “What we’ve got here is a failure to communicate.” To paraphrase his observation: What we have here is a failure to translate to the strategic message for groups at different levels in your organization.

For example, let’s say your daughter Jordan has won first place in the school district’s ninth-grade science fair, and you’re proud of her research for that innovative project. You tell the grandparents about the big win, and they’re thrilled as well. Assume you have a family reunion the following month with more than 100 cousins, aunts, uncles, and in-laws attending. Tell them about the same science project, and you’ll probably find them less interested than Jordan’s grandparents. After all, the aunts, uncles, and cousins have kids involved in science projects of their own.

Then let’s assume you have an industry meeting the next week, and you tell that group about Jordan’s science project. How interested will they be? And how interested will your seatmate on your cross-country flight be when you tell him about the science project? Unless you share a profound lesson learned about volunteerism or fund-raising success that applies to professional associations or to your seatmate’s company, your listener will probably care a great deal *less* than the grandparents.

The further removed the link to your child, the less the listener cares about your news—and the greater skill you’ll need to find a worthwhile idea to share from the science project. In other words, your ability to take an experience from one context and reapply it in a larger context to a different audience with wider interests represents strategic insight and communication.

We intuitively understand this need to translate in personal situations. But many leaders fail to “get it” in the workplace. In doing presentation coaching, I can’t tell you how often managers have told me about trying to give the same presentation to several different audiences and levels of management—and failing.

## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION VERSUS TACTICAL COMMUNICATION

Whether you're in marketing, sales, operations, finance, research, IT, legal, or human resources, tactical thinkers communicate directives to get things done. They decide who does what when. Unfortunately, the tactical things that get done may not always be the *wisest* things or the *most profitable* things with long-term payoff. Tactical thinking is critical—but common.

Still, strategic thinkers stand out from the crowd. Big-picture thinking uniquely positions you as the resource for focus, problem analysis, and innovation.

But strategic thinking puts points on the scoreboard *only if you can communicate your thinking clearly*. And the more respect your thinking earns—that is, the more visibility you get—the more often you'll need to communicate your thinking up, down, and across the organization.

This book offers help as you think and communicate strategically to fulfill your most essential responsibilities as a leader. **Its 36 brief chapters fall into six distinct categories—a suite of leadership communication skills.**

- People Development  
(hiring, firing, assigning, directing, coaching)
- Conversations
- Negotiations
- Speaking
- Writing
- Meetings

Why leadership communication? Because communication comprises the essence of influencing a team to accomplish a mission. The book is NOT intended to be a comprehensive, all-purpose management or leadership book. Neither does this volume focus on general

interpersonal skills. My earlier book *Communicate With Confidence: How to Say It Right the First Time and Every Time* contains more than 1,200 tips to improve interpersonal communication in myriad situations at work, home, and elsewhere.

Rather, this book focuses specifically on those relationships, situations, and decisions you face because of your position and responsibility as a leader. Recall that strategic refers to something essential or pivotal for the long term. In that sense, the degree to which you can communicate strategically in every interaction will determine your ultimate success with peers, staff, clients, suppliers, and your own executive team.

Tactical thinkers get things done. Strategic thinkers get the *right* things done. Tactical communicators tell others how to get things done. Strategic communicators *lead others* to get the *right* things done. They

- Cast the vision, chart the course, and “go first” to lead the way and set the example
- Communicate up and down the chain of command and across department lines to make sure all stakeholders understand the big-picture impact
- Network strategically to connect and involve the right people for input and participation—and then negotiate for mutual benefit
- Speak persuasively, write clearly, and conduct meetings that deliver results

Consequently, strategic thinkers and communicators typically end up in the executive ranks of large organizations or build their own entrepreneurial business. Whatever your plans, strategic communication will be the smoothest, most direct route to success.

PART 1

# STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

## Think Long-Term Investment in People and Payoff

*Leadership is not a magnetic personality, that can just as well be a glib tongue. It is not “making friends and influencing people,” that is flattery. Leadership is lifting a person’s vision to higher sights, the raising of a person’s performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations.*

—PETER F. DRUCKER, AUSTRIAN-BORN AMERICAN  
MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT, EDUCATOR, AND AUTHOR

*Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without the strategy.*

—GENERAL NORMAN SCHWARZKOPF, UNITED STATES ARMY,  
WHO LED ALL COALITION FORCES IN THE GULF WAR

*The art of effective listening is essential to clear communication, and clear communication is necessary to management success.*

—JAMES CASH PENNEY, BUSINESSMAN AND ENTREPRENEUR  
WHO FOUNDED THE J. C. PENNEY RETAIL CHAIN

## CHAPTER 1

# Communicating as a Leader and as a Manager

*The people who influence you are  
the people who believe in you.*

—HENRY DRUMMOND, 18TH-CENTURY  
ENGLISH BANKER, AUTHOR, AND MEMBER  
OF THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT

When my client Mitch visited our office, he had both good news and bad news. “Let me give you the good news first. . . . A couple of partners and I just bought a telecom at a great price—basically a spin-off of the entire division I used to manage.”

“That is great news.” I followed up with several questions and learned that the spin-off he referred to was from a nationally known company that had downsized his entire division.

“The downsizing didn’t sound exactly like good news at the time,” Mitch continued. “But it has turned out that way. That is, if we can make a go of this telecom venture.”

“Well, I’d say you’re off to a good start. Everything sounds like *good* news so far,” I said.

“Right. . . . Well, here’s the *bad* news: I’ve placed about 40 to 45 technical experts in leadership roles. Brilliant at their individual jobs—don’t get me wrong. But they’ve had only *limited* experience as managers. At best, they were supervisors at their old jobs. . . . They have the technical know-how. But now they need to communicate with their peers in other areas, deal with customers and suppliers, and interact with the executive leaders on the new team.”

I nodded, not wanting to interrupt to tell him how common his story sounded.

“They’re communicating at about this level,” Mitch gestured with a wave of his hand about mid-thigh, as if measuring the height of a small child, “and I need them to start thinking and communicating from this perspective.” He repeated the gesture at hairline level.

Our communication consulting firm hears this complaint frequently regarding how staff members deliver executive briefings and write sales proposals.

“If I can give you these people for a few days, can you teach them what they need to know to become real leaders—not just good in their functional roles?”

Music to my ears. I always love hearing someone voice the difference between *managing* (maintaining the status quo) and *leading* (improving the status quo).

You may hire a financial advisor to “manage” your money during a great bull market. He or she may help you reorganize your investments: consolidate your accounts from two different organizations into one bank account, project your future income needs for a child’s education or your own retirement, and consolidate your mutual fund investments into fewer families of funds. But after a year, if that person is not increasing the *value* of your investment portfolio, you’ll probably be looking for a new financial advisor. You want someone who can *improve* the situation, not simply *maintain* it.

That distinction between leader and manager may have absolutely *nothing* to do with position or title. You can lead as a project team

member, an association member, a parent, a researcher, a customer, or an assistant.

Consider the nine differences between leaders and maintainers in the following chart.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
**MAINTAINERS AND LEADERS**

<b>Managers/Maintainers</b>	<b>Leaders</b>
Have information, facts, or skills. They may even show mastery of a craft, job, or topic.	Have superior reasoning skills and judgment. They know how to apply their information, the facts, or their skills to a specific situation at the right time, in the right way, for the best outcome for all concerned.
Often try to lead people from the simple to the complex.	Most often try to break the complex down to the simple.
Take things apart to analyze.	Put things together to conclude and apply.
Like to do things their way. They tend to place great trust in their own expertise and control. Their thinking seems to follow the old adage: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."	Like to get input from several trusted sources. They listen with an open mind and weigh facts and ideas before rushing to accept or reject these ideas as valid.
Know when to be abstract to avoid offense, blame, or questions.	Know when an ounce of concrete and specificity is worth a ton of abstraction.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MAINTAINERS AND LEADERS *(cont.)*

Managers/Maintainers	Leaders
Communicate directly and frequently. These communication habits ensure control of processes and people.	Communicate directly, frequently, consistently, tactfully, and compassionately. These communication habits demonstrate passion, engagement, and concern.
Practice self-discipline and <i>expect</i> their staff to do the same.	Understand <i>why</i> they practice self-discipline and <i>inspire</i> their staff to do the same.
Do things right.	Do the right things.
Always know <i>how</i> to do things.	Always know <i>why</i> to do things.

As you plan strategic communication—whether for a conversation, a briefing, a report, a meeting, or an email—keep in mind these principles: The right timing. A clear conclusion. Specific application to your audience. Simple, tactful, concerned phrasing. The *why* behind the decision or action. Inspiration. The right thing to do. We’ll dig deeper into all these principles as we move further through the book.

- ▶ ***The manager’s goal:*** Smooth, flawless operations.
- ▶ ***The leader’s goal:*** Improve the situation. “Up” the game or performance. Increase the value or asset.



## CHAPTER 2

# Have a Ready Answer for THIS One Key Question —Always

*Like a diaphanous nightgown, language both hides and reveals.*

—KAREN ELIZABETH GORDON, AUTHOR

**A**s a leader, you hear questions every day, some serious, some trivial. “What do you hear about the merger plans?” “Do you think our budget is going to be cut?” “Can we get an extension on the deadline?” “Are we going to have to work over the weekend?”

But the ONE question that you have to answer correctly every time is this: “What are you working on?”

It’s particularly critical that you get the answer right when responding to your boss. Your reputation can also suffer when you flub that question with peers.

### **WHY IS THIS SO DIFFICULT?**

For the most part, you and your team need to communicate details to run your project, department, or division. For that, you need charts,

graphs, slides, spreadsheets, meetings, presentations, proposals, metrics, and reports. You accomplish things with these tools, and the associated data make perfect sense to you. The abbreviations, acronyms, illustrations, and other shortcuts save you time and ensure a common understanding.

So you have a tendency to try to communicate with the same tools and in that same fashion to those outside your functional area.

But don't.

That jargon, those communication tools, and that level of detail won't make sense to people on the outside. They'll likely conclude that you don't know how to synthesize, summarize, and interpret how your work contributes to the big picture of the organization.

Granted, habits are difficult to break. But they can hinder communication and halt your career growth.

But the **ONE question** that you have to answer correctly every time is this:  
**"What are you working on?"**

### **SO HOW SHOULD YOU ANSWER THAT ONE QUESTION?**

Put aside your complicated tools. Forget how much effort you've put into the project. Time spent does not equal value created. Instead, focus on these few things to answer the big question:

Part 1: We're working on solving X problem(s).

Part 2: Here's why it matters to the organization. . . .

Part 3: Here are the outcomes we're working toward. . . .

Part 4: *(Optional—depending on who asked the question)*

This is how the work may affect the budget and timeline as far as you're concerned. . . .

**TIME** spent does not equal  
**VALUE** created.

## **HOW DO YOU EDUCATE OTHERS OUTSIDE YOUR FUNCTIONAL AREA?**

You shouldn't and you don't.

If you do, you'll be irrelevant. While coaching sales teams on presentations or sales proposals, I frequently hear such comments as "We have to educate our customers on our product" or "Our customers really don't understand how best to use our process and the services we provide, so our real challenge is to educate them on exactly what we do."

I have to bite my tongue to keep from shouting, "How insulting to your customers!" That's like saying, "We need smarter customers." Very few customers will likely agree with you on that.

Ditto with internal customers. They don't want to be "educated" about what *you're* doing. They want *you* to be educated about what *they're* doing and then translate what *you're* doing for them. In other words, get aboard *their* train.

## **SO WHAT'S YOUR REAL JOB AS A STRATEGIC THINKER AND LEADER?**

Become a translator: "So what that means for you (for the organization, for our customers, for our partners, for our suppliers) is that . . ."

Sift through and analyze the metrics, data, and details needed for your functional role. Then draw some conclusions about the bigger picture: How does your work benefit them? Their budget? Their deadlines? Their costs? Their savings? Their profits? Their processes? Make their work easier? But never pass on your raw information.

Instead, communicate clearly an answer to this ONE question: "What are you working on?" And if your answer is strategic (relevant, tailored, and timely), the listener will care.

That's relevancy. And staying relevant is a leader's strategic responsibility.

## About the Author

Dianna Booher's life work has centered around communication in all its forms: oral, written, interpersonal, and enterprise-wide. As author of 47 books, translated into 60 foreign-language editions, she has traveled the globe, talking with clients and organizations on six continents about communication challenges they face at work and at home. Despite the cultural differences, two things remain the same: Communication is the basic business act. And communication either cements or destroys personal and work relationships.

Improving communication skills, habits, and attitudes dramatically changes life—for an individual, a family, an organization, and a nation. Dianna considers that an exciting and rewarding business and personal goal.

Based in the Dallas–Fort Worth Metroplex, her firm Booher Research Institute works with organizations to help them communicate clearly and with leaders to expand their influence by a strong executive presence. She also founded the communication training firm Booher Consultants, which provides training to corporate clients on writing, presentation skills, and interpersonal skills. Specifically, she has provided communication programs and coaching to some of the largest Fortune 500 companies and governmental agencies: IBM, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, ExxonMobil, BP, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, Ericsson, Siemens,



Alcatel-Lucent, Brinker International, J.P. Morgan Chase, Merrill Lynch, Hallmark, Marriott, Northwestern Mutual, Principal Financial Insurance, PepsiCo, Novartis, Bayer, the US Department of the Army, the US Naval Surface Warfare Center, and NASA.

*Successful Meetings* magazine has named Dianna to its list of “21 Top Speakers for the 21st Century.” The National Speakers Association has awarded her its highest honor: induction into the Speakers Hall of Fame. She is also listed among the “Global Gurus Top 30 Communicators.”

The national media frequently interview Dianna for opinions on critical communication issues: *Good Morning America*, *USA Today*, *Forbes.com*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Fast Company*, *Success*, *Entrepreneur*, *Investor’s Business Daily*, Fox, CNN, CNBC, Bloomberg, NPR, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*.

She also blogs regularly for Huffington Post, *The CEO Magazine*, and FaithHappenings.com.

Dianna holds a master’s degree in English literature from the University of Houston.

*For more information about Dianna’s work and her speaking engagements, visit [www.BooherResearch.com](http://www.BooherResearch.com).*

# HOW TO WORK WITH DIANNA BOOHER AND BOOHER RESEARCH

## **KEYNOTES AND CONSULTING**

If you have any of these challenges, projects, or goals, Dianna can help:

- “Our next group of young leaders needs help to move up to the senior level—they lack executive presence.”
- “Our salespeople make face-to-face presentations, and they need more polish.”
- “Our proposals aren’t working! We’re losing business deals that should be ours.”
- “We can’t get our projects and budgets approved by the executive team!”
- “People say there’s no communication around here, but we send them plenty of information, hold regular staff meetings, and update our intranet. So we have no idea what they mean!”
- “We get far too many customer complaints about our communication. It’s costing us time and money to respond.”

## **COACHING ON EXECUTIVE PRESENCE, SALES PRESENTATIONS, OR BOOK WRITING AND PUBLISHING**

- If you’d like to increase your executive presence to move up in the organization, we will design an individual coaching program on topics to fit your needs and schedule.
- If your speakers for an upcoming meeting are experts in their field—but are not necessarily engaging speakers—we can help them shape and deliver a dynamic presentation!

—If you're an entrepreneur, CEO, consultant, or other professional wanting to establish your credentials by writing and publishing a book with a major publisher, Dianna can coach you through that process as well. Go to [www.GetYourBookPublishedCoachingProgram.com](http://www.GetYourBookPublishedCoachingProgram.com)

After consulting and coaching at more than one-third of the Fortune 500 organizations, Dianna has the research, expertise, and practical techniques to help you reach your goals.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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### **Please connect on your favorite social media channels**

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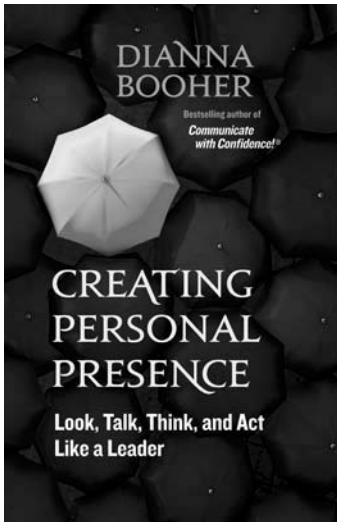
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*For more on this topic, go to [www.CommunicateLikeALeaderBook.com](http://www.CommunicateLikeALeaderBook.com) to download a Discussion Guide and other learning resources.*

Another Book by Dianna Booher

# Creating Personal Presence

Look, Talk, Think, and Act Like a Leader



Personal presence is difficult to define but easy to recognize. People with presence carry themselves in a way that turns heads. When they talk, people listen. When they ask, people answer. When they lead, people follow. Personal presence can help you get a date, a mate, a job, or a sale. It can help you lead a meeting, a movement, or an organization. Presence is not something you're born with—anyone can learn these skills, habits, and traits. Dianna Booher shows how to master dozens of small and significant things that work together to convey presence. She details how body language, manners, and even your surroundings enhance credibility and build rapport. You'll learn to use voice and language to demonstrate competence, deliver clear and memorable messages, and master emotions. With Dianna Booher's expert, entertaining advice, you can have the same kind of influence as the most successful CEOs, celebrities, and civic leaders. Learn more at [www.booherresearch.com](http://www.booherresearch.com).

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