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How To Communicate Like A Leader



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Build a persuasive case. ICLIPART

By Dianna Booher—

You may hold the position but lack the influence. If you sit behind the boss's desk, people may have to follow your directives, but they don't have to show

up with enthusiasm and demonstrate loyalty for the long term. Leaders, on the other hand, wield more power when and where it counts.

You've heard this axiom from motivational speakers and read it in books: "You don't need a title to be a leader." But what you do need are the communication skills to influence someone to follow you—to accept your ideas, to sign off on the proposed action, to fund the project, to encourage their network to "show up" for you.

In practical terms, here's how those leaders distinguish themselves solely by their communication:

Leaders Build a Persuasive Case

Contrary to popular belief, persuasion, a neutral word, can be used for good or bad. You can persuade someone for noble purposes or selfish interests. When politicians, athletes, movie stars, or managers slip into crass or manipulative behavior, we boycott their events, badmouth their leadership, and say they have no class.

But when a physician persuades an obese patient to lose weight for the sake of better health and longer life, we applaud. When a parent persuades his drug-addicted nineteen-year-old to check into rehab, we support the parent's efforts. When an engineer delivers a persuasive proposal challenging the feasibility of remodeling a building to city safety standards, we trust that her measurements are accurate and her conclusions are ironclad.

Without a doubt, leaders must know how to articulate their ideas persuasively both orally and in writing.

Leaders Synthesize and Communicate Their Reasoning

They do not force you to trudge through all the trees to convince you that you're surrounded by a forest. That is, they have the ability to gather a lot of information (incoming emails, calls, meetings, conversations, reports, industry news) and synthesize it to draw sound conclusions.

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A common malady in our day, they do not let information paralysis set in. Instead, they have an uncanny ability to analyze, discard, and combine it to make sound decisions they can explain to others.

Leaders Guide With Apt Questions

For example, if you're serving on an advisory board at work or in the community, you might lead the group to do some creative thinking with these questions:

- What specifically about the past attempts to solve this problem made them fail? In what ways is the current plan under discussion different?
- If money were no object, what would you like to see happen?
- How have other industries reached similar goals?
- Six months down the line, what if membership (donors, employees) has dropped 50 percent? What would be our fallback option?

Or if you are talking with a team member (not particularly someone who reports to you), you might guide them to rethink their performance and

outcomes on a marketing campaign with the following questions:

- How do you think the marketing campaign turned out?
- What did not go as well as you expected?
- If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently?
- May I share my observations? (After you've asked their permission, they can hardly refuse to listen. Here's where you might offer suggestions for improvements.)
- When you do the next campaign, what steps are you planning to put in place to maximize the chance that X happens as you want it to?

Questions—and their answers from the other person—cause reflection, refocus, and guide in the appropriate direction.

Leaders Speak Up—Literally

Nowhere is this communication characteristic more noticeable than in a physician's office—particularly in a large medical office or clinic with 20 to 50 staffers interacting with patients. As a caregiver for my elderly parents during the past few years, I've had many occasions to talk on the phone with healthcare staffers to set appointments, ask about test results, discuss treatment options, and provide insurance and financial information.

Just by voice volume and intensity (or lack thereof)—even if the caller were speaking a foreign language—I can tell you the “status” of another person calling before they even identify themselves fully. For example, when the cardiologist's PA (Denise) calls, the voice is firm, clear, confident. When the cardiologist's nurse (Teré) calls, she sounds childlike: timid, weak, uncertain.

The next time your credit card company or phone carrier fouls up and you have to call them about an issue, try this experiment: Listen to the voice and

see if you can determine whether you're talking to a follower or a leader, who will "own" and correct the problem.

To communicate like a leader means to speak up in a firm, clear, confident voice.

Communication is how leaders get work done.

*Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 49 books, including **Communicate Like a Leader**. She helps organizations communicate clearly. Follow her at BooherResearch.com and [@DiannaBooher](https://twitter.com/DiannaBooher).*

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