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Effective Communication of Ideas

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION OF IDEAS

PREFACE

PURPOSE AND APPROACH

Simply stated, this book is designed to guide the modern manager or professional person so that his presentations get the right results. Specifically, it centers on the oral presentation, the medium through which much of an organization's most important work is transacted.

But in emphasizing oral presentations, this book also brings in important supplements: written and graphic communications. For no manager or professional can handle his major communications problems solely through speaking. All three media — oral, written, and graphic — must be melded into an economical and effective package for successful results.

The approach combines important principles with representative samples of presentations by prominent contemporary practitioners. As basic principles are presented, they are, at the same time, demonstrated in the sample speeches.

In a word, the book's presentation merges sound theory with good practice, making its contents both meaningful and productive to anyone seriously wanting to improve his communication.

COVERAGE

Materials can be grouped into five segments.

(1) *Determining presentation need and feasibility.* Specific procedures are set out for sizing up essential versus nonessential communications, together with knowing realistically whether it is reasonable to make a presentation in a given situation. When you know these factors, you can eliminate unnecessary or infeasible communications, thereby saving a surprising amount of time and money. Furthermore, you can capitalize more effectively on those presentations which are required.

(2) *Organizing and developing ideas.* Useful ways are presented to assemble, sort, put together, and build out ideas. This stockpile of practical methods for packaging your messages is also related to the presentation specimens in the last part of the book.

(3) *Using communication media.* The uses of the three important types — audio-visual, written, and human — are thoroughly discussed. From this you have specific guidelines for judging the best medium or media to employ in a given presentation.

(4) *Using TRIM techniques.* The heart of the book, this is a simple but effective pattern for planning and carrying out presentations. TRIM refers to four essential components: the target, the receiver, the impact, and the method. Each is discussed in a separate chapter. Furthermore, each dimension is exemplified in depth by many exact references to presentation specimens. This permits you to see how speakers have actually applied each technique or device.

(5) *Presentation specimens.* These are twenty contemporary speeches by prominent business, government, and professional leaders. These presentations represent the most important types to which all managers and professional people most frequently address themselves. In addition to their uses for illustrating the book's principles, techniques, and devices, much can be learned from careful study of all as models of modern managerial and professional presentations.

SOURCES

The ideas in the book come from three basic sources: my study of and teaching of communication at the university level; my experience as a consultant to business, government, and professional organizations; and critical examination of the book's contents by many communication-conscious managers and professional people. The last source has been the most directly productive, for it gave me the invaluable insights of persons who are on the presentation firing line, and who, therefore, must produce results. This feedback played a very important part in shaping the final product seen here.

I want to give special acknowledgment to *Vital Speeches of the Day* for permission to use many of the specimens in Part IV. This cooperation was inestimably helpful, and I deeply appreciate it.

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

1

TRIM: A DESIGN FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Every experienced manager and professional person knows very well that his day-to-day work is carried out largely through communication. Almost all his activities involve some kind of information processing, whether as a sender (speaking or writing) or as a receiver (listening or reading), whether intrapersonal ("talking" to himself) or interpersonal (communicating with others). And most of these experienced people will also quickly assent to another proposition: Effective communication is by no means easily accomplished. It requires patience, planning, and skill in execution. You can only be admonished on the need for patience; however, planning and skill of execution are faculties that you can definitely learn and apply if you are willing to read and use the ideas discussed in this book. Therefore, let's go directly to our purpose of learning about our subject, starting with a working definition of effective communication.

WHAT EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS

Definitions of communication are countless. Candidly, however, most are of little practical value, so we need not bother ourselves with them. Let's look at a definition which at first may appear a little esoteric, but which, when clarified, will make sense: *Effective communication is purposive symbolic interchange resulting in workable understanding and agreement between the sender and receiver.* So that we can consider its implications for you, the manager or professional, let's go into the definitions a little more, taking it part by part.

First, effective communication is *purposive*. And by this is meant that it is *deliberately designed* to achieve a conscious end or objective. In other words, the communicator knows what he is after and plans his approach accordingly. This means that, while there are obviously many communications which are not deliberately purposive (e.g. purely social or fortuitous occasions), these are outside our consideration in this book.

Second, according to our definition, communication is the *interchange of symbols* between persons. And what are symbols? Fundamentally, they are the verbal (e.g. words, mathematical expressions, vocal intonations) and graphic (e.g. pictures, diagrams, charts, facial expressions) representations of the communicator's ideas. In other words, they are your ways of "coding" and signaling your thoughts and feelings to others.

Third, *effective communication* results in *workable understanding and agreement* between the sender and receiver. This is a most important element. What is meant is that effective communication produces a *sufficient* degree of meaning between the speaker and listener (or writer and reader), together with enough acceptance by both parties, to get desired results. This does not mean that the communication must always produce "sweetness and light" among all parties. Indeed, this is rare, and not necessarily desirable. It does mean, however, that both the communicator and receiver have enough common understanding about and willingness to accept the ideas presented to use them to get the company's work done at the requisite level. And this is all that is needed for you as an organizational manager or professional.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEFINITION

What does all this mean to you? For one thing, it means that in this book you will be studying only that managerial and professional communication which is planned, executed, and evaluated against a *defined objective*. Further, it means that we shall consider only communication *between people*. Important as they are, we shall not be concerned with man-to-machine or machine-to-machine interactions. Moreover, the definition implies that our central focus is *sender-centered* communication. In other words, the communication is *for* the receiver, but it is *from* the sender. Unquestionably communication from reader or listener perspectives is most important, but our basic approach in this book is from that of the *originator* of the presentation.

FURTHER IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Other implications and limitations need clarification. For one thing, we shall center on ways to handle *important* sender-centered communi-

cations, those that are vital for the manager or professional person in getting his job done efficiently and effectively. To be sure, what we discuss is applicable to any kind of communication, whether commonplace or exotic, but the right handling of his vital oral presentations determines in large measure whether the modern manager or professional person survives and progresses.

Furthermore, we shall concern ourselves primarily with *person-to-group oral communication*, together with *writing and graphics as supplements* to the spoken means. It goes without saying that in administered organizations oral communication is the basic vehicle for attaining managerial and professional goals. But, of course, the oral must often be complemented by appropriate written and visual communications, and it is in this light that we shall consider the combination.

Finally, we are going to work within another restriction. We shall concern ourselves with only the *most important and practical procedures and methods* to get communication across. Much material presented in many traditional speech and writing books is trivial — if not worthless — to the modern manager or professional. We shall deliberately exclude the "junk," focusing directly on those communication principles, procedures, and methods having genuine relevance for people who must work — and produce results — in today's firms, agencies, and institutions.

Let's now turn to our task.

PROCEDURE FOR COMMUNICATION DESIGN

How can you, the manager or professional, design your communication to get predictably effective results? The pattern suggested here is the result of quite a few years of administrative experience, of teaching communication, and of working with executives in business, government, and professional organizations. Properly applied, it will definitely help you in planning and carrying out your job-related presentations.

Let's look at the basic ingredients of the procedure: (1) presentation targets; (2) receiver roles; (3) desired impacts; and (4) presentation methods. To help remember these, let's put them in acronym form: TRIM. And now let's see what each means. (We shall explore these in depth in later chapters.)

T — the *target* at which you are aiming; in other words, the mission or purpose of the communication.

R — the *receiver* to whom the communication is addressed; in other words, the willingness and capacity of the listener-reader to understand and accept your message.

I — the *impact* which is needed; in other words, how the communication must affect the receiver if you are to hit the target and influence him as needed.

M — the *methods* which must be employed; in other words, the operational procedures which can be used to get (1) the desired impact with (2) the determined receiver role in light of (3) the communication target you are trying to hit.

Proper exploitation of TRIM can give you very effective presentation control. And, while not overly simple (for communication is not a simple subject), it is a practical, useful approach to the planning and carrying out of your presentations. Once learned, TRIM becomes almost automatic in application so that your time and efforts can be rapidly and productively channeled in sizing up the situation and in executing your communication to get the results you want.

THE BOOK'S PRESENTATION

The rest of this book spells out how to go about getting effective communication. Part II, "Backgrounds for Effective Communication," presents important working principles. Chapter 2, "Knowing When To Communicate," tells how to know when communication is needed or called for; Chapter 3, "Putting Ideas Together," gives ways to organize and build out the communication; Chapter 4, "Using Communication Media," presents the proper uses of the various vehicles — audio-visual, written, and personal — for carrying your ideas. Part II, then, prepares you to exploit the procedures enumerated in Part III.

Part III, "TRIM: How to Communicate Effectively," presents specific ways to plan and carry out your presentations to get the right results. In addition to detailing practical principles and procedures, each chapter will also refer to numerous examples of how these have been used in presentations by modern managers and professional people. These examples will draw heavily from Part IV, "Presentation Specimens," which is a collection of representative recent presentations (or excerpts from more lengthy ones). Chapter 5, "Hitting the Target," explains the vital communication missions or purposes; Chapter 6, "Communicating with Receivers," presents the important listener-reader roles which the communicator must be prepared to handle if his ideas are to get into the nervous systems of those for whom they are intended; Chapter 7, "Getting the Right Impact," spells out the kinds of receiver effects, with requisite techniques and devices to get your ideas accepted; and Chapter 8, "Using the Right Methods," specifies the practical procedures for successful planning and presentation.

Part IV, "Presentation Specimens," is a collection of recent presentations by business, governmental, and professional people. These presentation specimens are used to clarify and exemplify the principles discussed in Parts II and III. For ease of reference, each specimen has been internally numbered — either by paragraph or by other appropriate segment — so that the reader can go quickly to the specific referenced section. A simple reference method is employed throughout the book. For example, (Specimen 20:2) after the item discussed means "Specimen 20, Section 2." This allows quick reader examination of the example in context, as well as in isolation.

SUMMARY

Effective communication is purposive symbolic interchange resulting in workable understanding and agreement between the sender and receiver. The purpose of this book is to present the means by which you (the sender) can achieve such effective communication with your receivers in important job-related presentations. The approach involves four elements: (1) communication *targets*; (2) receiver roles; (3) desired *impacts*; and (4) communication *methods*. In acronym form, these have been designated TRIM. We shall be exploring each in depth in subsequent chapters.

