
Chapter 8
Communication - Speaking by Doing
Authored by H. Joe Creegan

“Ask yourself the easy questions and you’ll have a hard life, ask yourself the hard questions and you’ll have an easier life!”

*~Peter Thomson
Author, Personal Growth Strategist*

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The subtitle of this chapter, *Speaking by Doing*, is from a book written by my mentor, graduate school communications professor, William Buys, PhD, from Western Michigan University. It's been some time since I've read the book, (1975), but the title flashed in my mind and seemed appropriate for this chapter.

After all, we communicate to cause an event. Unlike the political arena, those of us in business operate on the clock where words wasted are time wasted. Time wasted is money wasted, neither of which we can afford. It's not that I'm taking an unfair shot at politicians or the political arena where words are, indeed, very carefully weighed. It's just that, as business people, we're on our own dime. With that in mind, I want to be respectful of your time and get right to the point of this discussion ... communicating to get positive results.

Your Words Must Reflect Your Actions

In the same respect our discussion regarding culture exposes the requirement to gain the trust of your team, it follows that your words must be trusted. There's nothing like adding validity to what you say than to do what you say you're going to do.

Promises, promises, Bill Cosby used to say, "Don't let your mind write checks your body can't cash." How many times have you heard the speech, "We're going to do it and we're going to be number 1", knowing in the back of your mind it "ain't gonna happen", so the slang goes. We see it all the time in politics, "Rah, Rah, hurray for our side." Right, the danger of that song and dance becoming repetitive is that it not only renders communications ineffective, it engenders anger and even hatred. We saw it recently in our own Congress, "You lie" was directed at the President of the United States coming from the Senate floor. It was an unprecedented remark in the history of our government.

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Now, to be fair, those types of comments happen behind closed doors all the time. They are no less powerful than when exposed. In fact, when they are hidden, or covert, they can be even more dangerous. (You can't fight an enemy you can't see).

Case in point — In chapter 7, *Culture and how it Relates to the Bottom-line*, I recalled a night the new leader of the Residence Inn hotels was introducing himself just after an acquisition in 1985. The old team, upper and middle management was standing in an elaborate ballroom setting, drinks in one hand, hors d'oeuvres' (appetizer) in the other speculating what our new life was about to look like under the new regime. There was an undercurrent of apprehension knowing that the management styles of the two companies were symbolic of dogs and cats sleeping together, so we were very curious about what would be said.

*You can't fight an
enemy you can't see.*

Bottom-line was, the words didn't matter (can't remember what was said) but the non-verbal cues flashed warning lights across the room. The ambiance migrated to rigid and somewhat fearful. To be fair, our new leader realized the enormity of the informal culture Residence Inn had built in its' short life span, and he came from a long history of formal structure on how to do things. Given the rigidity of an inherited Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) methodology, there was little he could do, in that first night, to re-orient himself to an audience made up of free mavericks and make his talk convincing. So what's the moral of the story?

Know Yourself and Know Your Audience. Had it been me, I would have opened with something like, "before we throw the rice and celebrate our new marriage, let me confess something. You all know we operate in a very tight vice around here. There's good news and bad news with that fact. The bad news

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is it's going to take some time to adjust and it could be painful at times. But the good news far outweighs the bad news. The good news is our SOPs are well thought out and serve us well with stockholders and customers. Your free range has opened the gate to phenomenal growth, and the best news is we both bring some very bright talent to the party. Let's get it on."

It's about finding the words to express your intention and being honest in the process. It's about acknowledging the value of differences while, at the same time, being honest about what is. It's the first and vital step in gaining trust. Authenticity goes a long way.

Thinking Before Doing. As much as our actions must support our communications, it follows that we must think about the intentions of what we want to communicate and, consequently, what we want to accomplish.

It's about finding the words to express your intention and being honest in the process.

A flash back memory comes to mind of when I was 8 years old. My dad's hobby was carpentry and, like most boys, I wanted to follow in dad's footsteps. I loved hammering nails and would find wood scraps around the neighborhood to build whatever I could make out of the pickings I found.

One late rainy Saturday afternoon, I approached my dad with the idea I wanted to build a juice stand in the basement so I could set up a business on the sidewalk and make a few bucks. (I shifted much of my playtime to constructive work as, apparently, my play activities appeared to be high risk related. My dad would say, "If you want to kill yourself I'll work you to death." I believe to this day that's what he was trying to do as is evidenced by the work ethic bestowed on me my entire lifetime).

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After what must have been 8 hours or so, building in the basement, dad came down to halt the construction as it was getting late and bedtime was at hand. As he hit the bottom step and gazed at the contraption I proudly made, he remarked, "What the h....?" The "stand" spanned the entire length of the basement. I had an issue with sawing: I didn't like doing it, so I built, end upon end, with the wood I collected to avoid having to saw anything. Dad, in his own succinct style, asked the question, "How are you going to get this up the stairs and outside?" Thus I had one of my first early lessons on thinking before doing. How does this connect to thinking before communicating, you ask? Alas, I took my lesson learned to the communications arena.

How does this connect to thinking before communicating ...

Fast forward, if you will, to age 19. I was driving home from college in my father's car after a long day of final exams. I had completed my sophomore year of undergraduate school and was headed home for the summer to work at Ford Motor Company and earn money to make payments on my college loan. Within about 5 miles from home, I fell asleep at the wheel and rolled his pristine Comet Caliente through the median missing another accident that had occurred ahead of me just moments earlier. Lucky for me, police were already on the scene and I was offered a ride home.

A millisecond before terror came to me I couldn't help thinking: "Dad is going to kill me". Flashback to 8 years old: I had dad figured out; I knew how to talk to him. I applied what I had learned from my experience at age 8 with the police officer, whose no-nonsense personality resembled that of my father's. Our conversation went something like this:

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Officer: "Is this the correct address on your license, son?"

Me: "Yes, officer."

Officer: "I'll drive you home."

Me: "No, please don't!"

Officer: "Why not? I'll talk to him, son. You're lucky to be alive. You just missed the bridge support pillar by inches. I'm sure he'll be glad to know you're alright."

Me: "No he won't. He loves that car."

As we're headed to my house, I sat quietly in the back of the squad car asking myself, "What do I say?" Now to be honest, I don't have much recall of my thought process as fear had overtaken me causing restricting blood flow to the brain, I'm sure. But, this was what I said when I entered the house to find my mother and father waiting. (Apparently they had already been contacted by the police and had some knowledge of what had happened).

I boldly walked into the kitchen from the side door of the house, climbed the two steps from the landing into the kitchen, threw my keys and license on the table and said, "Here are my keys and license. I don't deserve to drive anymore." My dad put his arm on my shoulder and replied, "I don't know about that but you may never see the front seat of any of my cars for some time." Mission accomplished, I didn't die that afternoon.

One more story then I'll leave this alone. My first hotel position as a General Manager (GM) was fraught with disastrous circumstances, literally within the first month on the job. The previous GM was an Englishman whose work visa had expired and had to leave the United States. I was recruited to fill the slot. The Sales, Food and Beverage departments had collapsed prior to my arrival, leaving

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conditions constantly in need of repair. You won't believe this but it's a true story.

Four weeks into my tenure and feeling proud about the turnaround with the staff and the sales effort, three buses pull under the canopy at the front door to the hotel. I had just finished welcoming a large group being hosted at the hotel that would be utilizing most all of the meeting and banquet space the hotel had to offer.

A moment later I was introduced, by our new Director of Sales (DOS) to the meeting planner of the group that had just arrived in busses. With contract in hand, the Meeting Planner asked to be shown the ballroom where their banquet would be held that evening as well as the VIP suite and smaller meeting rooms. The good news was that we had those accommodations. The bad news was they would be in use by the group that was already in house. Yep, the previous DOS contracted with the group but failed to document, procedurally, the event. Of course, the GM and DOS were now long gone and guess who was holding the proverbial bag?

"I'm responsible for this problem and I intend to fix it. Will you be willing to work with me?"

I had to act fast. To prevent a scene in the lobby, I asked that all delegates meet me in a small meeting room that was yet unoccupied by the other group. They came in, furious, as would be expected, and lined up around the room about 10 deep. This was a minority group (not that it makes any difference to the circumstances), who were defensive about being treated poorly and expected a song and dance from me. They were postured to fight.

Flash back to age 19, my old fall back for what worked to

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get me out of a tight spot, then. There was only one thing I could say. The intention of what I was about to communicate was to “create a decorum” that would give me the time to creatively solve the problem. In the loudest voice I could muster while standing in the center of the 180+ member group I said, “My name is Joe Creegan. I’m the GM of the hotel. I’m responsible for this problem and I intend to fix it. Will you be willing to work with me?” They went into shock with that statement. I had earned a modicum of their trust. Without going into the entire solution, the problem was resolved and they left their meeting happy. (I will hint that we did buy some meeting space and overnight guest rooms at a nearby hotel while, at the same time, used every square

When you drop the defense, the door to cooperation opens and creative solutions become more available.

inch of available space in our hotel. We actually made money).

You can Have the Best Intentions but You’d Better know if They’ll be Heard. So what’s the secret to having your good intentions received? It’s called *empathy*: Walk a mile in their shoes. (The upside in walking in someone’s shoes is you can get away from them and have a new pair of shoes ... kidding).

Seriously though, why is it good intentions are not always appreciated or do not help resolve an unpleasant situation? It boils down to whether the individual who is delivering the message is coming from a place of fear or empathy. Whenever we’re operating in fear we feel the need to protect and defend ourselves, or our company, or our ideals. If fear is operating, it will most likely prevail. The words that come out of our mouth or from our pen will spew the poison fear holds in its grasp.

When we’re empathic it’s not about us. If it’s not about us,

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there's nothing for us to fear. If we're not afraid, we have access to energy, creativity, and compassion that can solve problems, cross bridges, and change behaviors.

Some of you may be thinking, "I get anxious speaking in front of groups" or "When reporting to someone I'm accountable to if things aren't going well." Try this: "Hey boss, I know things aren't going well and it makes you look bad or negatively affects the company's bottom-line. You're counting on me to deliver, so how can you help me with this?" That's healthy fear.

When you drop the defense, the door to cooperation opens and creative solutions become more available. That's not to suggest you need to acquiesce when you're not responsible for the problem. But even in that scenario, an open stance might work better than a defensive one.

For example, the response to the boss might sound something like this, "Hey boss, this problem has been nagging me too and I've been looking forward to resolving it with you. Let's see what we can come up with." This approach connects you with the boss and enjoins him in finding a solution, or, at the very least, listening non-defensively to your case. Same thing when speaking to groups ... what are they there for and what matters to them? I will typically address a group where I've identified, in advance, their concerns or needs, and open with remarks that address that.

In 2007 I consulted with a hotel management company who had been awarded the management contract of a resort property that had gone back to the lender. Without going into detail about the series of events that led to its failure, I will share that the operating team had been severely traumatized. My very first meeting with the executive committee I opened with, "I know you've been badly hurt and the failure of the hotel is not your fault." In large part, it was not their fault. The

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original owners had attempted to convert a resort hotel to a condo-tel during a time when the real estate market fell in the toilet and financing a hotel room as a condominium was impossible. That, combined with lack of hotel operations and indiscriminate spending, caused its collapse. Conditions that ensued while the hotel was falling were very damaging to the hotel staff, guests, and local community.

When speaking to groups: What are they there for and what matters to them ?

Announcing my empathic position opened the door to earning their trust. It also paved the way for me to build structure and lead definitively as resistance to me and to change had all but dissipated.

In the early days with Residence Inn, I had the pleasure of working with a Regional Director of Sales and Marketing who was assigned to support my region, having 6 properties to manage at the time. One of my hotels was struggling to hit top line (revenue) numbers and I called the Regional Director of Sales and Marketing (RDSM) to help. Coincidentally, the President of the company was coming into town to inspect the property and meet with the hotel staff. I took advantage of his arrival by inviting him into our strategic discussion about how we were going to rectify the shortfall. He was a brilliant marketing guy, interpersonally very engaging, and a fantastic leader. Nonetheless, this was the President in our midst and the RDSM was politically mindful of that.

While presenting our strategy, the President expressed some concerns. I felt so confident we could execute and reach our objectives I blurted out, "If we don't hit the numbers we'll both resign" – meaning the RDSM and me. I should point out that I had not consulted with my marketing partner on what the consequences should be if we failed to meet our objective. Fortunately, we both shared the same passion for the strategy

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we selected to solve our problem but, at the same time, he – the RDSM – wasn't prepared to offer himself to the guillotine if we were to fail. This was another empathy lesson in the making. For the record, the RDSM was entrenched in the spirit of the culture, was very bright, and never allowed that incident to contaminate our relationship. We're still friends to this day. But, it's a lesson I'll never forget.

What is Your Communication Expected to Accomplish?

To hedge your bet that your communications will accomplish their objectives, it's helpful to first identify what you want them to do. The reason we want to be conscious of that is the end game determines the approach; approaches are different for each objective. Most business communication is designed to accomplish one or more of the following goals:

- To solve a problem
- To change behavior
- To connect with a customer
- To put fire in the belly (inspire or motivate)
- To install or reinforce procedures, rules, and protocol
- To introduce something new
- To preserve something old

Although there are more to mention, fundamentally you could categorize most communications in this group. It's important, then, to identify your mission and to know where you are, or are not, effective in any of these categories.

If you had to ask yourself where you were super strong and where your communications seemed to fail, what two categories would you choose? If we think about what is constantly pressing in our business, we can identify where

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we are weak. Likewise, our successes point to where we are strong. If you struggle to identify your communication strengths and weaknesses, you might find the following questions useful.

- What is it your company does best?
- What does it struggle with the most?

If we think about what is constantly pressing in our business we can identify where we are weak.

- How long have you had this problem?
- What is your strategy to address those challenges?
- What are the major barriers to you achieving your goals?
- What problems do you anticipate confronting in executing those strategies?
- What will that mean to you?

Much like our discussion in chapter 7, *Culture and how It Relates To The Bottom-line*, your answers to these questions will unearth both areas that need work and those which can be built upon. It's important to know that actions which follow words and empathy are not the only two tools in our bag. There are other skills that will ensure your communications hit the intended target and they can be learned, or farmed out.

Internal communications are no less important than external communications. Most businesses don't think twice about hiring an ad agency to conduct their marketing campaigns or PR firms to communicate to external markets, but blindly plow through their internal communications to employees. Does this mean an owner or manager should hire outside help to communicate everything to employees? No. But the

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question needs to be asked, “What are the consequences of not hitting the mark with this message? What do I need to know and do to ensure I accomplish the objective?” These, and other questions, will be addressed in the paragraphs that follow.

Communicating to Solve a Problem

Have you ever experienced hearing something, reading a memo, or wading through volumes of information designed to address a problem that only diverts or adds to it?

... government politics and business strategies don't necessarily blend well.

A few years ago one of my clients/friends (many of my business relationships are long-term and have evolved into friendships) called me to assist him in reorganizing a team of managers responsible for running 4,000 rental units. The company was one year into the acquisition of what was a group of fragmented businesses. With the acquisition and consolidation they became one of the largest condo resort rental companies in the U.S. They also owned a very successful hotel company with a strong track record and felt they could increase stock value by operating a company that didn't require a capital investment to obtain units to rent. The condo resort business seemed ideal. After all, wasn't renting a condo the same as renting a hotel room? There were some similarities, yes, but, operationally, no, not at all. About a year after they had acquired the company, and determined they knew enough about the business they had just acquired, they started issuing marching orders to the management team, condo owners and customers.

Watching them communicate reminded me much of the presidential campaign when Ross Perot was a presidential

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contender. He had some good ideas, was an effective communicator with flip charts, but failed to recognize that government politics and business strategies don't necessarily blend well. For one thing, the government doesn't own anything, well not until GM bailout anyway. A company accustomed to being in control and owning their own inventory quickly discovers they are confronted with a management communications game changer. Now they are communicating with literally thousands of owners AND hundreds of employees. The change in the ownership dynamic dramatically influences the communication with employees.

In this case, the management company, now owner of the rental business as well association management, was failing on all levels. Nobody was happy and I mean nobody. You would think a company as sophisticated as this one would have some idea their communication was badly damaging the field, condo owners, and customers alike. Nope. When you think you have the winning formula (and they certainly did with their hotel company) you tend to think it will work anywhere. Wrong! Someone in a very high place must have missed the movie, 48 Hours, where Eddie Murphy rousts some locals in a bar and says, "There's a new sheriff in town, and his name is Reggie Hammonds."

So it was there where about 4,000 owner sheriffs, 800 or so employee deputies, and thousands of citizen customers on the scene who weren't buying into the new "word up". My strategy: support my friend/client, save the field. Let's look at how bad communications destroyed this fine hotel company's opportunity to expand into the condo rental market.

What is it you Want me to Hear?

"Ask and it Shall be Given Unto you." First mistake many companies make is they pretend to ask their employees what isn't working and when the employees tell them,

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they listen only to what they need to, attack what they view as the problem, and defend the solution they've already determined to be the answer to the problem.

So Let's Look at This Listening Thing. It's more honest and less destructive, in my opinion, to come in and just say to someone, "this is how it's going to be" than to ask what's wrong then disregard the response. Now, granted, those of us who know it all and can easily poke holes in someone else's excuses, sometimes are "right". If you've ever been married, or are in a relationship that requires some compromise, you have to ask yourself daily: "Would I rather be right or happy?" But I digress. In a business relationship, it's not always about being happy. However, there is some value to having your employees feel valued. Often that dynamic is totally ignored. The outcome is a disengaged work force.

Here's where some leaders and managers make a huge mistake. They have identified a problem: i.e., falling revenues, over spending, white-collar theft, whatever, and they come to the table with "the" answer. They may have prepared diligently with facts and data that support the validity of the problem and the desired solution. Somewhere hidden in the recesses of their psyche is the message their communication is meant to put the problem on the table and change behaviors in order to fix it.

But what "should" have been the first thought? "Hmm, I've identified a problem. I even have the answer. Who is going to get this done for me?" If that question had come to mind, the nature and context of communications would have been different. In the context of "who is going to get this done for me", more questions emerge, such as: What's the pulse of the field regarding this problem (do they recognize it and how do they feel about it). What are skill sets of my people in terms of their ability to rectify this problem? What is the condition of the environment, currently, that will open the

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door to change? What challenges will my people confront, individually and as a group, that would encumber or impede their success?

Those questions invoke an entirely different communications delivery than what many of the clients I have served over the years employ. Most of my dominant driven, bottom-line oriented friends tend to cringe in asking the question, "How do they feel about it?"

"... people operate at the feeling level."

My mentor / graduate professor said to me very early on, in my management career, "People operate at the feeling level." He was right and recognizing that fact has served me well over the course of my career. Granted, we can go overboard attending to that, but when you acknowledge it to assist in developing your communications strategy, it's a valuable asset in your leadership arsenal.

The downside risk: Time. The downside to this approach is, it takes a little more time and a lot more skill to implement. But, and this is a big but, it has long-term and exponential impact. Unfortunately our economic culture operates, and has for a long time now, on the short-term. I can painfully recall being aware, when I was a VP for a large hotel company, my merit, and consequently my tenure, was measured every 28 days (we operated on a 13 period accounting cycle). It's not that assessing performance every month is bad, in fact, I'm a believer in immediate performance appraisal. However, when you're dealing with stockholders who monitor returns conditioned to the short-term, it's inevitable the short-sightedness will infiltrate the operations.

It was interesting to watch the company I worked for begin negotiations with a Japanese company. In Japan, there is significant emphasis on relationships and the long-term. As

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we were proposing a certain level of return on investment in 90 days, they, in the back of their minds, were thinking more along the lines of “Will I see any money in 30 years?” Talk about a dramatic cultural difference.

The first shift in thinking has to occur, then, in knowing what your communications are meant to achieve and understanding how the solution will be derived. It’s almost laughable to me, now, when I witness my clients struggling to affect change in their employee’s behavior. In effect what they’re saying is, “do this” and expecting things to be different. Did you ever tell your kid not to leave his socks on the floor only to find – you guessed it – his socks on the floor? And, did you tell him once or was this message number 300? “I don’t get it,” you say. “We’re two thirds of the way into the second year, I’ve been telling him to pick up his socks, and it’s still not happening. He’s fourteen years old, has a pretty good grasp of English, so I know he hears me. I just don’t get it.” Now I’m not writing this to help solve your family issues, but I will ask you this: “What’s his answer for them (his socks) still being on the floor? What about his answer makes sense to you, or, better yet, to him? If it makes sense to him, what makes it acceptable to having it happen in your house? Does he still want to live there? If not, you’ve got a whole other problem.”

Reminds me of a recent project I had in Miami Beach. I had done some work for this client at another hotel in Fort Lauderdale where he felt he needed my help with the resort in Miami. Without going into detail, the property was under financial duress for some time, negatively affecting the operating personnel and putting undo strain on my client.

After an in-depth assessment of the operational, financial, and marketing challenges of the property, an interesting pet peeve of my client was exposed. Stress finds its release in the most interesting events, sometimes. Here it is, his pet

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peeve. The property had a policy where the desk front staff would meet and greet every arrival at curb-side. This was a fantastic customer service strategy that not only created a valuable bond and service to the guest, but overcame a significant built in obstacle of the hotel: They had no driveway to the front door requiring guest's park curb-side where their car was immediately shuttled to a parking lot 10 blocks away.

So what was the problem, you ask? The staff would leave the Bellman's empty luggage carts exposed to the public when they were instructed to neatly tuck them away where they could not be seen by passersby. He, my client would rant, cajole, beg, plead, and threaten to get the staff to put those irritating carts back. He finally gave up. The very first day I arrived on property he was quick to mention how important that was to him. Three days later, the problem was solved — forever.

... a perfect example of a small issue turned big as a result of miscommunication...

Let's review his communication from the perspective of what it was meant to accomplish. Now this guy is brilliant, and I mean brilliant with a capital "B". He may be one of the most astute individuals I have ever met, or had as a client in my consulting career. What over shadowed his communications approach was his struggle with understanding why the staff didn't buy into his strategic analysis of how this particular issue was affecting guest perception and the upscale image of the hotel. I mean this guy could, on his feet, deliver all the nuances of how this impacted the bottom-line of what the hotel was trying to accomplish. Also, because in his mind, this was something so easily remedied and within the span of control, should be solved quickly. What he missed, and likely didn't have time for, given he was juggling other hotels challenges with owners, was why the luggage cart

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issue wasn't important to the staff responsible for managing it?

After 35 years in the business, 20 of which I have been consulting, my communications approach is instinctive, now. But if it was not instinctive, I would go to my list of "What is the communication for" and determine my strategy accordingly. So, in my approach to discover why the carts weren't being returned to their assigned space, I chose the strategy of due diligence. It was as simple as asking each individual staff member responsible for handling the carts, "Tell me about the cart issue." (They all knew it was an issue having heard about it, vehemently, from the President of the company).

This is a perfect example of a small issue turned big as a result of miscommunication, or, not understanding the mission of the communication. I would expect some of you would say, "I'd fix the problem, I'd fire their a__." Well, I have to ask, "Would you? What would it cost to hire and re-train an employee?" I can tell you from years of consulting and experience — anywhere from two times to eight times as much their salary, depending on the position he or she holds in your company. Understand that this does not take into account the impact such an action will have on your customers.

Do you know customers are tired of seeing new faces all the time? As much as we've become a disposable society, there is a deep longing for long-term connection. While I'm not suggesting we keep incompetence in place to satisfy that need, we do need to become aware of the impact constant turnover has on our customers. I tell my clients they can determine if an employee is worth keeping by administering a simple survey for a cost of \$200. If they are worth keeping, they can be coached to improve their performance in just 12 weeks for \$2500.

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Allow me to explain what I have just communicated with you above so that it makes sense. (It's become my self appointed mission to save the world one employee at a time with my 12 week coaching plan). Let's run some numbers. Say you have a \$10 hour employee working 40 hours a week. That's $\$400 \times 52 \text{ weeks} = \$20,800$ a year in salary. Now, let's say it only costs you twice their salary to replace them, thereby doubling your pay out for a total of $\$41,600$ / year. Wouldn't you rather invest 6% of that cost to save an employee if results were guaranteed? (That's a little bit of a sales pitch. But, being the altruist I am, there is a network of coaches out there who can help).

... what appears to be the simplest answer to the simplest problem is what causes us the most grief.

“Knowing Your Limitations”, but Giving Credit Where Credit is due

Here's what I admire about my client, other than his sheer intellectual horsepower. Like Clint Eastwood said in “Dirty Harry”, “You've got to know your limitations.” Throwing up his hands and hiring me wasn't an act of defeat or surrender (although he may have had moments when he thought that was the case), it was an act of knowing himself and his limitations. He had bigger fish to fry than luggage carts. He knew his company was struggling with cultural issues that were damaging his financial objectives with the property. He also acknowledged he was struggling with knowing his audience: The operating team who was not performing to his level of expectations.

By the way, this was not a guy who would say “do as I say, not as I do.” This was a “hands on do it 'till you drop” example setter who held expectations higher of himself than he would of others. He formed his work ethic very early in life and it

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carried forward in his day to day life. He began to recognize his communications style was adding to the problem more than helping. It takes courage and insight to do what Kenny Rogers told us long ago: "You gotta know when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em."

... it was the first step in building a culture that would engage employees to contribute to problem solving.

It Ain't Easy

A verse from an old Eagles song runs through my mind: "Tak'in it easy, tak'in it easy, don't let the sound of your own wheels drive you crazy." Nothing makes owners or managers crazier than dealing with unproductive or low performing people especially when it seems solutions to problems are so clear to us. Let me ask you, does your kid still leave socks on the floor? Or, is he/she grown and out of the house now and the socks are not your problem anymore? The point is what appears to be the simplest answer to the simplest problem is what causes us the most grief. But underlying are layers of very well hidden mechanisms carefully laid there to protect us from harm and give us a sense of importance in our lives. If the socks are still on the floor, you can bet they represent something much more important to you and your kid than meets the eye. If there is emotion stirring in that confrontation, it will often mislead your communication's mission.

Going back to the Bellman's cart scenario: When I asked the staff about what those carts meant to them, it uncovered a whole litany of rational responses. Those responses revealed conflicts; with their responsibilities, their desire to achieve guest satisfaction, and the problems associated with where those carts were located. What was the price to the owner, president, and staff, of having it in their face day after day?"

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Those points have to be considered when you assess the strategic communications approach and determine the time it will take to install a protocol to solve the problem, permanently. Yes, it took time. Yes, it brought me into conversations that seemed superfluous, (ones that most of us would say, “don’t go there”) but look at the results. Look at how solving that one (on the surface) insignificant issue freed up time and energy to go on to more important challenges. In addition, it was the first step in building a culture that would engage employees to contribute to problem solving.

Management and line employees can control and influence operating profit ...

Now I ask you, “Was the time and strategy worth it?” You bet it was. As communications improved, the team started working together. As they felt more valued, they began to contribute creative solutions to problems. As the energetic momentum began to build, dedication to financial and guest satisfaction objectives grew. Was that the end all solution to the property’s problems? No. There were other outside influences that brought pressures to bear. However, what I can tell you is this: The gains that were made and the professional growth that was achieved survived and the organization is better equipped to deal with future challenges as a result thereof.

For those who need more proof with regard to the impact communications play in any organization can be measured in employee turnover, guest satisfaction scores, and Gross Operating Profit (GOP). Management and line employees can control and influence operating profit, and thus should only be held accountable in areas where they have direct responsibility. If the debt service is high as a result of an awkward financial structure or taxes are high, employees have no control of that and should not bear the pressure for those circumstances.

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Discovering the Hidden Content of our Message

Although not all communications are emotionally charged, it is important to recognize that they (communications) can evoke emotional responses. Expressed or unexpressed, it's this emotional content that needs to be dealt with before any gain can be made at solving a problem or delivering a message.

If you're tracking politics these days, there are several examples of how the hidden emotion determines the effectiveness, or ineffectiveness, of the message being delivered. If you fall somewhere in the ranks of either Republican or Democrat, you've likely been exposed to what might be considered highly and emotionally charged rhetoric, directed at some very serious problems that require sane and rational attention. Instead, we're being inundated (flooded) with information that stimulates our emotional response by blinding us to the content of what is being communicated.

If I mention the names, Glenn Beck, Keith Olbermann, Rush Limbaugh, Chris Matthews, to name a few, you'll understand what I mean. It's understood these guys make their living at drawing an audience. Frankly, as a culture we've become accustomed to being entertained more than informed, but we can't ignore the arena we play in as owners, leaders and managers of an enterprise. We can't continue to be blind about the role emotion plays in both ourselves and in our listeners. Candidly speaking, business seems to be in the dark ages most of the time when it comes to appreciating the power of the hidden agenda, which in essence is how we "feel" about things. Again, my mentor was right — people operate at the feeling level. Don't think so? Take a look at our last election.

The Hidden Dimension. So how do we determine if there are hidden emotions in either us or in our audience? First step is a self check. We have to ask ourselves:

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- What does this communication mean to me?
- Why does it have that meaning?
- What would happen if the meaning I assign it were to change or become not as important as I think?
- Is my “feeling” about it more significant or more important than what my listeners feel or think? If so, why? If not, what is important?
- What is the consequence of this communication if no one buys it?

The energy and expertise to deliver the message to ensure “buy-in” was more significant than the training message itself.

“Buy-in”. We need to take a moment to address this whole notion of “buy-in”. “Buy-in” is your listener taking ownership of the direction you want him or her to go in. I had the privilege of working with Signature Worldwide in the early stages of its growth and continued to work with them well into their evolution as the world’s largest training company. I distinctly remember watching the brilliance of Signature’s founder, and visionary for / author of *The Good Book of Business* Don Farrell, tactically weave the “buy-in” process with the training to ensure ownership of the program he was teaching. It was the most masterful delivery I had ever witnessed. To this day, I credit my association with Signature as one of the most influential experiences of my life and one that contributed more to the success of my consulting practice than any other single event, other than Residence Inn, in my career.

The point being made here is this: The energy and expertise to deliver the message to ensure “buy-in” was more significant, particularly in the early segment of the training,

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than the training message itself. In fact, the message of the training was, “Do these 5 things and you’ll add \$200,000 to the bottom-line,” and, “there’s something in it for you, too. You’ll make incentive dollars and position yourself to grow in your chosen profession.” The fact is you could write those 5 steps on the back of a cocktail napkin, show it to the owner and they would be all over it. So why not just send out a memo and say “Do these 5 things?” (Some tried that, by the way. Have at it if you think you can make that stick).

BEFORE those 5 secrets were shared, anywhere from 1 to 2 and ½ days were spent on getting “buy-in.” The structure of the seminar was one of the most simple and brilliant I had ever seen. Those owners who were committed enough to sit through the training with their teams and astute enough to see the value of the “buy-in” process were quick to realize the return on their training investment. In very short order, all clients witnessed the increase in top line revenues of \$200,000 (for small properties) to upwards of \$500,000 (for the larger hotels). Was it worth attending to how employees felt about the program? You bet it was. Was Signature paying attention to the touchy-feely stuff? You bet they were and they turned it into gold.

By engaging the audience’s emotion first, the seeds to imagining new horizons are planted and creative energy is harnessed. According to Robert Collier, “The source and center of all man’s creative power... is his power of making images, or the power of imagination.” The key to harnessing the imagination is to create a space in which it can live. Remove the barriers that block imagination and new heights, with new direction, are available for the taking. Imagine that!

I Haven’t got Time to get my PhD in Communications, What do I do?

In a nutshell, harness the imagination of your employees. Create a vision that allows them to express their contributions

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to your company's objectives.

I have to confess, there is truth in the statement – “if you have enough money, you can buy success.” Throw enough money at something long enough and you can beat your competition, win over your employees, and even eliminate all risk. Just look at what our banking system achieved. When you get big enough, you can defer risk to the tax payer and go on with your happy life. If you don't have that kind of money, your success has to be earned with hard work, smart decisions, and other people.

What to do

- *Step One – “Hidden Dimension”.* Before you write a memo, converse with an employee, or give a speech, review the questions in the section “Hidden Dimension”. This requires self honesty and may also require an outside opinion. It's one thing to say to yourself, “We have to stop the bleeding (spending) or the company will die,” versus admitting how that threatens us, personally, and the impact it plays on our lives. Fear is a powerful master and can distort how we express our most sincere intentions.
- *Step Two – Know Your Audience.* Where are they now as it relates to the problem or message you want to address? This isn't meant to sanction a gripe session, but to recognize the value of knowing how, and what your people think. Recognize that skill is required to not let yourself get sucked into a black hole. However, knowing where your people are coming from is a powerful tool in leading them out of the desert.
- *Step Three – Determine if Your Message Needs to Contain Empathy.* If not, move past that issue. If it is required, to what extent, and what will make your intention believable? It's extremely meaningful to your listener (written or spoken) when they believe you know where the lines of responsibility are drawn. It's so much easier

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to influence positive action when elements that impede someone's performance is recognized. There are situations affecting employee performance that are not their fault. Employees don't control how a business is financed, yet the debt service burden can impact the culture in which the employee must operate. Telling them, "It's not your fault", sends a clear message that the owner/manager "understands". Concurrently, it clears the way to place accountability where it belongs. Doing that establishes a shared responsibility for addressing action steps to bring solutions. When responsibility and accountability are clear, it is so much easier to get "buy-in" to making necessary changes. Words that communicate the empathic message make it easier for employees to accept what they are responsible for.

- *Step Four – Ask.* Prior to delivering a message about solutions, know your listeners perception of the problem and their ideas about how to solve it. For those who are direct, bottom-line thinkers who experience frustration with people who "don't see it like they do", you may need help with this. If you're open to the idea, this component does play a significant role in getting your people on a new path to eliminate the problem. Then you need to prepare yourself with the notion this process takes time and skill. The upside is, when done correctly, it will install enduring positive change for everyone involved.
- *Step Five – Examine What's Kept the Problem Alive.* Most often our strategy is to kill the problem versus redirecting the energy (attitudes and beliefs) that has kept it alive for so long. The discovery of how long the same problems live in an organization no longer surprises me. The older the problem, the more likely the deficiency to solve it is somewhere at the top of the organization. Asking yourself, if you in fact have some accountability for the problem, what's my role in this, has real value. Guess who can most likely give you your answer? Yep, your

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employees. Not the “yes” people, but the one’s you trust and who know they can be honest with you. Here is the harsh truth – if you don’t have anyone in the organization you can turn to like that, then you’re the problem.

- *Step Six – Call for Help.* Like any doctor will tell you, don’t let the cancer spread. Use whatever resource available to support you. Many resources are free and others can offer a cost analysis to support your decision to buy help if necessary. Call the Small Business Administration (SBA) for example, or your local college or university for assistance and resourceful information.

And, Lastly.....

- A. Be certain you know your audience and the “hidden dimensions” of communications. The conversation at the water cooler and rest rooms hold more credence than your last meeting or executive order.
- B. Engage your workforce. “Buy-in” comes much more easily when employees have invested in solutions and will go a long way toward achieving desired results.
- C. Walk your talk and speak by doing. Believability is achieved by action. People will listen and then watch to determine if what they hear is reflected in the behavior of leadership.

Finding Help

There’s a wide gap between advice and help and there’s so much advice out there these days. If we were able to actualize all the advice ever given to us we’d be wealthy in spirit, in love, and in relationships. But, we’re human, and in our humanness we remember those nuggets of wisdom closest to our hearts and our wallets — and not necessarily in that order for some of us.

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When it comes to finding help in communicating, there is one question that shines a beacon of light on the path that would otherwise lead into darkness. That question is, “Am I communicating trust”.

“Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservations.”

Trust comes by faith. There are other chapters in this book to address the topic of faith and even business ethics. But the fact remains — trust is the most precious commodity in our world of relationships, business or otherwise. As Elton Trueblood once said, “Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservations.” Our ability to communicate trustworthiness requires an examination of our own faith. Over the years, it has become very obvious to me that those who have solidified their own faith, are best able to trust. Trusting others is inclusive of trusting one self. Have you ever known someone who followed behind you every step of the way communicating, verbally or non-verbally, a total lack of confidence in your ability to perform?

Case in point: In my junior year of undergraduate school I took a summer job at Ford Motor Company in the Specialty Foundry at the Rouge Plant in Dearborn, Michigan. I worked in maintenance, cleaning up messes and moving things around. One of my favorite jobs was driving a hi-lo moving racks of crankshafts around. One particular afternoon my boss, Frank, directed me to relocate a number of racks of crank shafts from one corner of the shop to another. You had to know Frank to appreciate his management style. Frank was a “lifer” at Ford, a 30-year plus veteran showing no sign of ever retiring, and had adopted the 40’s and 50’s style of management. Keep in mind that those he was accustomed to managing were not college graduates. But, in summers, while the “regulars” took vacations, college help was recruited. You’re probably guessing Frank didn’t adapt his style for the

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new crop of employees he interfaced with every summer. You're right. We, wet behind the ear crowd, adapted to Frank and rightly so, he was the boss and certainly entitled to respect.

Back to the story...

Without going into every detail, this is how the instruction to move one rack from one location to another was presented to me:

Frank: "Get on your horse and follow me." (He was pointing to the hi-lo and I couldn't wait. After all, driving was preferable to cleaning out the crank table pits where it was over 110 degrees. Hi-lo driving afforded me the power to move mountains and bask in 98 degree breezes).

Me: "Right behind you." (I respectfully follow).

Frank: (As noise levels preclude anyone from hearing, hand signals become the modality of choice). He waves at me to follow, while I'm driving, and slowly walks toward the racks, which I can plainly see. Step by step the waves continue as though I'd be lost if I had to go three feet on my own. (In all fairness, air quality wasn't that good in those days and visibility was an issue but three feet wasn't the sight threshold).

Me: I follow along, anxious to get there, while harboring thoughts of "Does this guy think I can't find my way across the isle?" (I was 19 years old at the time and patience, as is with most young males, wasn't one of my stronger virtues).

You get the picture. To make a long story short, Frank would follow this procedure for EVERY SINGLE RACK! Just for fun, I'd veer off course just to frustrate him. He never understood the ego component of a 19 year old male college student. Needless to say, that summer became one of the most challenging for him and the most fun for us college comrades.

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Have you ever had a boss who wouldn't relinquish control? Or, God forbid, are YOU the boss with little confidence in your workforce fearful that: 1. No one can do it as good as you, or 2. The level of incompetence drives you crazy? You might be saying to yourself, "I'd love to be able to trust them!" If you can't, there may be several reasons:

- A bad hire
- Job demands aren't compatible with skills or aptitudes of those responsible to fulfill them
- At some level, fear of trusting grips you

There are remedies for the first two that you'll, hopefully, find in this book. The fear issue is another matter. This is deeply personal and requires faith to overcome. As the last two chapters on faith in this book disclose, it's the essence of everything.

The question then becomes, "How do we assess this issue in ourselves and what can we do about it?" Obviously, assessment requires an open mind and a dash of humility — ok, more like a large scoop of humility, there I said it. Before I get behind my pulpit, let me offer these observations.

- There are signs of trust issues going on when:
 - o The real conversations take place in the restroom
 - o It gets quiet around the water cooler when "whomever is in charge" walks by
 - o People aren't showing up for work
 - o The team is afraid to report bad news or admit they're struggling with an issue
 - o Reports get "padded" to hide the truth
 - o and many more
-

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As an owner, manager, or whatever title you wield in the world of work, are you approachable? Are there appropriate boundaries? Does your team trust you?

How do we make changes with such an important and sensitive issue? You've heard it said, "Confession is good for the soul." Have you ever heard someone with authority over you approach you and say, "I care about you, your success, and the success of this business? And I'm lousy at communicating that, I know. What do we need to do to solve this (whatever the problem)?"

Since someone already beat me to the Sermon on the Mount, I'll refrain from lofty advice or platitudes of Heavenly wisdom. In the words of Dwight L. Moody, "Character is what you are in the dark," and nothing shines more brightly than that.

In closing, I find it valuable to repeat these very words I had communicated with you earlier on in the chapter and that is: By engaging the audience's emotion first, the seeds to imagining new horizons are planted and creative energy is harnessed. Therefore, harness the imagination of your employees that will create a vision allowing them to invest their being in the mission of the greater good. Let them find access to how they can express their contributions to your company's objectives, thereby establishing roots of trust.

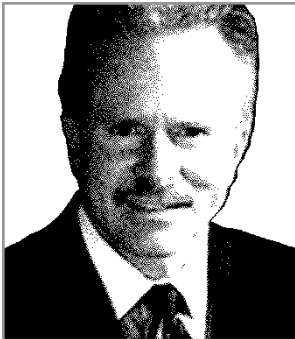
Bottom-line: When you drop the defense, the door to cooperation opens and creative solutions become more available. A great starting point to activate openness, creative solutions, and trust is to embrace communication as art. What is the "art" of communication? Be a great example first by walking the talk, and **SPEAKING BY DOING!**

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3 Take-Aways:

1. Be certain you know your audience and the “hidden dimensions” of communications. The conversation at the water cooler and rest rooms hold more credence than your last meeting or executive order.
2. Engage your workforce. “Buy-in” comes much more easily when employees have invested in solutions and will go a long way toward achieving desired results.
3. Walk your talk. Believability is achieved by action. People will listen and then watch to determine if what they hear is reflected in the behavior of leadership.



Author Background and Contact Information

H. Joe Creegan

President of Growth Management Associates and OADTampa

Specialists in Interpersonal and Organizational Development with focus on hiring, training and coaching in the hospitality industry.

Contact Joe by going to www.TheGoodBookofBusiness.com

What Your Company/Institution Does for Your Clients:

Improve revenue stream, customer satisfaction, employee engagement and gross operating profit through coaching, training, and organizational development.

What Makes you Unique: Co-developed an exclusive axiological profile tool for utilization in the hotel industry

instrumental in achieving employee development, retention, and succession.

Individual and Company Achievements/Awards: Reduce employee turnover by 50% for most clients; improve customer satisfaction scores to comply with franchise standards; and improve GOP to meet client objectives in once failing properties.

Background

Professional: Vice President, Operations for Residence Inn by Marriott; Organizational Development, Marketing, and Operational consultant in the hotel industry since January of 1990.

Avocational: Adjunct Professor for Detroit College of Business, Subject matter: Sr. Level Marketing Management.

Adjunct Professor for Piedmont Community College, Subject matter: Communications.

Adjunct Professor for St. Petersburg College. Subject matter: Interpersonal and Organizational Communications.

Education: MA Interpersonal and Organizational Communications.

BS Marketing and Business Education from Western Michigan University

AS Sales and Advertising from Northwood College.