

" Leadership is primarily trust and communication. When you communicate well with people and treat them with respect, they will go through brick walls for you. "

Communicating for Leadership Success

A February 22, 2006 presentation by

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Synopsis by Rod Cox



"What is the primary job of any leader, from U.S. President to shop foreman? It's communication. The greater the leadership responsibility, the more the job is a communications job. And because leadership communication is a skill, a set of learned behaviors, it is not inborn. It is developed. As with any behavior, with more knowledge and practice comes more skill."

Put another way, to develop communication skills is to develop leadership skills; and so it is appropriate to use the term leader/communicator as a title that combines both attributes.

Key to understanding leader/communicator strength, Hackman contends, is understanding our own communication style as well as the communication styles of anyone we might wish to influence: our staff, our colleagues, our bosses, our customers, our vendors. In this Executive Forum presentation, he breaks the discussion into several key elements:

- The role of communication in leadership
- Identifying and understanding our own communication style
- Successfully interacting with other communication styles
- Organizational Trust: what it is, what it has to do with communication, and why it matters to leaders.
- The role of corporate vision.



Professor and Chairperson of the Department of Communication at University of Colorado – Colorado Springs, **Dr. Michael Hackman** teaches communication courses at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Since 1991, he has served as visiting professor at universities in Hamilton, New Zealand; Siena, Italy; and Vienna, Austria. He has also conducted leadership and communication workshops to private and public sector organizations in Canada, the United States, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Hackman is Senior Consultant at CommuniCon, Inc. where his clients include Wells-Fargo, the United States Air Force, J.D. Edwards, Hewlett-Packard, Harley-Davidson, Georgia-Pacific, Fiat, Ernst & Young, AARP, Agilent Technologies, and Bristol-Meyers Squibb.

With Craig Johnson, Hackman has co-authored two textbooks, *Leadership: A Communication Perspective*, and *Creative Communication: Principles and Applications*, that are used at over 400 domestic and international universities. Executive Forum recommends both books.

An unusually talented teacher, Hackman was awarded the university-wide Outstanding Teacher Award at University of Colorado in 1995. As you might expect, his Management Forum Series presentation was full of high energy interactive dialog, illustrative stories, and facilitated discussion. The concepts, learnings and quotes used in this synopsis are derived from Hackman's presentation, and are subject to international copyright laws.

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1. The Role of Communication in Leadership

First, let's define terms and concepts:

- Communication style refers to format; the long-term systems and patterns that make up how we prefer to interact with other people.
- Leadership refers to the science and art of connecting people, materiel and processes to achieve desired outcomes.
- Because effective leadership depends so much on effective communication, the relationship between the two is nearly absolute. When communication styles match or are compatible, leadership and outcomes are hugely enhanced. When they are not, leadership becomes a constant behind-the-wave struggle.
- Clear messages are the essential foundation for connecting people to achieve common outcomes, even when people may have differing communication preferences.
- Lucid, persuasive, flexible communication becomes the toolbox if not the holy grail for all leaders who face the challenge of maximizing the production of their teams. Think of a powerful leader as a master communicator; i.e., a leader/communicator.

Every leader/communicator has the essential task of gaining buy-in for a future that others may not see. To illustrate this point, Hackman took participants through a "find the star" exercise. Embedded in the black-and-white geometric design on the screen was the figure of a five-pointed star. But where? After a few moments time and several hints, there it was; a perfect star nestled amid the competing lines, colors and textures in the lower right hand corner of the screen. And then Hackman popped the question, "*How is this like leadership? What does helping people find a star have to do with anything?*"

- Some employees find the star and "sign on" quickly. Some trust that a star exists even though they may not clearly see it. But most employees take much longer and require bona-fide proof of the star's existence. A good leader/communicator helps his people "get it."

To meet the communication receptors of all her people, an effective leader/communicator may send many messages using many styles, rather than one message in one style.

- Good leader/communicators encourage two-way communication.

Differing perspectives help an organization thrive. A good leader/communicator appreciates diverse points-of-view and promotes them as a means of reducing the likelihood that his organization will run afoul of unforeseen events, missed actions, and other pitfalls that lead to unintended consequences.

- A good leader/communicator encourages talk between members of his organization.

Learning from each other is a primary way of increasing organizational wisdom and outcomes.

A big chunk of the leadership/communication job is to be out interacting with anyone led or affected, whether they are employees, vendors, clients, and other stakeholders. Hackman tells of a recent United Airlines flight where the pilot came into the First Class cabin before pushback and shook the hand of every passenger. Imagine: 16 executives grinning like school kids because the pilot – The Pilot! – was greeting them and shaking their hands. Could plastic captain's wings be far behind? This simple gesture was a model of excellent leadership communication with a specific goal in mind: to gain repeat flyers.

People like to be recognized. Whether you have 10 or 500 people in your organization, if you're the leader you really should know every person's name as well as something about that person. Get to know people. This is a basic task of any good leader/communicator.

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2. Identifying and understanding your own communication style

Hackman's discussion of communication styles is based on the MBTI, the most popular personality instrument in the world today. Based on psychiatrist Carl Jung's theory of psychological type, MBTI is used as a tool for understanding and improving teams, leadership, communication, and conflict resolution.

Jung notes that our communication dimensions are stable over time – the overwhelming majority of us remain true to our type irrespective of our age or place in life – and give us insight as to why some relationships work so well while others are a struggle. Remember meeting someone with whom you connected instantly? Typically, that good connection will persist and ripen because it is largely based on shared or complementary communication styles. Conversely, where the initial communication doesn't work, you are apt to always struggle.

Understanding the preferred communication patterns of your team players is a key element to improving team connectedness and effectiveness. This is not to say that connection is an absolutely necessary condition for success. Many teams – maybe even yours – might be only weakly connected, perhaps better defined as *"tolerant, but not chummy,"* or *"latently combative."* However, we have to learn to work effectively with people even when we don't connect well. The more a leader/communicator is in tune with the communication styles of the players, the better chance she has of molding a cohesive team with predictable positive outcomes.

In Jung's style self-assessments, there is no right or wrong. Using a pattern of dichotomies, he forces a choice between psychological opposites. Jung's methodology has withstood extensive analysis – validation and verification percentages are very high – and transcends national and cultural boundaries. Through this self-assessment, we learn:

- how we prefer to take in information: by experiencing the present (Sensing) or by imagining future possibilities (Intuition).
- how we tend to make our decisions: by use of logic-driven analysis (Thinking) or by means of a more personal process (Feeling).

On the surface, this seems simple: we just need to learn everyone's type and all will be well. Not so. People are psychologically complicated, a combination of nature and nurture. Further, we all use all of the styles as dictated by the situation, although we are less inclined or find it more difficult to use the styles that are less comfortable for us. And we are highly resistant to changing our type other than to temporarily fit more comfortably into a specific situation. That's why for the most part, we are unlikely to be successful when we try to lastingly "mold" a child or employee or ourselves into a different communication style. Extensive research shows that we are far more effective when we work with the cards we have been dealt, when we develop ourselves within our type.

The following grid compares and contrasts the four basic communication styles or types, and for comparative purposes places the psychological opposites (Sensor vs. Intuitor, and Feeler vs. Thinker) side by side. As you read through them:

- think of how your own type and communication style is likely to be perceived by the other styles.
- consider the styles of the people with whom you frequently interact.

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Type	Sensor (S)	Intuitor (N)
General	Emphasis on action. Thrives on getting things done without unnecessary and time-consuming deliberations. Employs an energetic approach to work and life.	Focus on ideas, innovation, concepts, theory, and long-range thinking. Big picture. More of a problem-solver than an implementer. "Doing" may be unsatisfying. A "what-if" person who derives satisfaction from the world of possibilities. Concerned with tactical reality, but not particularly concerned with present-day reality.
Behavioral Focus	Competence, objectivity, pragmatism, resourcefulness, results-oriented, "just do it," determined, rational	Imagination, theory, speculation
Characteristic Behavior Positively Applied	Competitive, objective, pragmatic, resourceful, confident, results-oriented, realistic, determined	Original, creative, abstract, imaginative, visionary, idealistic, broad-gauged, charismatic
Characteristic Behavior Negatively Applied	Ruthless, cynical, unimaginative, opportunistic, arrogant, self-involved, cold-blooded, domineering	Naïve, impractical, pompous, weird, scattered, dogmatic, devious, unrealistic
Value Orientation	Action, winning, wealth	Concepts, ideology, discovery
Time Sense	Present	Future
Comfort Zone	Concrete tasks, practical situations, goal-oriented work environments	Unstructured, creative tasks that require use of imagination
Discomfort Zone	Vague or hypothetical data, absence of goals or bottom line orientation, slow decision-making	Bureaucracy, making things happen quickly
Jobs In Which They Excel	Pilot, banker or investor, military officer, marketing executive, entrepreneur, or any job where quick decision making is imperative	Scientist, artist, professor, writer, senior-level executive
Consumer Influencers	Immediate decision, get it done	Long-range impact

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Type	Feeler	Thinker
General	Focus on human interaction and comfort. Seek and enjoy contact with others. Try to understand and analyze emotions of self and others. An affirming belief in human potential.	Focus on logic, ideas, and systematic inquiry. Finds satisfaction in identifying a problem, developing a variety of possible solutions, weighing them carefully, and testing to find the most logical systematic solution.
Behavioral Focus	Expressive, human interaction, projecting feelings	Structure, organization, problem-solving, logic
Characteristic Behavior Positively Applied	Spontaneous, persuasive, empathetic, sensitive, perceptive, nostalgic, probing, loyal, supportive	Very good at giving precise directions. Analytical, systematic, prudent, deliberate, precise, generally and spatially organized, problem solvers, rational, stable
Characteristic Behavior Negatively Applied	Impulsive, manipulative, sentimental, vindictive, overly personal, melodramatic, subjective, conflictive. May be seen as not hard working (too busy socializing) but studies show the opposite to be true.	Cold, stubborn, over-confident, indecisive, controlling, unemotional, rigid, overcautious, nit-picking
Value Orientation	Family, friendship, loyalty	Quality, being right
Time Sense	Past	Past, present, future
Comfort zone	Human interaction, probing, analyzing others	Data collection and analysis
Discomfort Zone	Highly structured situations, taking orders, impersonal work environments	Interpersonal communication, situations requiring quick decisions
Jobs in Which They Excel	Sales, teaching, public relations, nurses, psychologists	Lawyer, engineer, accountant, IT specialist, doctor, or any job where data is important
Consumer influencers	Recommendations from friends	Consumer Reports, other sources of objective data

How would people from each of these four Series respond if you asked them:

- What do you like me to do when I communicate with you; i.e., what is your favorite communication situation?
- What irritates you when you try to communicate, or when people communicate with you?
- What are your most problematic communication situations?

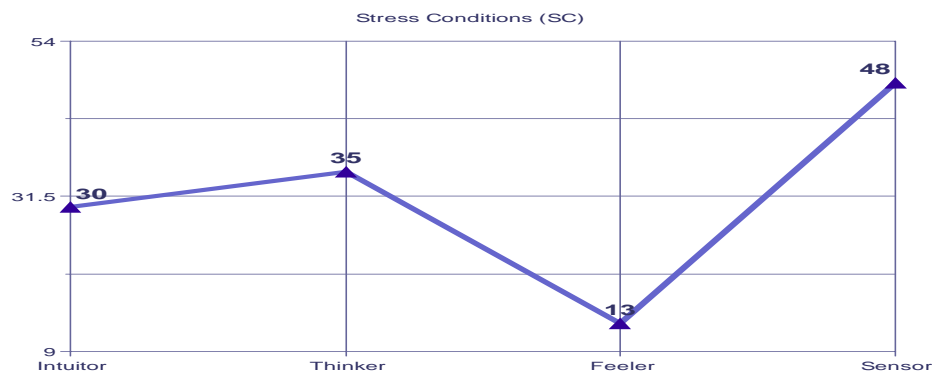
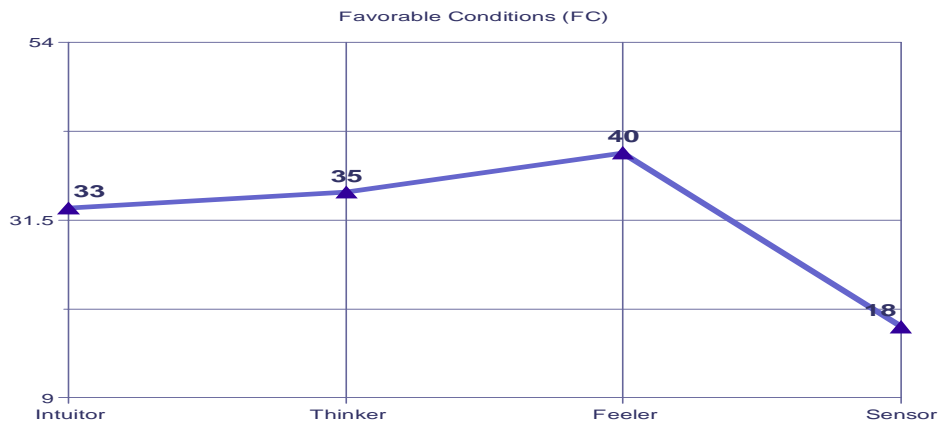
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Notes:

If you want to accurately determine preferred communication styles, consider purchasing the assessment used at Hackman's presentation – *A Survey of Communication Types* by Dr. Paul P. Mok – from Training Associates Press, P.O. Box 452828, Garland, TX (800) 779-3536 paulmokcst@aol.com. An interpretation manual is also available.

The two graphs below are plotted from the responses of a sample participant. Compare and note what happens to his Feeler and Sensor preferences under stress conditions. Using the data from the grids on pages 3-4, how might this be evidenced in actions? In communication?



- Scores from 24 – 36 represent “average” use of a particular style
- Scores of 37 and above represent “compulsive” use of a particular style
- Scores of 23 and below represent “compulsive avoidance” of a particular style
- Differences of 7 points or more on the same dimension from Favorable to Stress Conditions are “behaviorally observable.”

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Earlier, we said that our communication style is highly likely to remain stable throughout our lives. However, under stress it may morph: the predictable "us" may temporarily become a "different" us. To some observers – and perhaps to ourselves – it may seem as though we've temporarily become our evil twin with uncharacteristic likes, dislikes, and actions. But like a rubber band which under stress may assume a new "shape," we are very apt to return to our original "shape" when the stressor is removed.

In the above graphs, compare the participant's shift in his F and S scores when under stress, and consider how this is likely to temporarily alter his communication style.

What about a flat line profile where dichotomy scores show little variance?

"This can be interpreted as a highly adaptable communicator who gets along with all and is easy to interact with – or – it may be someone who is difficult to communicate with because of unpredictability. Most of us have a primary style – our highest overall score. In the event of a tie, make your determination based on the one that resounds most with you."

3. Successfully interacting with other communication styles

We would do well to ask ourselves not only *"What is my style?"*, but also, *"What are my liabilities in terms of my style? To be more effective, what do I need to adapt?"* In its purest form, a consistent style may be a good thing. It certainly provides predictability. But a single-style leader is likely to miss a lot of what's going on. Therefore, many of us – and this includes virtually all good leaders – are strategic in how we handle our work style as we adjust to the situation.

A big part of successful leadership is developing flexible strategies for dealing with differences in communication styles person-to-person and situation-to-situation. Consider:

- working to identify the primary style of those you interact with, and considering the impact of your communication style on their behavior.
- focusing more on substance than on style.
- situationally adapting to the style preferences of others.
- looking carefully at communication style preferences when assembling teams.

4. Organizational Trust: what it is and why it matters to leaders.

You have learned how leaders with good communication skills are likely to grow teams with high productivity. But just as important is trust. Leadership is primarily trust and communications. When you communicate well with people and treat them with trust, they will go through brick walls for you.

Think of the people you trust. Why is it that you trust them? (Audience responses)

- *They do what they say they're going to do. They follow-through.*
- *They have ethics, character, and competence.*
- *I can count that what they say is true to the best of their knowledge.*
- *I have an internal gut feeling of trust.*
- *They display discretion with sensitivity.*
- *Differences are accepted. They make me feel safe when we disagree.*

The final bullet – feeling safe to disagree -- is absolutely essential, says Hackman. Trust means that it's okay to exhibit vulnerability while continuing to feel safe. It means that it's okay to put yourself on the line.

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- *Trust is multi-level. Feelings of trust vary among and between groups.*
- *Trust is culturally rooted. What constitutes trust is different culture to culture and it's defined differently. For example, the attention to time and relationships is markedly different in German and Italian cultures.*
- *Trust is communication based, built on abundant, accurate, open information. In the absence of these, the resulting vacuum is likely to be filled with rumors, innuendos, or a person's own information, accurate or not. So even if your information is not complete, give what you have and make sure that it is truthful.*
- *Trust is dynamic and evolving, easy to lose and difficult to recapture even through a long term rehabilitative process. It is a supreme challenge to build trust back into an organization that has lost it.*
- *Trust is multi-dimensional. It's cognitive. There's a behavioral dimension. It's emotional and built on gut instincts. And of all communication processes, trust is the hardest to control because people evaluate us and everything we do through their perception of our trustworthiness. Do anything you can to preserve trust and find ways to minimize negative reactions.*

Trust matters from a bottom-line business perspective, too. Simply put, high trust is strongly related to high profits. Consider Nordstrom's: not the cheapest place to shop, but where earnings per square foot of floor space are twice that of its competitors. Nordstrom's successfully takes advantage of:

- adaptive organizational forms that adjust as the situation adjusts. Witness their justly famous return policy where decision making is on-the-spot and in the hands of front-line staff.
- strong internal and external strategic alliances. Members of Nordstrom's sales staff often become long-term personal buyers for affluent customers.
- responsive virtual teams. It takes a lot of trust to work with managers and employees in different locales, or in matrixed organizations. A Nordstrom's sales associate in Chandler, Arizona has the same level of authority to make customers happy as does a sales associate in the Seattle, Washington flagship store.
- minimal litigation costs. Nordstrom's knows it's less often the mistake and more often the attitude that prompts lawsuits so they focus on positive attitudes and interactions.

Hackman's wife recently returned a pair of ill-fitting Nordstrom shoes that she had worn for several months. Rather than being resistant, the clerk said "I want you to be happy with us when you leave this store" and gave her a full refund. Thirty minutes later, Hackman's wife left the store with a smile on her face – plus three new pairs of Nordstrom shoes for which she cheerfully paid full price for two.

5. Trust Influencers

Does it surprise you to learn that the influencers of organizational trust have been identified and mapped? In the following trust components, the percentages in parentheses indicate the importance that people assign that particular influencer.

Concern for employees (.91): A generalized perception of sincere, caring and empathetic effort by leaders to understand feelings and to promote tolerance and psychological safety. A significant element in Southwest Airlines' achievement of multiple-year first-place awards for baggage handling and customer service is its continued pattern of demonstrated concern for its employees.

- *How is concern for employees communicated in the organization?*
- *What policies and practices are most important?*

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Openness and Honesty (.88): A generalized perception of sincere exchanges of shared info between leaders and followers. Share open, accurate, ample, honest communication.

- *How do the messages (presentations, e-mails, memos, publications, etc.) in your organization communicate openness and honesty?*
- *Are leaders / managers accountable, trained, and supported in providing open and honest communication? What are the evidences?*

Identification (.84): A generalized perception of affiliation and association as a result of holding common goals, norms, values and vision.

- *Are leaders going to executive retreats at posh resorts while workers are foregoing bonuses?*

Reliability (.80): A generalized commitment to what you're doing, making sure words and actions are aligned.

- *How reliable are the people in your organization?*
- *Are there differences across functions and locations?*
- *How congruent are you in your words and actions?*

Competence (.75): A generalized measure of the effectiveness of leadership.

- How is competence communicated within your organization?
- To your customers and clients?

Vision: Does It Really Matter?

"Yes! . . . as long as it's carefully thought out and thoroughly implemented," says Hackman.

One of the most important leadership elements, vision is a concise statement of the direction in which a group or organization and its people are headed, specific enough to provide real guidelines to people, yet vague enough to encourage innovation and remain relevant under a variety of conditions.

Unfortunately, most organizational visions fall flat in that they tend to be wordy, lofty, difficult to remember, and have little to do with actions. They often speak only to executive levels. But a well-crafted vision can do wonderful things to an organization:

- *Disney: We create happiness.* Simple and to-the-point. Employees are given great latitude to creatively make guest happiness work.
- *Apple: To make a contribution to the world by making tools for the mind that advance humankind.* This is both motivational and inspirational.
- *Amazon.com: To be earth's most customer-centered company.* The concept guides the action.

Building trust in your organization often starts with a review of policies and procedures.

- How many signatures does it take to get approval?
- Are rules and regulations getting in the way of good decisions?
- Do you have a plan for communicating trust?
- What is the training and education for managers and supervisors?
- What specifically do you do to build trust?
- Do you have regular employee feedback processes?

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Application

Dr. Hackman suggests starting your path to greater communication success and organizational trust with a thoughtful yet tough-minded analysis of where you are now, where you want to go, and then implementing three or four actions to begin the process.

- How aligned are your values to the organization? The closer the link, the more comfortable and productive you're apt to be.
- Where is the identification strong in your organization: Where does it need improvement? Clarity is a necessary precursor to alignment.
- How can your communication efforts contribute to clarifying the organizational vision? The success of your co-workers/leaders/customers?

An initial Action Plan might look something like this:

Action	Responsible Parties	By When	Follow-up Date

"A leader who understands his communication style, and who can meld and/or take advantage of the communication strengths of each group while keeping the conversation going has his finger on a powerful button."

For further information about preferred communication styles and MBTI preferences, Executive Forum recommends:

- Barger, N. & L Kirby (2004). *Introduction to Type® and Change (2nd ed)*. Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc.
- Bridges, W. (2000). *The Character of Organizations: Using Personality Type in Organization Development* (updated ed.). Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Dunning, D (2003). *Introduction to Type® and Communication*. Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc.
- Hirsh, S.K & J. Kise. (2000). *Introduction to Type® and Coaching: A Dynamic Guide for Individual Development*. Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc.
- Hirsh, S.K., & J. Kummerow. (1998). *Introduction to Type® in Organizations (3rd ed.)*. Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc.
- Kiersey, David. *Please Understand Me II* Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis Book Co.
- Killen, D & D. Murphy (2003). *Introduction to Type® and Conflict*. Mountain View, CA: CPP, Inc.
- Myers, Isabel Briggs. *Gifts Differing*. CPP, Inc., formerly Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, CA.
- Myers, Isabel Briggs. *Introduction to Type in Organizations*. CPP, Inc., Palo Alto, CA.

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Pearman, R.R. (1998). *Hardwired Leadership: Unleashing the Personality to Become a New Millennium Leader*. Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.

Quenk, N.L. (2000). *In the Grip: Understanding Type, Stress, and the Inferior Function*. (2nd ed.). Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.