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BY ROWENA MORAIS

For most of us, we spend a significant amount of time at work communicating. Whether we're drafting proposals, shooting out emails, in meetings or having phone conversations, each touchpoint either supports or takes away from our communication efforts. I believe time invested in learning how to communicate well, and not downplaying the issue as something we are already familiar with and therefore understand, is key to our success in getting things done.

To get noticed, **WRITE FOR YOUR READER**

It's harder than it looks

In most avenues, we do not work or exist alone. We need to get the support, buy-in or approval of others who are leading us and sometimes from within teams. If we fail to accord our communication endeavours as significant to our efforts, the bottom line is that we fail to influence others in their decision making, which ultimately may cost us in the long run.

Don't get me wrong. For the longest time, I was also ineffective, to an extent, in how I communicated.

I focused on what I wanted to say and how I was going to deliver my message. It was important to me, to be crystal clear about what I was saying and equally, that my message was not truncated in any way that would affect its impact. In other words, it was all about me.

The truth is many of us focus on ensuring our message is heard. There are things that we want to say and often, we want to deliver it in a particular fashion and until such time as the message is delivered in full, there is little else we want to pay attention to. We may block the other person out, we may fail to heed warning signals or worse, we may react too quickly to how others are responding. Yes, we may be too inwardly focused.

Any communication is a two way street which means that we need to focus as much - if not more - *attention on the person receiving our message.*

I can't remember at what point it dawned on me that I needed to pay far more attention to the person listening. There were times when I got into heated debates with colleagues over an issue. There were times I didn't feel I was being heard. I was cut off mid sentence. I was talked over. I didn't feel I was understood and I wanted to reiterate my points to make sure they understood better. Was this a case of speaking better? Was this a case of "they just didn't hear me out"?

And then I said to myself, "Why don't I put myself in her shoes? If I can do that, I will know better how to position myself to her and then, maybe she may actually listen."

Through deliberate practice, I am now better at communicating. I have developed a deeper awareness - in the moment - to recognise when in a conversation I need to take a step back and reassess the situation.

The first thing I do when preparing any marketing or communication collateral is to step into the mind of the reader. What do they want? Why would they be interested in what I have to say? The all-important what's in it for me? Lay it all out from their perspective and even better, allay their fears and answer the unasked questions.

Are people getting better at doing this? Yes, I can see the shift but it's still not as mainstream as it should be. Can you apply this to all aspects of your life? Absolutely. But as Phillip Yaffe pointed out in his article, *Why Putting Yourself In the Mind of Your Reader is Easier - and More Challenging* - than you might have imagined, it is simply because we are not taught how. And we need more practice - not just any kind of practice but deliberate practice where we focus on what we're doing, breaking down the process into a series of steps, assessing and analysing the action and reaction, going through various possibilities and just generally engaging in trial and error. To step into the mind of your listener or reader is to understand that there is more than one perspective in any situation.

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