



7 Keys to Lifting the Fog in Your Communications with People

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Every communication either contributes to or contaminates a relationship. There is no in between. As a leader, you have the opportunity to contribute to people every day and your communications is your vehicle by which you can influence. To be sure you are not creating fog with your communications, follow these 7 essentials.

1. Walk in their shoes.

Irrefutably the most powerful thing you can do in your relations with others is to see the world from their perspective. When you “walk in their shoes,” you pretend you are on the other side of your own communication, experiencing it from the other person’s viewpoint, imagining what it would be like to receive the communication that you just delivered.

2. Listen like your job depends on it.

Every person wants to be heard and understood. Your job as a leader is to listen intentionally and relentlessly. Listen to understand their view point, not to agree with it. Help them feel heard by paraphrasing, asking second questions, and empathizing with how they must feel.

3. Speak to be understood.

Always assume that you are responsible for a miscommunication. When a miscommunication occurs, assume that the error was on your end of the communication. If someone is left confused, assume that you spoke in a way that was not clear, understandable, or memorable. Then go about speaking to be understood by them, not you.

4. Set expectations.

People just want to be winners, not losers. So show them how to win. The easiest way to help others win is for everyone to understand expectations from the beginning. Set expectations, check in with their understanding of those expectations, and check in with them midpoint to clear up any confusions that have arisen regarding those expectations.

5. Give feedback.

People, just like pilots, need feedback to be specific, immediate, and on-the-job. Feedback that is given once or twice a year does little good. Yearly performance evaluations are at best a dashboard of where people are. They don’t offer any behavior-impacting advice. Offer feedback – good and constructive – throughout the day and you will influence people’s behaviors more effectively.

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6. Ask for feedback

Have you ever asked your people, "So how am I doing? What can I do better to serve you?" If not, what are you afraid of? Ask and you will engender their trust as well as discover some fog that needs clearing.

7. Suspend your stories

When we miscommunicate, fail to communicate, or create missed expectations, people are left to wonder, filling in gaps with their stories. And when people fabricate stories, conflict becomes inevitable. The only way to address conflict is to confront the other person, debunk the story, and start over. Suspend your own stories when you are left to wonder and you will go to great lengths to avoid conflict altogether.



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