

What Should I Do?

By AG Sertillanges

We are obliged at a given moment to accept necessary sacrifices. It is a painful thing to say to oneself, "By choosing one road, I am turning my back on a thousand others." Everything is interesting, everything might be useful, everything attracts and charms a noble mind; but death is before us. Mind and matter make their demands. Willy-nilly we must submit and rest content, as to the things that time and wisdom deny us, with a glance of sympathy which is another act of homage to the truth.

Do not be ashamed not to know what you could only know at the cost of scattering your attention. Be humble about it, yes, for it shows our limitations; but to accept our limitations is a part of virtue and gives us a great dignity, that of the man who lives according to his law and plays his part. We are not much; but we are part of a whole, and we have the honor of being a part. What we do not do, we do all the same; God does it, our brethren do it, and we are with them in the unity of love.

Therefore, do not imagine you can do everything. Measure yourself, measure your task. After some experiments, make up your mind, though without rigidity, to accept your limits. Preserve, by reading and if necessary by a certain amount of writing, the advantage of your early studies, your contact with wide fields of knowledge—but for the main part of your time and strength, concentrate. The half-informed man is not the man who knows only the half of things, but the man who only half knows things. Know what you have resolved to know; cast a glance at the rest. Leave to God, who will look after it, what does not belong to your proper vocation. Do not be a deserter from yourself, through wanting to substitute yourself for all others.

From The Intellectual Life at the end of the chapter titled "The Field of Work"

Table of Contents

These articles were originally published in the Manager in Ministry.

Communication's Gauge	4
How to Demoralize and De-motivate People	4
Things to Tell a New Staff Member	4
E-mail Etiquette	5
What Goes with Yes and No?	6
Clues of Incompetence	6
Communication: The Process of Life	7
Dumpagation	8
A Box of Creativity	9
Dangers of Hindsight	10
What a Secretary Wishes Her Boss Understood	10
Lessons Learned the Hard Way in Communication	10
The Best Tribes Have Chindians	11
Communicating Your Values	12
E-mail: The 7% Solution	12
Staying Ahead of My Team	13
Filling the Information Gap	13
Value the Answer	14
Helping My Team Ask for Help	14
Grapevine vs. Meetings	15
10 Things Every Team Wants Every Team Member to Communicate	16

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Communication's Gauge By Sam Brock

Occasionally I find myself saying, "He is a lousy communicator!" Usually it is because the communicator forgot to tell me something I needed to know, told me too late, told me so early that I forgot, or all of the above. Reviewing this list, I realized how hard it is to be a good communicator. I must remember everything that may affect someone and tell him at exactly the right time so that he has the information when he needs it. No wonder I find myself under the category of lousy communicator more often than not.

According to 1 Corinthians 10:24 and Philippians 2:1–5, we each have the responsibility of considering others. Communication is one way to do that. Following are a few principles of communication that show you care about others.

Communication must be timely. Just because you have the calendar figured out for the next five years does not mean that everyone is ready for that calendar. Everyone you work with has a different idea of what is timely. Some plan way ahead, while others are lucky to know what the plan is for today. Your job as a communicator is to give each of them the information they need when they need it. Writing things on paper will help accommodate all the different ideas of timeliness. During staff meetings with many announcements, we have someone type notes and e-mail the notes to all the staff. If someone forgets a detail, he can refer to the notes. Also, if someone missed the verbal announcement, he'll still get the e-mail version. Try to stay a step ahead of your team with your timely communication.

Question, decision, communication! On your mark, get set, (you know what comes next) GO! With communication there is another series that you need in your head—question, decision, communication! A question is the red flag letting you know when people need information that you have. You may have not yet made a decision. However, many times you have already made the decision and forgotten to tell anybody or did not realize how it would affect your team. Your concern about the well-being of others is tested by whether or not you communicate to them. Every time you make a decision, think about those on your team who are affected. Then do the work of communicating to them.

Encourage questions. It takes two to communicate. Think of questions as a way to clarify communication. If you are intimidated by questions, you will find yourself avoiding them. If you think a person is being difficult or dumb because they are asking questions, the questions will slowly disappear. Giving your team a bit of time to ask questions during a meeting or at the end of announcements is a good habit to get into.

Once I realized that communication is not only talking and listening but also a way that I could prefer others, I had a biblical reason to try to be the best communicator possible.

How to Demoralize and De-motivate People

1. Only explain when asked.
2. Never ask questions.
3. Live in a "state of Eeyore."
4. Live in a state of emergency.
5. Set unattainable goals.
6. Never challenge the troops.

The list of six can be broken down into three categories in which leaders should be striving for balance.

Things to Tell a New Staff Member

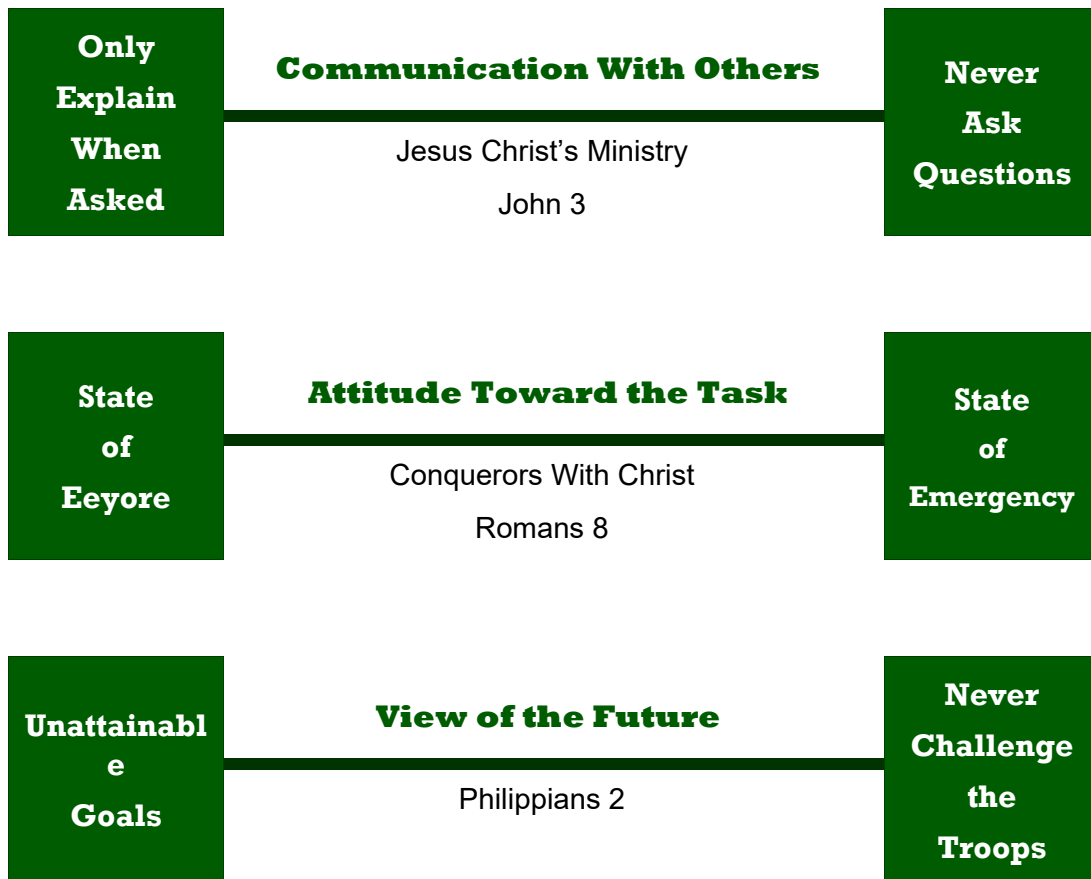
New shoes are never comfortable—Every new job has a time of break in. There may be some tender spots along the way. Only time can make the new fit like the old.

Dumb questions aren't—Don't try to fake what you don't know. Just ask and be willing to ask often.

You are a rookie for a year—After a few months, your staff may forget that the new guy is actually a new guy.

Maximize the positives, minimize the negatives—Every new place has its good and bad. If you maximize the negatives and minimize the positives, you will be miserable. This one is good for all your staff.

Ask why—If you know what we are doing but you don't know why, then ask.



E-mail Etiquette

Don'ts

1. Don't use e-mail in place of a one-on-one conversation. Talk to people and keep writing notes rather than hiding behind your computer.
2. Don't use all caps. IT LOOKS LIKE YOU ARE SHOUTING!
3. Don't use sarcasm. It never works in writing.
4. Don't use e-mail as a confrontational tool. If you're really perturbed at someone, see them in person—after you have cooled off.
5. Don't believe everything you read. Just because an e-mail claims "the research team at IBM has discovered a new e-mail virus" doesn't mean it is true.
6. Don't spread rumors. The grapevine is powerful enough without e-mail's help.
7. Don't store e-mail in your inbox. Set up folders to sort e-mails you need to keep.
8. Don't spam. Spam is unsolicited junk mail sent to a list of people. To avoid spamming people, ask yourself whether or not the information you're sending will be of interest to EVERYONE on your To: list.
9. Don't check your e-mail every time the "new mail" icon shows up.
10. Don't e-mail information that needs to be addressed within twenty-four hours. Let people know via phone, radio, or in person.

Do's

1. Use e-mail to pass along valuable information. That's what e-mail does best. It is an excellent tool for quickly reaching many people with important information.
2. Check your e-mail at least once each work day. Vital information is often sent out with little advance notice.
3. Use e-mail as a reminder tool.
4. Use e-mail to answer questions. Let the person know you received his question and tell him when to remind you if he hasn't received an answer.
5. Always respond to interoffice e-mail.
6. Use e-mail to pass along phone messages. When you receive a phone message, a quick "thank you" lets the message taker know you have received the message.

What Goes with Yes and No?

By Sam Brock

Saying *yes* and *no* is one of the hardest things you should be doing every day. Many times we procrastinate by saying "maybe" or "let me check on that and get back with you." We put off the disappointment we know we will create when we say no, and we worry about the precedent we will set when we say yes. If your ministry is changing, you will have to say yes and no frequently. The ability to say yes or no is vital to following a plan, holding an expectation, or leading a team. Much goes into the process of saying yes or no, so don't take this job lightly.

Before You Say Yes or No

- Listen. You may already have a preconceived idea of what your answer is going to be, but chances are there are two sides to the story. Listen for any information that would impact your yes or no.
- Ask questions. What vital pieces of information are missing?
- Do you have the whole story? Many times information is presented from one point of view. Fill in the context by getting the whole story.
- Was there time for your information to change? Just a few hours is all that is necessary to change a situation. Keep listening.
- Has this already been answered, or should I be answering? If it is somebody else's job to say yes or no, you should stay out of it.

As You Say Yes or No

- Discuss what brought you to this conclusion. Letting your staff know the major reasons may let them know a bigger picture and how your mind works.
- Share the philosophy behind your conclusion. Constantly sharing the why behind the what helps your staff make good decisions in the future.
- Encourage input no matter what your answer is.
- Your answer should not be a secret. Your answer will undoubtedly affect others. Whom does it impact and how? Share that information with others.

Clues of Incompetence

Blaming Inanimate Objects for Human Errors

Examples: The bus took a wrong turn, or my phone hung up on you when I was transferring you.

Cure: Be honest about the mistake. Tell the person how you plan to do it differently next time. Give them a solution.

Avoiding the Job

Example: When you ask questions at the help desk, they refer you to another number instead of helping you.

Cure: Help people solve their problems. When you show a willingness to help, people will assume you are competent. You still have to prove it.

Enjoying Ignorance

Example: I don't know; I just work here.

Cure: Keep learning. Keep asking questions. Do not settle for ignorant bliss.

If Yes

- Stick with your priorities. Your pet project may be way down the list; by saying yes to your pet project, you are saying no to a higher priority. Now people will need to figure out how something becomes your pet project instead of what is most important.
- Is this a one-time yes that will be a no many times in the future? The person who asks you for vacation after buying his plane ticket may be the perfect candidate for this type of yes. Make sure you are clear when the answer is yes once and no many times.
- At what point would your yes become a no? This information defines the boundaries and helps clarify expectations.
- Be excited! A yes that sounds like you want to say no is not very comforting.

If No

- Make sure you are not just saying no because it is a burr under your saddle.
- Ask yourself if you can explain your no to everyone.
- When could no become a yes? Is there something that could change that would change the answer?
- Be compassionate. When saying no to the requisition for more tools, make sure the person you are saying no to knows that you have put yourself in his shoes. A cold-hearted no is hard to take.

If you must say maybe, let the person know when they can expect a yes or no. Then do the work necessary to turn a maybe into a yes or no. The hard work of yes and no is yours to do. Go to it!

Communication: The Process of Life

By Walt Brock

Over the years of ministry I have finally learned the central axiom of management. It has taken me a long time, countless hours of frustration, and much soul searching; but I have finally come to terms with my shortfall in regards to this axiom. I've argued, debated, and resisted taking any responsibility for my actions; but every time I do, honesty demands my acknowledgement of the correctness of constituent surveys, staff comments, and my own family's opinion. It all boils down to this—I must acknowledge that I have a long way to go in order to be considered a good communicator. The majority of all general purpose books written from Christian or secular perspectives dealing with management, leadership, or family issues have a chapter or more devoted to this subject. I readily admit this failure, but how to fix it is beyond me (James 3:1-2). Still, I must endeavor to improve and find ways to get the message across to others.

I believe that one of my problems has been that being a man who likes to fix and do things, I have had a tendency to view communication as an accomplished feat, rather than an ongoing process. When every question was answered, when my wife was quiet, when no hands were in the air, I had arrived . . . I had communicated. Little did I realize that such silence was more of a testimony of my poor communication, rather than of my good communication. If I continue to view communication as something to be accomplished and put behind me, I will always be disappointed and frustrated that it keeps coming back to dog my sense of accomplishment. Rather I need to view communication as an ongoing fact of life, like breathing . . . always there, always necessary, and an evidence of life. If I will remember that, I may be less frustrated by finding that so much of my management and leadership work revolves around communication in one form or another.

Well, that is enough philosophizing; let me share some helpful thoughts regarding communication.

Understand the unofficial communication channel in your ministry. Do not by default allow this useful tool to become a negative force in your ministry. In every organization there is an official communication channel and an unofficial communication channel. Through the unofficial channel, staff often know exactly what big event is about to be announced before you announce it, and according to what they heard on this highly reliable (for them) channel, they have probably already made up their minds long before you have presented your whole plan. Therefore, you must manage this channel of information, using it for good. There is no need to try to stop it from happening; if the sun comes up tomorrow, this channel will be functioning.

Your best course is to figure out how to “unofficially” tap into this channel and put out some helpful information in advance. Tap into it before you make your announcement, find out what people’s concerns are, and answer them right up front as you are making your big “surprise” announcement. Do not fall into the trap of trying to use this as a tool of manipulation, but rather view it as a tool of communication—an aid to listening to the real concerns of your team, concerns that for one reason or another are not being addressed directly to you.

To whom do you communicate in the process of growth and change? I’m helped with this one by remembering the “4H” rule—healing, helped, hurting, and holdouts.

Is there any **healing** from the past that needs to be addressed scripturally? Some, not all, new ideas have their roots in the past, such as a previously proposed course of action that was rejected, a problem that surfaced, or an unfair circumstance affecting your team. If any of these issues linger, the wise course is to identify them and resolve them before introducing something new.

Who will be **helped** by this new growth idea? You must involve them in the planning process, or you might find the very people you are trying to help complacently dragging their feet when you thought they’d be thrilled. Listening to this group of people has always, without exception, improved my best ideas and plans. The more involved they are, the more on board they are. This is where I use the “box of creativity” (see *Manager in Ministry* Issue 2), defining the four limitations of time, purpose, resources, and people; then I allow others (those to be helped) to imagine solutions within that box.

Who will be **hurt** by this change process? Everyone, without exception, looks at each new change from the viewpoint of how it affects them. Plan on communicating (listening to and understanding their situation) with **all** those who will not be helped by the proposed change and about half of those who will be helped.

Who are the **holdouts**? Some people will reserve their judgment for a while; they want to hear more, have some questions answered, etc. On the other hand, some of them are doing so as a ploy to get their own way or to test how the winds are blowing. But some of them really want to think it through and make a good decision. Because we don’t know the heart of man, it is difficult to tell why they are holding out. When some are holdouts, I have found it is best to treat them with respect, going to each personally to learn what their questions are and answer them if I can, or research in order to give them an answer. Some holdouts have saved me a lot of agony by not immediately agreeing with the boss, causing me to look a little closer and make some key adjustments. Holdouts can be extremely helpful or can be a great hindrance to change; the communication of leadership makes the difference.

Reactions are more important than actions. We must listen to reactions with both our eyes and our ears and then respond to those reactive words and responses communicating value and honor. By observing reactions, we can always learn more about ourselves and those we serve. Although proper reactions are a constant challenge for the believer, we have an advantage over non-Christian managers because God has given us biblical formulas for confrontation and forgiveness.

Reactions will come—do not be surprised by them. Some will come now, some as you are in process, and some as you finish. You must handle them as they come.

- Some will argue with you, wanting their position accepted.
- Some will attack you, trying to change your views through personal attacks and questioning of your motives.
- Some will agree with you, but go away and continue to do the same old things.
- Some will ask for more information, time, and study. They will stall until the deal is dead.

Dump-agation

Dumpagation is the fine art of giving people responsibility at the last minute so that imminent failure is not your fault. Dumpagation is practiced by managers who do not want to take the blame or who have not taken the time to properly delegate. Use the following four simple steps to delegate properly.

1. I do.
2. I do; you watch.
3. You do; I watch.
4. You do.

Steps two and three are the most often missed steps of delegation. Dumpagators use steps one and four. Your team will appreciate the time spent to properly delegate.

Problems from reactions never go away by themselves; they must be handled. Remember the old oil filter commercial, “Pay me now or pay me later?” There is never a better time to handle them than now!

Reactions can be best handled by two simple reminders (assuming you’ve dealt with any offenses biblically).

- Remind them of the love principle by which Christ wants us to live. A self-sacrificing others-first love results in a give-give spiritual solution, not a win-win secular solution.
- Remind them of why we are involved in this change—it is God’s will for this ministry. Reactions are almost always best answered by going back and reviewing why we all decided to work at this change process we call growth. Why? Because God wants us to, and He usually puts us in stress situations to see if we have learned to trust in Him or if we are still trying to create our own little security circle of inactivity.

A Box of Creativity By Sam Brock

Some of my most memorable boxes came on Christmas morning. My parents would try to hide the contents of our gifts by putting the much asked for pocket knife in a huge box with a rock in it. The big, heavy box allowed me to imagine all sorts of possible gifts. As a child, I became an expert on what gifts could fit in a certain size box. As managers, it is our responsibility to give each of our workers a box of creativity.

The box represents the limits or expectations that we can expect. Without limits it is impossible to be creative. Our workers may indicate a desire to have no limits, but their creativity is dependent on our box.

When all four sides of the box of creativity have been defined, we are ready to be creative. Think about a specific area in your ministry, such as your website. Is the purpose clear? How much time and money do you want to spend on it? Is there a deadline? Two things happen when there is no box of creativity. First, our staff assume they can spend, use, or work on the project as much as they want. We find ourselves trying to get a handle on something that has grown way out of proportion. Second, staff who do not want to step on any toes, spend too much energy, or spend too much money, will wait and wait and . . . wait. The project does not get off the ground, because nobody has a clear idea of what to do and how to do it.

Our job . . . giving them a box of creativity! We are to remind them that even though we may have limits, we serve a God who is infinite. Our limits magnify God’s power.

PURPOSE

Purpose. The first side of your box of creativity is purpose. Define the purpose of what you are trying to accomplish. If you do not define the purpose, others may define it for you. Common purposes that may be harmful include, “Let’s get this done as fast as possible,” or “Whatever works . . . I guess that’s okay.” Every activity should have a reason. Many times the purpose is key to connecting temporal work with eternal possibilities.

TIME

Time. The second side of your box is the realization that there is a time deadline. Unfortunately, we are not given any time-outs in the constant procession of time. Without a deadline, your team begins wasting time and goofing off, waiting for you to share what the deadline is going to be.

PEOPLE

People. The third side of your box should be a clear understanding of who will be involved in getting the job done. Each person provides a different background and unique skills that affect the creativity.

Money/Resources. The last side of your box of creativity must include what we can spend or use to do the job. To create out of nothing is not an ability that we have. Many times we communicate this through the use of a budget.

MONEY/RESOURCES

Dangers of Hindsight By Sam Brock

What is hindsight? One dictionary defines it as the ability or opportunity to understand and judge an event or experience after it has occurred. Consider the following five dangers of hindsight:

Confusing hindsight with foresight—many decisions we would not make if our foresight were as clear as our hindsight. Confusing the two means we will judge others' motives based on things they could not have predicted.

Never using hindsight—never looking back robs us of the opportunity to learn from experience. The process of looking back is many times called evaluation.

Dwelling on hindsight—leads to obsessing on the coulda, shoulda, woulda without dealing with where we are now.

Encouraging us to do nothing—we become gun-shy about making decisions because our hindsight makes it obvious that we are not perfect.

Forgetting that hindsight is a limited view—remember that this is still a limited viewpoint and is not close to the all-knowing expanse of God's viewpoint.

What a Secretary Wishes Her Boss Understood By Beneth Perry

How difficult it can be to determine what project is priority. Sometimes the boss walks up to her desk and tells her he has a job that needs to be done immediately. What he has forgotten is that he told her the same thing yesterday, and that's what she was working on when he gave her another "priority."

That depending on her job description, she may have more than one boss. She needs a way to determine whose A priority gets done first.

That it's her job to make the boss look good. Therefore, she and her boss need to work out a plan whereby she can respectfully "bug" him about getting a job completed without her being made to feel like a nag.

How important "round-trip tickets" are. In order for both the boss and his secretary to be most efficient, they need to communicate clearly on what job or part of a job either of them has completed. For instance, when a boss sends an e-mail to his secretary with a job for her to do, she needs to reply with a "Got it," "Okay," or even something like "Okay. I'll start on that after I finish . . ."—something that lets him know she got the e-mail. She then needs to communicate with him again when the project is completed. In the same way, the boss needs to have the courtesy to respond to her e-mails, letting her know she can rest assured that the job she completed for him was done right and that he will take it from there.

How frustrating it is to discover the boss doing her job. It seems oftentimes that because the boss either doesn't know what to do next or just doesn't want to take the time to explain a job to his secretary, he ends up doing small tasks himself, instead of passing them off to his secretary, allowing her to successfully fulfill her job description of helping the boss be able to complete his administrative duties.

That while she is to make her boss look good, she is not to be his scapegoat. If he misses a deadline, messes up a job, or fumbles a ball that was most clearly in his court, he needs to be the one to make that right with the offended party, not get the secretary to do it for him.

Lessons Learned the Hard Way in Communication

Don't believe everything you hear.

True things taken out of context lead to false conclusions.

Repetition will be necessary.

Repetition will be necessary.

Everything should not be communicated to everybody.

God is a master communicator.

To develop your listening skills you must quit working on your talking skills.

Misunderstandings will happen between two people who care about each other.

First seek to understand; then you will be better understood.

That everyone expects the secretary to know where her boss is and when he will be available.

Therefore, it's helpful for the boss to communicate often with his secretary on where he is; what time he'll be back; if while he's gone, he's able to be reached on his cell phone; and if while he's in his office, he's able to be interrupted.

That she and her boss need to determine what the best way is for the two of them to communicate and then stick with that plan.

For several months, I worked in a church office where the senior pastor's secretary would keep a folder on the windowsill between his office and hers. Every time the senior pastor walked into the office, which oftentimes was when she was not there, he would open the folder and find letters he needed to sign, paperwork he had requested, and other bits of information. He would do whatever was necessary with that information, sometimes put new items in the folder, and return it to the windowsill for the secretary to retrieve the next day. Even though he was rarely in the office, they were able to get much accomplished as a team with this great system of communication.

That they both need a regularly scheduled catch-up meeting, at least weekly.

If the boss is rarely in the office, these meetings are vital for the secretary so that she knows there's a meeting coming where she can tell him, without feeling hurried, what her work load looks like for the coming week. At that time, she can also tell him what she has perceived to be top priority, giving the boss the opportunity to change her priorities if he needs to.

That she can handle some time alone to work on the long lists he gives her.

After a weekly meeting, the boss may have given the secretary at least a week's worth of work—work that she will need some blocks of uninterrupted time to complete. The boss should give her that space and not feel like he constantly needs to be coming to her every day with big projects. Perhaps he could keep a list and just give her these new items at their weekly meeting.

The Best Tribes Have Chindians By Sam Brock

Our project had just been "adjusted" for the third time. Because our all-star grounds crew felt we had the perfect plan, Bill and I decided we needed to get started. We had begun to line out the project when our boss's boss stopped by and changed our project to the original plan. Then our previous boss said that he needed to talk to our current boss to make sure our boss's boss knew the whole story. All we wanted to do was start digging. Our problem was having too many chiefs and not enough Indians.

Using the Old West theme, our team decided we needed more chindians. A *chindian* is a person who is both a chief and an Indian. A chindian not only knows how to make decisions about the project but also is willing to pick up the shovel and help with the project. It is always nice to work for a chindian: he has not forgotten what it was like to be an Indian. At first, it may seem impossible to switch roles so quickly. But we do not treat our kids like our wife, and we had better not treat our wife like one of the kids. At home, we very quickly jump back and forth between roles.

A good Indian is expected to do a few things: listen, work, stick at it, follow through, and do his part. A good chief is expected to do different things: talk, meet, set priorities, lead, change stuff, and make sure everyone is doing his part. A good chindian combines these attributes and becomes the type of chief that every Indian wants. A good chindian is a talker who welcomes input and encourages his team to speak their mind; he spends time in his office doing only what he can do but on occasion is seen holding a paint brush or pushing a vacuum—he's seen doing things that anyone could do. A good chindian knows that even Indians can make good chiefs. He looks for ways to give his Indians responsibility to the point that they are chief of their areas.

Know your people. Know their differences; and don't forget that everyone can be a good chindian and are best taught to be chindians through the example of a chindian . . . which could be you!

Communicating Your Values

By Sam Brock

One of the difficulties of managing in ministry is giving clear expectations as to what your values are. You make decisions and go in directions that seem right and natural to you, but those around you do not always seem to be going the same direction. Listed below are ways to show others what is important to you

1. **How you spend your time**—Look back on the last month and ask yourself what you have communicated as important. Often, the urgent is communicated as what is important, instead of the important being important.
2. **What has to be re-done**—My first three days on the job as a groundskeeper were punctuated by doing the same project over three times. Each time there was a different aspect that was not quite right. I realized quickly that doing the job right was more important than doing it fast, and I had a better understanding of my boss's values.
3. **What gets done first (priorities)**—Our limitations allow us to do one thing at a time. That one thing is the most important thing at that moment.
4. **Where you spend your money**—Just like your time and priorities, money spent says much.
5. **What you are concerned about**—Letting people know what you are nervous or concerned about is a sure sign of what is important to you. Make sure that this is not worry or fretting.
6. **What you do in your life that is uncomfortable**—Diets, exercise, classes . . . these are all things that may be difficult to us, but doing them shows what is important. Doing nothing shows what is not important.
7. **What prompts emotion**—Laughing, crying, and anger are all dead giveaways for what is important. Showing a little emotion is necessary to communicate value.
8. **Relationships with others**—The old phrase, “Birds of a feather flock together” applies to people. What are the values of those closest to you? People will infer that your values are similar to those of your friends.

The reality is that we **do** communicate our values. We have no way of hiding what our values are. Bottom line: we must **have** the right values in order to communicate the right values.

E-mail: The 7% Solution

There are many possible ways to communicate. You may use a meeting, cell phone, radio, note, messenger, or e-mail to get your message across. Remind your team that e-mail is the 7% solution and must be used for those most mundane of communication needs.

In his book *Management: A Biblical Approach*, Myron Rush has a diagram that shows what is used to gain understanding in communication. To be able to talk is one thing, but to be able to communicate is totally another. When people are trying to understand your communication, they rely on non-verbals for 55% of their understanding and on tone for 38%; the actual words make up just 7% of their understanding.

If you ever wonder why your e-mail is misunderstood, it is because people only have 7% (just the words) to work with. They must fill in the gaps for tone and non-verbals. We try to help them with little smiley faces, *ha ha has*, and punctuation marks; but none of those things can communicate like a good, old- fashioned, face-to-face conversation.

Use e-mail to answer simple questions or give directions. Go talk to somebody if you want to communicate!

Staying Ahead of My Team **By Sam Brock**

You have two things to be happy about—one, you have a team; and two, they are moving. But you also have a problem—how do you stay in front of them? At times their initiative seems to be going the wrong way. You find yourself reacting to the team that you should be leading. As a manager of people, you can categorize what you do to stay ahead of your team in four areas.

Define Direction. Let your team know what their destination is. At times this may involve numbers and square footage, but many times this is a concept or a principle that you are trying to achieve. Define the direction of the improvements you hope to make this year. Define the direction of what projects you're going to work on. Give your team a look at the big picture. We many times fail to share the big picture with our team, because we are overloaded with all the day-to-day crises.

Predict Needs. Now that you know where you are going, predict what you'll need to get there. As a leader who serves, taking the time to figure out what people are going to need in six months is very helpful. Doing the work to make sure those things are provided in six months is what gets you ahead of the team

Widen Bottlenecks. In every ministry there is something that is holding you back. Sometimes because of growth, something that was sufficient two years ago is no longer enough. The widening of bottlenecks is where change is happening in your ministry. You must be involved in the changes of your ministry. A list of possible bottlenecks could include ministry organization, computer system, single telephone line, slow internet connection, vehicles, chairs, electricity, staffing, storage . . . and this is just the list for the last few weeks. The moment you widen one bottleneck, you create another one. It is part of your everyday job to help your team widen bottlenecks. A good exercise for your staff team is to brainstorm on the perceived bottlenecks of the ministry. This becomes a nice way of saying, "I could get more done if my leader could serve me by . . ."

Remember Details. Tons of details are coming your way; figure out how to remember and deal with them. Just because you are the leader does not mean you can avoid getting involved in the nitty gritty. Think of the ministry that Joseph had. He shared the meaning of Pharaoh's dream and immediately was installed to deal with it. He defined direction for all of Egypt. He predicted needs that would occur in seven years and began to work on those problems immediately. When he noticed bottlenecks, he dealt with them (e.g., building more barns). Joseph was second in command in Egypt, yet he was still involved in the details when his brothers showed up.

The most common problem we have as leaders is that we pick one of these areas, and we get stuck there. We have so much to do in that one spot that we never do the other three. Do you find yourself gravitating to one of these jobs and ignoring another area? Get ahead of your team by defining direction, predicting needs, widening bottlenecks, and remembering the details.

Filling the Information Gap **By Sam Brock**

Whether we like or not, everyone is in the habit of filling in the information gap. For example, you make an announcement that says we're having a meeting tomorrow at 9:00 a.m. in my office. That announcement seems clear, but there are lots of gaps that people begin to fill in. What is it about? How long will it go? Do I need anything in order to be prepared? Is it optional? It is impossible to fill in every gap for every person. Every manager should get a feel for how their folks fill in the gaps. Typical ways of filling in the gaps include the following:

- **Assuming the worst:** "Oh, no. We're having a meeting at 9:00 a.m. sharp . . . I wonder who is going to get fired?"
- **Overly optimistic:** "Hey, we've got a meeting at 9:00 a.m. I'm sure our manager just wants to let us know how well things are going. I can't imagine the meeting lasting for more than 10 minutes. I'll schedule my next appointment for 9:15 a.m."
- **Endless options:** Because gaps can be fun to wonder about, this person spends the next 24 hours listing all the possibilities of what the meeting is about. This is how rumors are started and can even be a platform for gossip.

- **Gap creators:** Gaps can be created in several ways—two unrelated events are tied together, motives are questioned or assigned, or asking others questions to which they don't have answers.

How should we deal with the gaps that are inevitable? Two simple things: **trust** and **patience**.

Value the Answer

We answer all kinds of questions throughout the day. How can we value the answers we give?

Value the person asking the question.

Stop what you're doing when you answer the question.

Recognize the impact of your answer.

Give them the whole answer—if the answer requires action on your part, follow through!

Value the person's time and attention.

Anticipate questions and figure out a way to provide clear answers before the questions are asked.

Give feedback in the process of answering questions (e.g., the maintenance man will fix the problem in your cabin while you are at the evening service).

Don't allow your situation to affect your answer; your bad day isn't an excuse to give the person asking a question a bad day.

Follow up; the person may not ask again if his question wasn't answered.

Get help with answers if you need it.

Use a considerate, helpful tone when answering questions . . . even if you've already answered the same question ninety-seven times.

Eye contact is crucial in determining if the person understands your answer and if he is asking the right question.

Consider the opportunity to answer the same question multiple times as your opportunity to develop a professional answer to that question.

All questions are good.

If you have to give a hard answer, do it with compassion; give an alternative if possible.

Smile!

Helping My Team Ask for Help **By Ron Perry**

As a manager, I was surprised one day to hear someone say to me, "I don't know when, how, or even if I should ask for help!" I was taken aback because as a manager I see my role as one of helping my team do their job, but for a member of my team to tell me that meant that he did not understand my role as his helper. He also revealed that he did not know how to ask for help. As a result of that comment, my wheels began to turn. It was a challenge to me to realize that one of the needs every manager has is to help his team learn how to ask for help. If we can do that, we can do what we are supposed to do as managers—be a help!

So how do I help my team ask for help? First, I must remember that **the very word team implies that it takes all of us to do a particular task.** *Help* is not a horrible word that a team member should never utter. Rather, it should be a frequently used word because the essence of a team is to help one another achieve a mutual goal. A team develops a culture of help when members know their roles. As a manager, I want my

team to know that my role is to help them. I can do that by being available, asking questions, reiterating my role to them, and then helping them when they need it.

Second, I must teach my team members that **there is a fine art to asking for help**. Neither the Accusatory Asker, the Roundabout Asker, nor the Last-minute Asker has learned that fine art. The Accusatory Asker asks for help by implying that your negligence, oversight, or lack of concern is the reason he has to ask for help in the first place. It's hard to know with the Roundabout Asker if he is informing you of a problem that he has under control or one that he wants your help with: he never comes right out and asks for help. And because the Last-minute Asker does not look ahead, he asks for help when, often, it is too late to help him.

To help your team members with the fine art of asking questions, teach them the following three things: (1) believe that the person from whom you are asking help really does want to help you, (2) be direct and clear: "I need help with the following," (3) be timely with the request: don't wait until the last minute.

The third way we help our team learn to ask us for help is to **look to our Helper's example**. How does God teach us to ask Him for help?

- He gives us responsibility that is more than we can do alone.
- He gives us a clear channel of communication with Him—prayer.
- He enjoys helping us and never mocks or ridicules our requests for assistance.
- He never moans or finds our requests an inconvenience.
- He helps and often goes beyond what we requested.

To be like God our Helper ought to be our goal as Christian team managers. Therefore, we must not only teach our team members how to ask us for help but also make it easy for them to ask.

Grapevine vs. Meetings

Both the grapevine (the unofficial communication channels of your ministry) and meetings (the official communication channels of your ministry) are necessary and have their pros and cons.

- The grapevine is faster and better listened to.
- The grapevine loses context—in the repetition of details, some are dropped and some are embellished
- Encourage your staff to think of the grapevine as just part of the story—there is almost always more to the story.
- A healthy grapevine passes on helpful information and encouragement. A toxic grapevine is the main channel for gossip and rumors. Root out the toxic grapevine by addressing the individual who starts and repeats harmful words.
- Ask about the grapevine—identify a couple of people who you believe to be well connected and ask them what is out there.
- Feed both the grapevine and the meetings; they both need information—the more critical and complex should be reserved for meetings, but good news is one of the best things to pass through the grapevine.

10 Things Every Team Wants Every Team Member to Communicate

Recently we asked our staff team, “What do wish our team communicated better?” The list generated during that meeting was helpful for each staff member to realize what little pieces of communication were helpful. All staff members should make sure these ten items are part of their communication repertoire. Circle the one you need to work on the most. If you are an adventurous team, underline the one you wish that your boss would work on the most.

1. When you miss a deadline
2. Your expectation of what a good job is (e.g., time spent, quality achieved)
3. Saying “good job” when you see one
4. Anything broken (to the person responsible for it)
5. Changing schedules
6. Changing procedures
7. Responding to communication—something that says you heard what was said
8. Your location (e.g., at home sick, out of the office for the day, gone for an hour)
9. New responsibilities
10. Love for others

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