**Communication Strategies, Systems, and Skills**

By: Jim Clemmer

***"Before you say what you think, be sure you have." —* Malcolm Forbes, past publisher of *Forbes* magazine**

Communication is both a symptom and a cause of organization performance problems. Over the years, we've heard hundreds of managers use communication as a vague catchall for every type of organization and team problem imaginable. Generally, the root cause of many "communication problems" was deeper than that.

Poorly designed organizations, ineffective processes, bureaucratic systems, unaligned rewards, unclear customer/partner focus, fuzzy visions, values, and purpose, unskilled team leaders and members, cluttered goals and priorities, low trust levels, and weak measurements and feedback loops all cause communication problems. Whenever a manager contacts us to solve a "communication problem," we always know we have some digging to do.

Communication strategies, systems, and practices do play a central role in high-performance. Information, understanding, and knowledge are the lifeblood of the organizational body. A thoughtful and comprehensive communication strategy is a vital component to any successful change and improvement. The education and communication strategy sets the tone and direction of improvement efforts.

Education and communication strategies influence the energy levels for change and improvement. Strong communications keep everyone focussed on goals and priorities while providing feedback on progress and the course corrections needed. Effective communication strategies, systems, and practices have a huge and direct effect on organization learning and innovation.

Effective communication strategies, systems, and practices:

* Deliver clear and consistent messages to all parts of the organization
* Are simple, direct, and fast with a minimal number of filters and interpreters
* Inspire and energize
* Are user-friendly, human, and personal
* Move information, experiences, learning, ideas, direction, and feedback equally well in all directions — up, down, and across the organization
* Provide multiple channels
* Are only possible in an atmosphere of trust and openness

Despite all their talk about communications, many managers don't appreciate the highly strategic role communication plays in their improvement efforts. Consequently, they don't spend enough time thinking through what they want to say and the best ways to say it. But the amount and type of communicating we do speak volumes about how much we trust people and whether we see people as partners or "subordinates" who "work for me." Our communication strategies, systems, and practices set the dimensions of the environment we are putting people in.

**Up Close and Personal**

***"A vision is little more than an empty dream until it is widely shared and accepted. Only then does it acquire the force necessary to change an organization and move it in the intended direction."* — Burt Nanus, *Visionary Leadership***

The best information and communication systems, strategies, and technology can actually make things worse if we don't have strong communication skills. With today's technologies, a much bigger audience can conclude much faster, that we don't have our act together. A powerful Context and Focus (vision, values, and purpose), clear goals and priorities, and a well-designed improvement plan won't look that way if poorly communicated.

Many managers devise slick internal marketing campaigns and invest in expensive information technologies. They're on the right track. But although customers and partners appreciate and (when well trained and supported) will use these technologies, they want to break through the mechanical alienation these tools and approaches can bring. People want a personal touch. They want to feel the passion, energy, and human side of their leaders before they can partner with them.

Leadership and communications are inseparable. Our ability to energize, inspire, and arouse people to ever higher levels of performance, is directly related to our ability to communicate. Strong leaders are strong communicators. If my communication skills (especially verbal communication) are weak, I'll never be much of a leader. I may be a strong administrator, director, technician, team member, or manager. But without strong verbal communication skills, I'll be a weak leader. Unless I improve my communication skills, I'll become a victim of the shifting balance between managing things and leading people.

Effective communication is no more a natural skill than leadership is a born trait. Very few powerful communicators just opened their mouths and let the words naturally flow out. Most leaders learned, developed, practiced, and refined their communication skills through a lot of hard work and conscientious effort. They learned how to sell and persuade. They learned how to infuse a well-formed case or logic with emotional appeal. They were able to light their logic on fire.

Jim Clemmer's  [practical leadership & personal growth books](http://www.jimclemmer.com/online-book-store-audio-leadership-books-leadership-management-time-management.php), [workshops](http://www.jimclemmer.com/customized-workshops-for-staff-and-management-teams.php), and [team retreats](http://www.jimclemmer.com/management-team-retreats.php) have helped hundreds of thousands of people worldwide improve personal, team, and organizational performance. Jim's web site,  [JimClemmer.com](http://www.jimclemmer.com/), has over [300 articles](http://www.jimclemmer.com/leadership-articles.php) and [dozens of video clips](http://jimclemmer.com/index.php?option=com_seyret) covering a broad range of topics on change, [organization improvement, self-leadership, and leading others](http://www.jimclemmer.com/leadership-articles.php). Sign-up to receive Jim's [popular monthly newsletter](http://www.jimclemmer.com/newsletter/), and subscribe to his [leadership blog](http://www.jimclemmer.com/blog/). Jim's international bestsellers include *The VIP Strategy,* [*Firing on All Cylinders*](http://www.jimclemmer.com/firing-on-all-cylinders.php)*,* [*Pathways to Performance*](http://www.jimclemmer.com/pathways-to-performance-a-guide-to-transforming-yourself-your-team-and-your-organization.php)*,* [*Growing the Distance*](http://www.jimclemmer.com/content/view/726)*,* [*The Leader's Digest*](http://www.jimclemmer.com/the-leaders-digest-timeless-principles-for-team-and-organization-success.php) *and* [*Moose on the Table*](http://www.jimclemmer.com/content/view/961). His latest book is [*Growing @ the Speed of Change.*](http://www.jimclemmer.com/growing-the-speed-of-change.php)