

## THE ILLUSION OF COMMUNICATION

### By Rick Boxx

Early in my banking career, I had the difficult task of communicating to one of our customers that our loan committee had decided to decline his loan request. When I met with this individual, I thought I had delivered the bad news with gentleness and sensitivity.

However, I soon discovered there was a problem. The next day the customer called and asked, "So, when do I pick up a check from my loan?" I groaned inwardly as I realized I now needed to communicate the bank's decision again, more directly and assertively this time.

There are many dynamics involved in the communication process, but one simple model distills it into a few essential parts: The Sender (or Messenger); the Message; the Receiver (or Recipient of the Message), and Feedback (or Response from the Recipient). The Sender conveys the Message to the intended Recipient in some manner, whether in person, in writing, or in visual or auditory form. Then the Recipient (hopefully) responds in similar fashion to confirm the Message has been received.

One way of defining communication, as a friend of mine likes to say, is "the successful exchange of meaning." In other words, the Sender and Recipient are in agreement about what has been said and the intended meaning. When this does not happen, we have a failure to communicate.

That was what happened with my interaction with the bank customer. I meant one thing, but what the customer heard and understood was something very different. As playwright George Bernard Shaw observed, "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

What is the remedy? How can we be certain to achieve the successful exchange of meaning? We could take numerous courses on communication theory and principles, but one of the best sources for learning how to effectively communicate is by reading the Bible. Here are some of its insights:

**Speak the truth.** Delivering hard news, even though it may seem difficult, requires directness, truth, and compassion. As Zechariah 8:16, in the Bible's Old Testament, teaches, "These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts."

**Communicate with compassion.** If we are not careful, speaking the truth without sensitivity can be as painful as hitting someone with a hammer. Therefore, without compromising the truth we need to convey, we should strive to communicate it with appropriate sensitivity. "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

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Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:14-15).

**Truth leads to freedom.** Delivering unwelcome news is one of the most difficult tasks we must perform. Relationships are important, and bad news can jeopardize a valued relationship. However, we do people a disservice when we attempt to withhold the truth from them or express it in a way that might easily be misunderstood. As Jesus told His followers concerning the Word of God, “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). Truth will always set us free.

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### Reflection/Discussion Questions

- 1.How would you define communication? Before reading this Monday Manna, how would you have described what it means to communicate effectively?
- 2.Have you ever experienced a time when some form of communication between you and someone else failed terribly? Describe that situation and how you dealt with it when the miscommunication was discovered.
- 3.Why is effective, successful communication so important, whether in the workplace, at home, or in any of our daily activities and relationships? What are some problems, both big and small, that can result due to poor communication?
- 4.Do you believe in always telling the truth, even when it is very difficult to do so? Can you think of any circumstances when not telling the truth, or not being completely truthful, might be the best approach? Explain your answer.

### Challenge For This Week

Take some time this week to consider how effective you are as a communicator. Do you take the time to make certain that what you say to others is expressed clearly, truthfully and with sensitivity and compassion?

Schedule some time to meet with a trusted friend and ask whether he or she can identify any areas in which you might need to improve your communications skills – whether you need to work on achieving “the successful exchange of meaning.”

#### NOTE:

For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 10:20-21, 11:1, 12:14,17,19,22, 15:1-2, 16:11, 17:27, 18:13; John 1:17, 8:36

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