

Beyond Technique—Qualities of an Effective Communicator

In writing a book about the *techniques* of effective communication, I run the risk that someone might infer that *technique alone* can make a good communicator. Clearly, technique can make a difference. In fact, in many cases, it is the single most important factor in making a communicator effective. Still, there is more to communicating than just technique.

An entertaining after-dinner speaker can enhance his presentation by applying proper techniques. So can speakers presenting the gospel. But technique alone will not make a gospel message successful. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't work at perfecting our methods. It means only that we should make sure we establish a proper foundation upon which to build.

If I didn't feel that there is a great need for more excellent presentations of the gospel, I certainly would not have endured the agony of writing a book on the subject. However, in this chapter I would like to discuss issues beyond technique that are important for every messenger of the gospel to consider.

Aristotle said that a good leader must have *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. *Logos* is the ability to give solid reasons for an action, to move people intellectually. *Ethos* is the moral character at the source of a leader's ability to persuade. *Pathos* is a leader's ability to touch feelings, to move people emotionally. These same elements must be present in the life of an effective communicator.

The Effective Communicator Delivers a Focused and Organized Message

But *logos* is not enough. Every day thousands of charlatans and unethical communicators present powerfully focused, organized messages that lead many astray using those same sound communications principles.

If your concern is to communicate, with excellence, the life-changing message of Christ's love, you must attain a higher standard. You must also have *ethos* and *pathos*.

The Effective Communicator Models the Message

No matter what kind of audience you have—whether it be a Bible study group, a congregation, a youth group, or a Sunday school class—you will influence your audience as much by your life as by your message. In fact, your life will provide a strong foundation upon which the credibility of your message will rest.

That is the nature of the gospel. The life of Christ and the demonstration of his love for us at the cross brings power to the message he left with us. If Jesus had not come to live with us or if he had stayed in the grave, the message of the Bible would be anemic at best. But he lived among us, he rose from the dead, and his life is the foundation for the power of his Word.

The same is true as you communicate the gospel to your audience. A group of teenagers will learn more about patience watching their youth leader caught behind a slow driver than they would from a thousand speeches on the subject. Your ability to practice what you preach brings power to what you preach. You can talk to your children about love every day of your life, but the love you demonstrate toward your spouse will ignite your message in their hearts more than all the words in the universe could do alone. A congregation will understand the pastor's message on unconditional love in proportion to his demonstration of that love to difficult members of the congregation.

Itinerant speakers have little opportunity to demonstrate the moral character behind their message. They must take advantage of brief encounters to show that the love of which they speak is at work in their own lives.

Learn It

Live It

Pass It On

Pastors, youth workers, and Sunday school teachers are providing a constant message with their lives. If that message is inconsistent with the message that they preach, then the power of their communication is greatly diminished. If your actions contradict what you say, your actions will speak louder than your words. However, when your actions are consistent with your words, they work together to form the most powerful kind of communication there is.

The Effective Communicator Speaks with Passion

A passion for sharing the message of the gospel is also part of the *ethos* that aids communication. There is an enthusiasm that accompanies the message of a speaker who deeply believes the message.

At a large trade show I had occasion to observe two people demonstrate a food processor. I saw the first person do the demonstration just as I entered the building. His sales patter was filled with humor, and he made good use of audience participation. Although the demonstration was interesting, several people, including me, drifted away about halfway through.

I wouldn't even have thought any more about it if I hadn't had to pass this same spot on my way out. A new person was doing the demonstration and this person held the entire crowd until the very end. I waited while he filled several orders because I wanted to congratulate him on his enthusiastic presentation. He had used the same sales talk, but his added enthusiasm and sparkle made all the difference in the world. As we talked, I discovered the reason for his excitement. He was the inventor of the processor and owner of the company. The first person who gave the presentation was only doing his job, but the inventor believed in his product and enjoyed showing others how it worked.

That same kind of passion shows through when you present the gospel. If you believe in it and love sharing it with others, people will be able to tell.

We've all had the experience of listening to preachers who were like these two salesmen. Some preachers just seem to be "doing their jobs." What a difference it makes to sit at the feet of teachers or preachers who are excited about their message! They hold your attention, and you listen to what they are saying because you know they believe it. This kind of enthusiasm is difficult to fake and is almost impossible to hide. Not even the wonderful techniques of preparation and delivery covered in this book can substitute for a vibrant daily relationship with the author of our message. There is such an obvious difference between the speaker who searches for messages because it is his job to deliver them and the speaker who can hardly wait to share what he is learning about the God he loves and lives for daily.

The Effective Communicator Cares About the Audience

A third aspect of this *ethos* is a loving concern for people. People who know that they are loved by a speaker will overlook many faults in style and delivery.

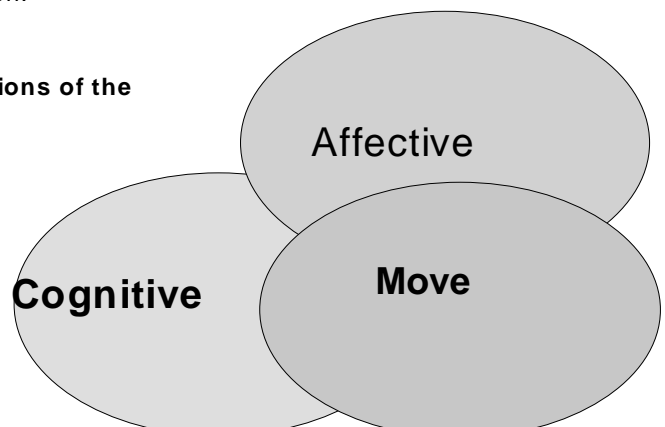
It is easy to seek personal gratification from the audience and forget you are there to serve them. For many years I sought out the laughter and response of my audiences for personal satisfaction. If they didn't respond to my message I would get angry. What a rotten audience, I would think. Once I discovered that my personal worth is not grounded in applause or laughter, it changed my whole approach to preaching, teaching, and entertaining. I am there to give, not to get.

It is a heady experience to be able to hold the attention of an audience. You can use the audience selfishly to feed your ego, or you can choose to allow God to meet the needs of those who hear you through a clear and caring presentation of the Word of God. When you care, it shows. A genuine love for the people to whom you speak will enhance the power of your communication.

The Effective Communicator Touches the Emotions of the Audience

The *pathos* of which Aristotle spoke was the ability to move the audience emotionally. *Pathos* does not refer to manipulative toying with people's emotions. It has to do with personalizing the message so an audience can respond.

Educators acknowledge that three specific learning domains closely parallel Aristotle's statement. These are represented in the diagram below.



The *cognitive* domain is what we know. It is the sterile accumulation of facts. The *affective* domain is what we feel. This domain can be accessed through truth or with lies. It can also be manipulated as an end in itself. The *motor* domain is accessed by action.

It is very easy to concentrate on any one of these domains at the expense of the others. A good storyteller can use the emotion of a story to move people's feelings without an underlying foundation of truth from God's Word. Without that foundation people will quickly abandon whatever they have heard when the feelings have gone. An academic may find herself simply relaying great amounts of information in the mistaken belief that people will respond to raw data because she does. This kind of "cognitive dump" leaves the majority of the audience cold and unmoved. Finally, the activist will always have his audience doing something.

The best learning takes place when the teacher accesses all three domains. The most effective communication takes place when there is a balance of information (cognitive, know) brought to life with illustration (affective, feel) and personalized with application (motor, do).

A careful study of the ministry of Jesus reveals that he touched people emotionally. People responded strongly to his personal delivery of the truth. Some hated him, some loved him, but few ignored him. Some believed and others decided that he was of the devil and should be killed.

He was presenting the most important cognitive truth in history. This truth had existed in the prophetic writings for years, but his pathos, his personal delivery, and his application of that truth left no room for people to sit idly by.

If you wish to communicate the gospel effectively, you will have to do more than just dump information on the audience or pepper the forest with theological buckshot. Your message is more than a message to be heard, it is a message to be felt and lived. If you are to be effective, your teaching and preaching must touch the emotions of your audience.

The Effective Communicator Touches the Lives of the Audience

The last important aspect of your communication is your ability to touch the lives of your audience.

As an itinerant speaker I often hear pastors, youth workers, and volunteers say how they wished they could be in my line of work. They seem to feel that because I have been on television and radio and speak to large numbers of people, somehow my communication is more effective. I believe that is not true. The most effective communicator is one who can live with and touch his or her audience on a day by day basis.

When I was in youth work in northern Minnesota this truth was burned into my heart forever. For several months we had been working with a teenager named Lisa. Although she had heard the gospel message dozens of times she continued to resist giving her life to Christ.

One night my wife, Diane, announced that we were going to a play in which Lisa had a small part. She felt that it was important for us to encourage her and show that we cared by being there. Because I was tired I fought this decision with stern determination. I reasoned that since Lisa had only one or two lines in the entire play, she wouldn't care if we attended. I lost the argument and with a grudging attitude drove to the play. On the way Diane insisted we stop to get some flowers for Lisa. We purchased a half dozen roses, but I made it clear to everyone near me that I was not happy. The play went without a hitch, and Lisa did her few lines with enthusiasm. I was still smoldering when Diane fanned the flames to life by insisting that we go backstage and give Lisa the flowers.

When she saw us standing backstage she was ecstatic. "What did you think?" she bubbled. "Did I do okay?"

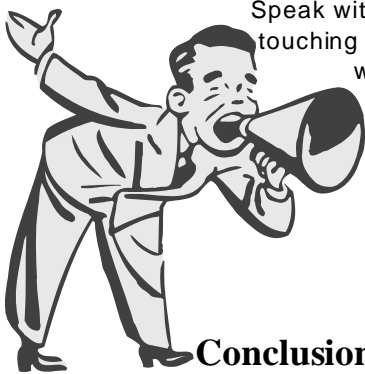
We assured her that she was marvelous, and then I remembered the slightly wilted flowers that I was holding behind my back. "Here," I said clumsily, "these are for you."

I will never forget what happened next. Lisa's mouth dropped open as she took the flowers and slowly sank to the floor. With tears streaming down her cheeks she thanked us for coming to her play. "I thought that no one would come because I had such a small part," she cried.

Of course, I felt terrible and the "I told you so" glance from my wife made it even worse. I asked for God's forgiveness that night, but the following week he gave me a gift that was even greater. Lisa came to our home and prayed to receive Christ. If you try to tell me that her decision had nothing to do with a backstage visit and six wilted roses I will disagree.

When you attend a play or soccer game or sit in the home of one who is working through a family crisis, it puts your message in an entirely new light. For those you have touched with your life, your message is clearer and more personal than ever before. Being at the bedside of a sick teenager or playing softball with adults Saturday afternoon makes you more than just the man or woman who gives a talk every week. It makes you a minister, a true communicator of a beautiful message.

The teachers and speakers who had the greatest influence on me were those who touched me with their lives by their personal involvement.



Speak with clarity and power. Model the message with your life and never stop touching the lives of those to whom you minister. Those characteristics coupled with the techniques of dynamic communication will raise the level of your communication to its fullest potential.

Conclusion

Most of the communication that we embark on is instinctual and automatic. We certainly do not need to be consciously thinking about this process all the time, however, when we find ourselves in complicated communication situations, such as inter-cultural settings, it can be very useful in identifying where the miscommunication may be occurring, and can assist helping us prepare for situations before they occur.

Organising Your Message

Opening Illustration

The Big Idea

What is the theme of your message? One sentence; keep it short and straightforward.

Introduction

You will win them or lose them in the first 30 seconds. You will need an attention grabber.

Main Points

What main points will support the Big Idea?

- Scripture
- Illustration
- Explanation

Application

So What? How does this talk apply to my life and what can be done.

Conclusion

What do you want them to remember?

