

# Communication from the Inside Out



*We are missing leadership. It just isn't in supply in this world of fast and endless information on just about anything.*

**W**E'VE ALWAYS KNOWN THAT sitting in the corner office with a title was not sufficient to qualify one for leadership. Now, the information age has debunked any notion that we might have had about leaders being those who *know* the most. But oddly, it seems that merely creating change is not leadership either.

Unfortunately, leadership, like weight-loss, is not merely a matter of changing outside habits. Becoming a leader requires changes on the inside, and the ability to communicate those changes authentically in the context of making the leader's world different in a meaningful way.

Leading is not just a matter of knowing *what* to do—that is the job of the strategist—it is a matter of knowing and communicating *why* we are doing it. What is absent in today's brand of leadership is not information, change, or knowledge—it is inspiration. Inspiration gives knowledge an application and change its meaning. We long for leadership because we are rarely inspired, and we miss it terribly.

To inspire, "to breath life into," requires self-knowledge, the courage to speak, and then it takes the emotional intelligence and commitment to learn how to connect with others. Effective leadership communication is clear and deep, creates commitment rather than compliance, and, for most of us, requires the learning and application of new skills.

## Discovering What Matters

Real leadership is deeply personal. Real leaders communicate in a way that inspires action from others. They understand who they are and what they want. Each is driven by principle rather than by politics, and each does substantial reflec-

tion and writing about personal values and the change that should flow from the application of those values. Personal values form the basis of effective leadership communication. To believe that the mere achievement of external goals will inspire others is folly.

In a time when loyalty is waning, the generation of loyalty can become competitive advantage. Many technologists are loyal to projects and friends, but not to an organization. Many executives are loyal only to their latest option grant and bonus plan. As long as such people are satisfied at



work, they stay at work. Satisfaction springs from what we do, and is always vulnerable to a mistake or to a better offer.

But loyalty is different. Loyalty to a leader comes from who he or she is—from the motivation behind his or her actions. Loyalty is created from values that matter more than transactions. Leaders can inspire such loyalty—if they first understand who they are, not just what they do.

Discovering what matters is the first and most critical piece of leadership development. I ask each of my clients to provide an autobiography, or at least a summary of the defining moments of their lives to understand the values and experiences that makes them care about their performance and the performances of the people they lead. From that material, we can construct the messages of change that need to be delivered, and we can do it from a base of the leader's personal values, not just the needs of the enterprise.

## Finding Voice/Deciding to Lead

Once these values are discovered, the leader can start to communicate through them, not merely about them. Values become the basis for all leadership communication. Inspiring others requires that we inspire ourselves, and it is most often that which we don't say rather than what we do say that we regret the most. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty."

Inspiration comes from spirit, depth, and meaning. Speaking through values inspires leaders, and thereby gives them the ability to inspire others.

Unfortunately, leadership communication is not merely saying what we think or what we feel. Leading requires a decision—a commitment to engage and connect with others; to learn the skills of communication to inspire others to make change happen. Deciding to lead is to take on a greater responsibility than merely having a voice. It is to submit ourselves to the scrutiny of others—to their criticisms and fears, to make our own ideas of the future match with theirs, and to communicate in such a way that we connect.

The difference between high-performing teams and exceptional teams is the quality of the relationships—how well people like and trust one another. We can speak about what really matters to us, and listen to what really matters to others, and we can do so in ways that signal our willingness to be known and our interest in knowing others. Stories, metaphors, and relevant personal experiences can connect with others in ways that facts and evidence can't. Leadership communication connects with the mind—it is logical and strategic—but it also connects with the heart by being personal and meaningful.

Listening to connect is different from listening to formulate a rebuttal. If the primary measure of trust is closeness, then having and conveying empathy is the hallmark of leadership listening.

The skills of leadership communication are learned through introspection, courage, and practice. The rewards of the practice are immense. Those who follow you will be enriched, and so will you. **EE**

*Terry Pearce is president of Leadership Communication, 800-658-4453 or [www.terrypearce.com](http://www.terrypearce.com). This article is based on his book *Leading Out Loud* (Jossey-Bass) and developed into a leadership-training program by Blessing White ([www.blessingwhite.com](http://www.blessingwhite.com)).*

*Excellence in Action: Discover what matters most in your life—your voice—and communicate through your values.*