

VENTURING MAGAZINE

LeaderThoughts #8 by Michael Brown

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Communication

In LeaderThought #5, we spoke of the "Characteristics of Servant Leader". We have already touched on the concept of Vision & Mission that tied to the characteristics of Conceptualization and Persuasion. We dealt with Goal Setting that also ties to those characteristics. We looked at Change with ties to Foresight. Now we will look at Communication which ties to both Listening and Empathy.

As leaders we need to be communicators. This is important for many aspects of leadership. As leaders we should develop a Vision (we spoke of that back in #2 of this series). But what good is that vision if we are unable to convey that vision to those we lead such that they accept and buy in to that vision? In leading people, we must be able to communicate with them, and that includes finding out what they need and want. This communication could be one on one or small groups.

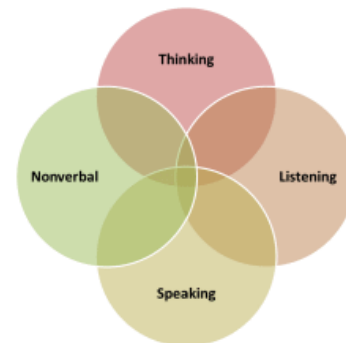
Too often communication is seen as being totally separate from leadership. There are programs and classes on speech and communication, but divorced from leadership. On the flipside, sometimes people think that leaders must be great orators. Well, yes, some have been, for good or bad. But there have also been quiet people who are great leaders as well, but they still were able to communicate. They were better at that one-on-one or small group communication rather than getting in front of a large group.

And always keep in mind that communication can be written as well as verbal. Can you organize your thoughts; put them down in a form that others can understand? This too is important.

The recent movie, "The King's Speech" illustrates this issue. It's based on the true story about King George VI of England, who was king during WWII. He suffered all his life with stuttering, which impacted his ability to communicate. Since his older brother would be king, that wasn't seen as too important. It is interesting in the movie how we see his father showing him the importance of the ruler to be able to communicate with his subjects, now thru the medium of radio. When his brother must abdicate the throne, he then becomes the next king, and his stuttering issue becomes more important. We see in the film how the assistance of Lionel Logue helps him manage and be able to be a better communicator, and thus a better leader.

- Kings Speech – Official Trailer
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAm7gRXFiRo>
- The Real King's Speech – King George VI
<http://www.youtube.com/embed/opkMyKGx7TQ>

The Four Communication Skills



Often times we can see this with others, when their poor communication skills affects their ability to be a leader, even when it's at the level of a Venturing Crew. I've seen this in small groups I'm in, where due to the poor communication skills of the group's leaders, certain poor decisions were made because of this. There are solutions.



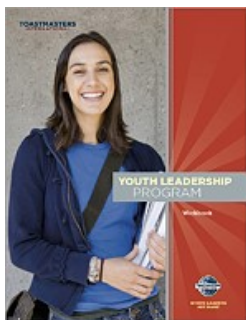
The works of Dale Carnegie are readily available. Most people probably know of him from his well known "self help" books "How to Win Friends and Influence People" (1936, 1981 revised edition) and "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living" (1948, revised 1990). But he came to fame when he started the "Dale Carnegie Training" courses in public speaking. His textbook is available in two editions: "The Quick and Easy Way to Effective Speaking" (still used in the course today) and "How to Develop Self-Confidence & Influence People by Public Speaking". Both are easily available and I highly recommend both of them.



Many people have probably heard of Toastmasters (www.toastmasters.org), but few probably know what the organization is all about. Toastmasters focus on communication: helping people be better communicators and speakers, in their personal and professional life. People join (and stay) for a variety of reasons. Most to become better speakers, others to improve their skills in English or other languages. Those who are good speakers become better speakers. They stay because the organization is all about continuous improvement of our communication and leadership skills. You never stop learning. The Toastmasters program is built around the earning of educational awards in the area of communication and leadership.

- Toastmasters International Public Service Announcement
<http://www.youtube.com/embed/7ts-C5D0qJU>
- Excerpt from the speech that won the 2012 World Championship of Public Speaking
<http://www.youtube.com/embed/Ms0Gq941iHk>
- Trailer for Speak: A documentary on Toastmasters and their International Speech Contest
<http://www.youtube.com/embed/lPmSmklamKc>

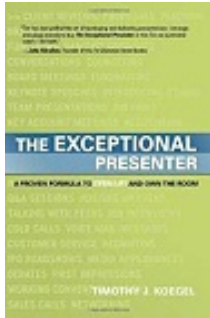
Ok, but what about Venturing? There are a few ways that Toastmasters can help. If you are 18 and older, you can join Toastmasters. If you want to be a better speaker and presenter (and leader) doing so can really benefit. Say what you will, but in my experience as both a scouter and a Toastmaster, the BSA really doesn't have good training programs for people wanting to be better speakers and presenters. This was one of the reasons I joined (and stay) in Toastmasters. And I know other scout leaders who do the same. There are some other ways Toastmasters can help Venturing as well.



First off, as part of their "Success/Communication" program is a module called "Speechcraft". It's sort of a "mini-toastmasters" experience that can be presented by Toastmasters Clubs over a 4-8 session period. This is something that could be organized by local Toastmasters Clubs for older (18+) Venturers. Toastmasters ALSO has a program for youth under 18 called the "Youth Leadership Program" (YLP) that is very similar. And they are coming out with a new youth communication program, and the first part is available NOW. This first part is called "Interpersonal Communication", because it was found that youth needed to learn better intercommunication skills before they moved to public speaking. The second part on public speaking has not yet been released, but I expect it soon. Also, a change from YLP, the "Interpersonal Communication" module may be presented by NON-Toastmasters (no idea if this will be true for the second part). It's available for purchase from the Toastmasters website. There is

a Team Leader Manual for the presenter (such as a crew adult leader) and a Team Member Manual for the youth. (However, I will point out that the cost is less for Toastmaster members to purchase this material).

- A great video created by a Toastmasters Club to promote their YLP <http://www.youtube.com/embed/IChuNWyGj3I>



If you have youth who want to be better communicators, speakers, and presenters, either as crew officers, officers above the crew, or training/presenters with ILSC, NYLT and the like, taking a look at how Toastmasters can help them is important.

Another aspect of communications that is important is being a good presenter. This is more than just being a good speaker; it's about conveying a message. An excellent resource for this is the book "The Exceptional Presenter" (2007) by Timothy Koegel (www.theexceptionalpresenter.com). This book is a sort of combination of a manual and workbook. There is great information in it, presented bit by bit, but also includes exercises to help practice the concepts being given. Quite honestly, many of the things he covers are also covered in Toastmasters.

The book is built around the idea of OPEN UP! This stands for the six characteristics the presenters must have:

- Organized- be prepared, organized, have a clear message that is conveyed well.
- Passionate- have enthusiasm and conviction.
- Engaging- build rapport with the audience.
- Natural- have a conversational style.
- Understand your Audience- if you better know this, the easier it is to engage them.
- Practice- the only way to improve is practice.

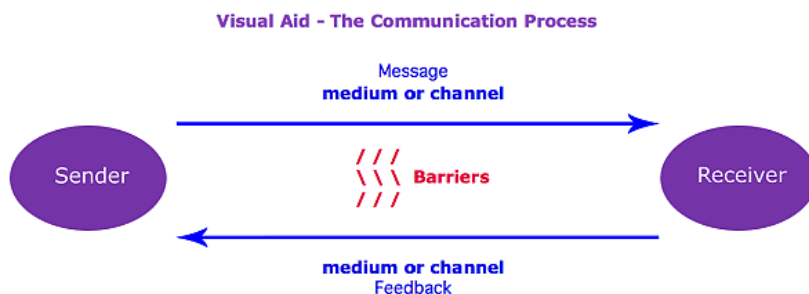
Here is an interesting interview with Tim Koegel on YouTube:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAd_ScII0Yw ("*embedding disabled by request*")

A recent phenomenon that is growing in usage is the virtual meeting (even in Venturing). This can often times take the form of an on-line meeting or webinar, when usually a powerpoint presentation is given, with someone presenting it verbally. There are a lot of differences between this and traditional presentations, as the presenter does not get the immediate feedback from their audience. Koegel's more recent "The Exceptional Presenter Goes Virtual" was written to address this. As the cost of being able to do on-line meetings and presentations decreases, we may see an increase of these within our community. So this may help leaders both youth and adult.

Now, while communicating to those you lead is vital (whether speaking or presenting), how well are you with your followers communicating to you? Are you good at listening to what they are telling you, verbally or non-verbally? Too often when it comes to communication we focus too much on the leaders getting their message out to the followers, but little or nothing about the leaders dealing with the messages coming back from the followers. For the servant leader, LISTENING as a skill is just as vital as presenting information. It's vital we get this information. The Greenleaf Center (www.greenleaf.org) even published a booklet on the subject: "Greenleaf and Servant-Leader Listening" by Don Frick.

A final point about communication is that people must understand the barriers which get in the way of communication, both from the leader and from the followers. These barriers can be poor communication, or bias that people have. These biases can be past issues with that individual or group, prejudices and the like. Having a better understanding of others can remove some of those barriers, but we should all be mindful they are there.



Bottom line, to be a better leader you need to be a better communicator (including listening).