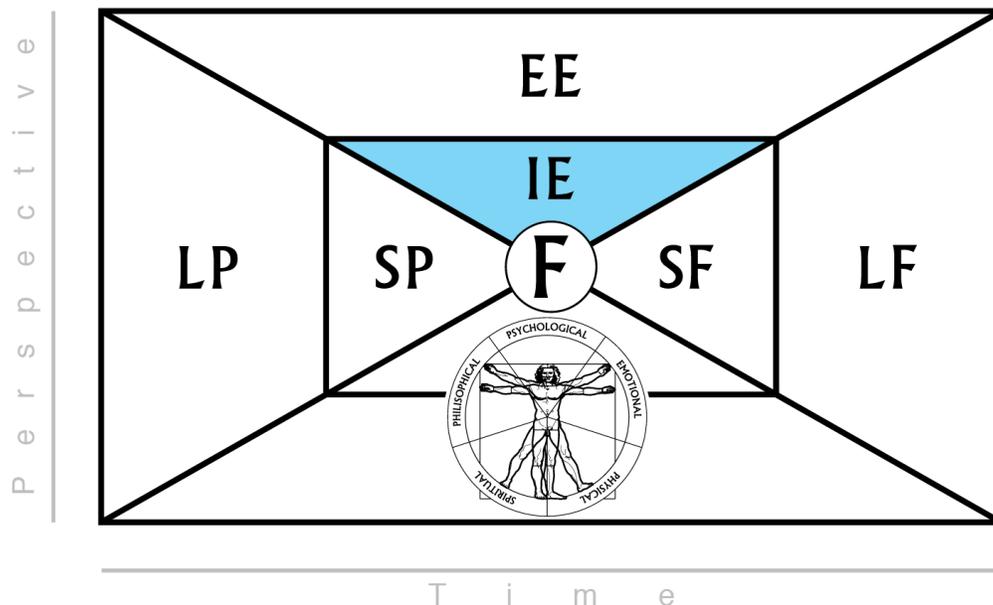




FINDING YOUR FLOW TOOLKIT VOL. 9 COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

"Communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy and mutual valuing."

-- Rollo May



As much as we want to think that finding our flow is a personal process and completely under our control, we are always taking into consideration the people, places, and things that play a significant role in how we manage, perform and grow within our

Meaningful Life Arenas (MLA's).

Last week we discussed the importance that other people play in our lives and in our flow. Our interactions with others, especially those with whom we are achieving personal and professional goals, are either contributing or inhibiting our work and progress.

Sometimes but rarely do the people in our lives play a completely neutral role. All said, we can probably do more in building and advancing these relationships.

Take a quick snapshot of the people in your performance arenas and see if you can place these players in either of these three categories (positive, negative, neutral). Now ask yourself: What's the difference? Most likely the quality of communication—on both sides of the relationship.

The study of interpersonal communications is broad yet is a constant area of study for the committed high performer. If you are seeking more flow with others, it is imperative that you recognize the importance of your communication skills as they invite more synergy and improved interpersonal relationships.

In my personal study of interpersonal communications, I wanted to share with you just a few simple principles and tactics that I have found most helpful on the job, in the field, and in life. These constitute my "Top 10" best interpersonal practices:

1. Create a Servant Mindset

The old adage "Nobody cares how much you know unless they know how much you care" is a sound principle. As you consider the intent of your communications seek to create a caring mind-set. Notice how this mindset changes the tone and feel of the conversation. Seek to add value through each communication by focusing on the needs of your audience.

2. Modes of Communication

Effective communication can take place through multiple modes. Identify the most appropriate mode based on the circumstance. This requires taking the receiver and considering his/her needs. Formal correspondence may be appropriate for project documenting while a written note may be more appropriate if you seek to send a more intimate signal. For some, personal or sensitive communications may require a face-to-face verbal/non-verbal mode while others prefer an emotional buffer through the written word. In some instances, the proper use of texts may be the appropriate mode given the timing of a message. For any intended message, consider both the person and the circumstance in order to best communicate your message.

3. Communicate at the Level of Your Audience

Understanding your audience and speaking at their level fosters rapport and trust. The overuse of “big words” or irrelevant language can create more interference than clarity within any type of communication. As such, choose words, phrases, and stories that will tap into the frequency of your intended audience.

4. Communicate with Clear Intent

Begin each conversation with a clear goal in mind. Know the expected outcome in advance—even if that outcome is to have no outcome other than to explore ideas or socialize with someone. This focus will keep you from wandering off the intended subject—unless of course that is your goal.

5. Tune-In to Non-Verbal Communication

Even though you may have a particular message to get across, seek to maintain awareness. Your communications may need to change based upon new information that impacts your original message. Raising your awareness includes paying attention to non-verbal cues such as wide eyes, tight lips, angled eyebrows, crossed legs, breathing patterns, energy level, and many other indicators that reveal how your words are “landing” on the receiver. If you

notice some non-verbal behavior that you do not understand, check out your assumptions. Make sure within any important communications that you look for cues—cues that may need to be addressed to demonstrate understanding.

6. Clear and Precise Language

We all get tired of conversations, stories, and meetings that go on and on where upon reflection the content could have been summed up in 1/5th the time. As you consider your use of language and story, think about how you can cut the fat out. Use more precise language (oral and written) to convey the meaning you desire. Remember: quality vs. quantity.

7. Check for Understanding

Once your message has been sent, are you sure it will have its intended effect? If not, check your listener to insure understanding. Ask simple questions such as: 1. Am I making sense? 2. Do you understand my intentions here? Can you repeat back to me what you understand so I can make sure I've communicated clearly? These simple questions will help your listener appreciate your intent for communicating effectively.

8. Ask for Feedback

If you have individuals in your MLA's that do not always understand you, perhaps it's worth asking for some feedback. I have found these magical questions invaluable in many interpersonal situations:

What am I doing when I communicate clearly?

How do I err when I communicate poorly?

What might I do to improve my communication skills?

9. Grow Your Vocabulary

Every one of us has a gap in our communicative ability simply

because of our vocabulary. To grow your working vocabulary, look up words you often ignore. Use a “word of the day” program. And use new words when appropriate to demonstrate new understanding. Avoid, however, the use of profound language that makes you look arrogant.

10. Be Authentic

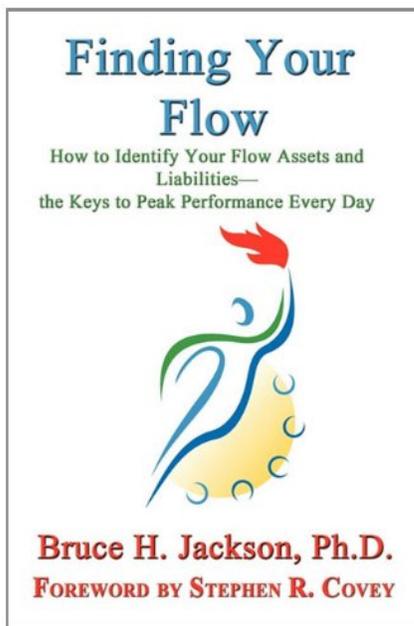
Every great communicator knows how to connect to his/her audience. Perhaps you’ve heard the adage: “Who you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you are saying.” This reminds us that our personal authenticity is at the center of effective communication. To do this you have to “be” the message. It needs to represent how you believe, value, and behave.

We are just scratching the surface here but perhaps a few of these thoughts will get you thinking about your close and working relationships and some new ways in which you can improve your communication patterns.

Test a few of these out and observe the results. You may find that as you improve your communications that your relationships improve. And when your relationships improve, you have tapped into a significant External Flow Asset that will support you in your quest for finding more personal and interpersonal flow.

EXERCISE AND PRACTICE:

- Review the questions in: Improving Communications exercise sheet
- Consider one simple strategy and practice for improving your communication patterns within your most important MLA's.

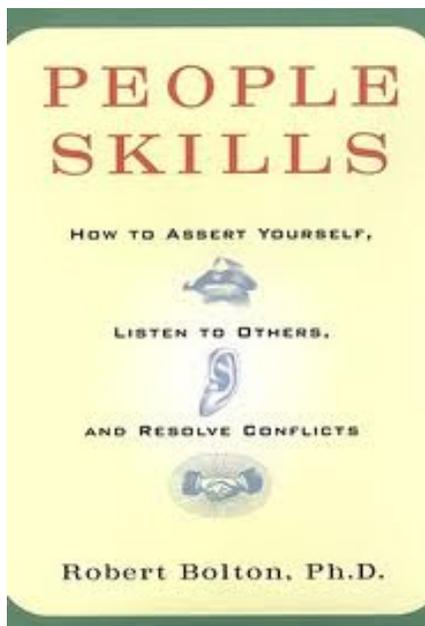


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