

Believe In What You Are Communicating

by Mike Hawkins
mike@alpinelink.com



One of the most important competencies a great leader, a great parent, or any person of influence can have is the competency of effective communications. You can be a technical whiz kid, a creative genius, score in the top 2 percent of standard IQ tests (the requirement to join Mensa International), but if you can't communicate what you know in a way that engages others, you might as well not know anything. As Pericles, the influential leader of Athens in 495-429 B.C. said, *"The man who can think but does not know how to express what he thinks is at the same level as he who cannot think."*

In my consulting work, issues related to communications are the most frequent contributor to poor performance that I encounter. In every intervention that I've ever been a part, communications has been on the list of "issues" that were uncovered. People either talk too much, don't talk enough, use the wrong medium for their message, give the incorrect message, involve the wrong people, or use an inappropriate delivery style.

With that track record, you might question whether good communications is even achievable. It is of course, but it's not something you simply acquire by taking a 2-day presentation skills seminar. It involves building an ability based on the why, what, when, where, and how of both speaking and listening. But more fundamentally, being a great communicator first involves having the right mindset. It requires that you believe in what you are communicating. Too often, people view communications as a chore and just go through the motions ... and it shows. They lack the passion that comes with truly believing in something.

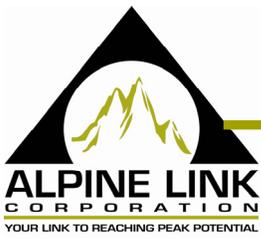
I've worked with eloquent speakers that had great vocabularies and powerful voice inflections, yet lacked this belief. I've also worked with people who were not very good speakers, at least by speaker standards, but because they were so passionate about their topic, they could engage others to the fullest extent. I'd rather talk with this later type of communicator over the former any day. John C. Maxwell had it right when he said *"people don't care what you know until they know that you care."*

The foundation to good communications is believing in what you are communicating. It is not just passing on the message, but being a contributor to and believer in the message.

To believe in your topic of communication, it must be a part of who you are. It must be a part of your purpose, values, or beliefs. It can be something in which you feel you are personally making a difference or that you look forward to. It is not just something connected to your employer's performance, or what you are expected to do. It is something you believe in as much or more as others.

Your purpose and belief can be anchored by virtually anything you deem important. Here are a few areas I've found worthy of not only my own passion, but have captured the hearts and minds of my co-workers and entire organizations. If you find that you lack belief in what you are communicating, consider how your message impacts these areas and embed them into your communications:

- Achievement** – People like to feel a sense of accomplishment. They find satisfaction in attaining goals. Goals can be financial targets, market share positions, or something as simple as winning a contest. If you want your communications to be effective, relate your topic to how it and the efforts of the person you are communicating with impact a goal, mission, or vision.
- Respect** – More fundamental than achieving a measurement is winning someone's respect. It could be your team's, boss's, friend's, or family's. While not always a good long-term anchor of belief given its transitory and uncontrollable nature, it can be a significant short-term driver of your passion and others'. Being valued, especially by people whom you respect, engages your emotions to the fullest extent. To be most effective in your communications, consider how the topic impacts your self-esteem and other's.



Believe In What You Are Communicating

- Development** – For many people, true satisfaction comes with learning and improving. The prospect of more knowledge and skill is commensurate with more prestige, power, and money. Any endeavor that includes the opportunity for personal or professional growth can be a huge contributor toward believing in it.
- Relationship** – Being part of a team or partnership where people share common objectives, activities, and risks can be highly motivating. It fulfills our basic human need to belong and creates a sense of loyalty. The hope of a new or improved relationship along with being part of a high performance team is a strong component of believing in a mission.
- Service** – Providing a value adding service to others gives people meaning beyond themselves. Knowing that they are helping others live a better life or attain their goals gets people excited about what they do.

Think about what you believe in. Visualize the end goal which you are pursuing and bring it to life in your mind and in your words with attention to these areas. Become passionate about your work and your purpose. It will show up in your communications making you a much more effective communicator.

Mike Hawkins is president of Alpine Link Corporation, a consulting firm specializing in helping individuals and organizations reach their peak potential. For this and other Alpine Link business articles, visit:

http://www.alpinelink.com/Leadership_Sales_Management_Consulting_Papers_Tools_Templates.aspx.