

# We Need A Communications Paradigm Shift: Plain English

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I was recently meeting with a client to review their employee engagement scores. The SVP of HR looked at me with some concern:

Wow our communication scores are low. What's going on here? We do actually talk to each other. I'm at least 75% sure of it.

We then looked at the global norms – which were equally as low – and I said to him with a smile:

It appears that you guys aren't alone.

The puzzling part for all of us who work on communications effectiveness is that most companies have established ways for us to communicate – meetings, newsletters, email. We have cell phones. We text. We call. We IM. So what's the problem?

There are the usual suspects:

- We are on information overload these days, inundated with communications from all angles. I must confess that I am as guilty as anyone. Before writing this article, I left a text message, email, and voice mail about the same topic to someone just to “make sure” she got the communication. I'm suddenly feeling like part of the problem. In an attempt communicate thoroughly, we might be communicating ourselves to death.
- Then there is the fact that most of us are running a million miles an hour while juggling 13 bowling pins and often run right past people trying to communicate with us no matter how many communications vehicles they use.

There might be two other more subtle things going on that we can actually coach people about:

## **1. Overuse of corporate jargon, acronyms, and other weird things we say**

It's hard enough to make sure we are all being understood at work without introducing

unnecessary hurdles into the gauntlet – and corporate jargon and acronyms definitely fall into the category of unnecessary.

Talking about “leading paradigm shifts,” “baking people into processes,” or “drilling down” and “fleshing out straw dogs” may cause more confusion than we think , even though weird terms like that fly around the corporate world as fast as anything else.

Acronyms are equally challenging. I was recently in a meeting where an operations VP looked at the team presenting and asked: “What the heck is a WIIFM?”

All of us change management nerds knew it meant “What’s In It For Me,” but it was assumed that he knew as well. He didn’t.

Another client was working on a project formally called the [MSP VMS ACA](#) Initiative. I could see one of the stakeholder’s head cock as he muttered to himself: “The whaty-what-what initiative?”

## **2. The Golden Rule may not really be so golden**

We were all taught the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would want done unto you.”

But what if I love details and communicate that way to someone who simply wants a quick overview? Or what if all I care about is the bottom line and communicate that way to someone who cares about the impact to people? I have sat in meetings where someone is making a great presentation but losing half the room because they didn’t think about the importance of how they are communicating.

The real rule of communication should be a more evolved Platinum Rule: “Do unto others as they want or need done unto them.”

It requires thinking outside of our own frame of reference but really improves how well any message resonates and is retained.

Few of us can stop the excessively fast paced momentum of the corporate world all by ourselves or have an impact on all of the new ways we communicate with each other, but we *can* coach our people on these two things. Maybe it might bump up our communications scores on the next employee engagement survey.

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