

It's All in How You Communicate

A good leader spends more time communicating than doing anything else. Consider that every day you informally speak to as many as 20 people (or more!). Whether it's running your daily morning huddle, explaining a dental procedure, or building rapport with a new patient, you give a speech every time you open your mouth.

To gain confidence as a communicator, I use a method dubbed "C - O - D." Usually, those letters stand for "cash on delivery." And that is exactly what happens when you communicate clearly, because you *will* sell yourself. However, in this instance, "**C**" stands for **Content** (substantive information); "**O**" means **Organization** (speaking by design); and "**D**" is for **Delivery** (pizzazz without angst).

Content → say something worth saying

With more than eight years of experience consulting with dentists on presentation skills, I have found that the best communicators are those who possess the K, A, and C Factors:

"**K**" stands for **Knowledge**. You speak more comfortably, with greater vocal variety, and with heightened enthusiasm when you talk about what you know. In other words, stick to your area of expertise.

"**A**" stands for **Attitude**. Your listeners don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. You don't have to be a cheerleader to convey your passion. You need to be *you*. However, in your own style, the patient must grasp that you are pleased to be there.

When your "Knowledge" and "Attitude" show up, you will begin to create the C Factor.

"**C**" stands for **Credibility**. Everyone has a BS lightbulb in his or her head. (You already know what *that* means!) Your BS lightbulb comes on and you stop listening when you sense the speaker does not know and/or does not care about what he or she is saying.

What do you do and say early on to create a high credibility factor when you communicate with others?

Organization → say it in a way that will help your listener grasp the information

Ears have lousy memories. Think about a sieve and a sponge. Which one best depicts your brain? Are you a sponge? Do you soak up 100 percent of the information you receive every day, all day long? Probably not.

In reality, we all are sieve-heads. Visualize that everyone you talk to (in person, over the phone, via email, fax, voice mail, an audience, in a meeting ...) is wearing an imaginary sieve. We may hear 100 percent of what you're saying, but we'll only retain 25 percent, even if you are dynamic and cogent. Seventy-five percent goes right through those sieve holes. How often does a patient ask your assistant or hygienist to reiterate what you've just said after you've left your operator?

Less is more

It is critical that you be organized. Use an outline



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approach to organize your information, thinking “less is more” as you put your thoughts together. Focus on three main points that you can support with stories, humor, and examples. Remember that listeners value clear, concise, organized, and anecdotal information.

Delivery → say it with pizzazz and without angst

Sometimes it can be nerve-wracking to quote a high fee, give a speech, face an angry patient, or provide constructive criticism to a valued team member. In all of these situations, it's OK to possess a degree of nervousness. In fact, nervousness begets adrenaline, which begets energy, which begets enthusiasm, and without it, you would be blah.

The trick is to embrace your nervousness through practice, preparation, and a positive mental attitude. At the very least, think about your message, your agenda, and your hidden agenda before you begin.

Law of frogs

Kristen Ulmer, a contributing editor to *Skiing* magazine, wrote an article titled, “Stuck? Try These Ten Strategies for Skiing With More Power and Energy Than You Ever Thought Possible.” Ulmer suggests that we visualize our greatness and raise our freak-out ceiling.

Her final tip is the Law of Frogs: “If you have to eat a frog, you better not look at it for too long. It's no different with an intimidating ski run. The longer you stand up there and worry about how you are going to get down it, the harder it will be to swallow your fear.” She goes on to say, “I know it's easier said than done. Try this. Relax. Take a few deep breaths. Concentrate on something familiar — the snow conditions, a similar run you have skied, how the first turn will feel. Take charge of your destiny. Map out a strategy for skiing the run. Find your line. Trust your ability. Don't look at the frog too long.”

How to communicate with “C - O - D”

- ✧ Make your listeners care about your topic by caring about it first.
- ✧ Think “less is more” when speaking.
- ✧ Use stories and examples to get your message across.
- ✧ Leap like a strong, confident frog.

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