

*“Human communication has its own set of very unusual and counterintuitive rules.”*

Malcolm Gladwell

### Inspiring Change...

#### The Language of Leadership

What does it take to transmit bold new ideas to people who don't want to hear them? How can the language you use facilitate enthusiastic, energetic implementation and become *transformational*?

Transformational leaders...

- Generate enduring enthusiasm for a common cause
- Present innovative solutions to solve significant problems
- Catalyze shifts in people's values and ideologies
- Demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice personal interests for the greater good
- Help others get through crisis moments
- Inspire people to want to change, creating a positive energy that sustains the change
- Motivate followers who will ultimately become leaders

The *what* of transformational leadership is reasonably clear. It's the *how* that's usually obscure.

- ⇒ How do leaders communicate complex ideas and spark others into enduring enthusiastic action?
- ⇒ What words do they use to inspire others to become new leaders?
- ⇒ Why are some leaders able to accomplish the feat while others fail miserably?

*“Words differently arranged have a different meaning, and meanings differently arranged have a different effect.”*

Blaise Pascal

Stephen Denning, a senior scholar at the University of Maryland's Burns Academy of Leadership, makes the case for transformational communications in his book *The Secret Language of Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 2007).

More than anything, it's what leaders say — and the way they say it — that generates sustained energy and exponential results.

### How to Lead Change

Many experts proclaim that leadership is solely an issue of inner conviction: You must find the leader deep within yourself.

Other experts encourage you to:

- Become the person others will want to follow
- Discover your strengths
- Increase your self-awareness, self-regulation and authenticity
- Become emotionally and socially intelligent
- Visualize to materialize
- Be true to yourself, and change will happen

*“I am always doing that which I can not do, in order that I may learn how to do it.”*

Pablo Picasso

If leaders' own inner commitment to change is to have any effect at all, they must effectively communicate it to those they aspire to lead — and follow with actions that exemplify those words. Words and action... 'walking the talk'... honestly and genuinely create...

- Trust
- A Galvanizing Effect
- Enthusiasm
- Energy
- Momentum
- Sustainable Motivation



The wrong words, or even words said in the wrong sequence, can undermine your best intentions and plans, killing an initiative on the spot.

**We've always done it this way...**

The traditional communication approach follows this sequence:

**Define the problem ► Analyze it ► Recommend a solution**

This has been a revered intellectual tradition in organizations since the ancient Greeks. It works well when the aim is to pass on information to people who want to hear it; but, if you want people to change their thinking and behavior in fundamentally new ways with sustained energy and enthusiasm, this approach has two flaws:

***It doesn't work.***

***It often makes the situation worse.***

People who disagree with you or have other ideas and habits won't respond well to your list of reasons to change. In fact, lecturing them on your beliefs will often lead to greater entrenchment in their long-held approaches and behaviors.

A significant body of research shows that asking people to change often drives them more deeply into opposition. This 'confirmation bias' is a tendency to search for or interpret new information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions and to irrationally avoid information and interpretations that contradict existing beliefs.

*"Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind."*

*Rudyard Kipling*

Successful leaders follow a unique, almost hidden communication pattern:

**Grab Attention ► Stimulate Desire ► Reinforce**

**Grab Attention**

In an experiment with 60 executives, researchers found the most important factors in grabbing their attention were:

1. A personalized message
2. Evoking an emotional response
3. A trustworthy source
4. Concise language

*"Desire is a powerful force that can be used to make things happen."*

*Marcia Wieder*

**Create Desire**

Use positive stories of how successful innovators are making a difference. Appeal to both heart and mind to gain an enthusiastic buy-in. Effective leaders establish an emotional connection.

The task isn't to impose your will on an audience; it's to enable participants to see the possibilities and come to their own conclusions, based on the evidence presented in your positive stories.

**Reinforce**

The desire for change will wane unless it's supported and reinforced by compelling reasons. Remember to share the story of:

- What the change is, as seen through the eyes of those who will be affected by it
- How the change will be implemented, with a delineation of the simple steps for getting from "here" to "there"
- Why the change will work, with an explanation of the underlying mechanisms that make change virtually inevitable

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