

# Communicate with Clarity:

*A Quick Guide for High-Performing Executives*

*By Dr. Sandra Folk*



*Good communication is powerful. How you communicate reflects on you, your reputation, and your organization. Maximize the success of your business communication by using my ten-point quick guide for high-performing executives.*

*For a customized plan designed to help you achieve your specific goals contact Dr. Sandra Folk.*

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**DR. SANDRA FOLK**

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# Listen Like A Leader

*Effective communicators are good listeners. They listen more than they talk. They ask questions instead of making speeches. Skilled listeners find out what they need to know.*

Good communication is not only about articulating your ideas; it's also about the art of listening. Use the 80:20 rule (80% listening, 20% speaking) as your starting point. Attentive listening helps you to gain a better understanding of another person's thoughts, ideas, and needs — and respond accordingly.



## TOP TIPS:

**Engage:** Be an active listener — one who makes sure the other person knows that he or she is heard. Let others finish speaking before you respond. Listen attentively, rather than focusing on what you plan to say next.

**Comprehend:** Be open-minded. Listen without judgment to truly understand another person's point of view. Rephrase what has been said to make sure you have a shared understanding.

**Ask:** Go below the surface by asking thoughtful questions. Use open-ended questions (rather than questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no") in order to learn more.

# Understand Your People

*Read your audience. Understand what they need, and how you can give it to them. Choose the right language for the biggest impact.*

Business is about relationships, and it's your challenge to become an expert on the people you do business with. Focus less on yourself, your product or service, and more on your "audience."



## TOP TIPS:

**Converse:** To understand needs, pain points, and what makes someone tick — have a conversation. Don't just rely on email and document sharing. Take the time to chat — it builds understanding and trust.

**Determine:** Your conversations with colleagues, employees, and clients will provide the information you need to determine the communication style best-suited to a specific business relationship. Strategize your approach based on information you have gathered.

**Value:** Great managers value unique abilities of others. They tailor business to different learning styles, cultural background, and needs. Learn to appreciate and value differences — they may be your "super power."

# Say More With Less

*Be precise, persuasive, powerful. Avoid industry jargon. Emphasize key messages.*

It's challenging to grab people's attention. One of the best ways to be heard is through business communications that are concise and to the point.



## TOP TIPS:

**Focus:** Your message needs to be focussed before the creation of presentations or documents. All your business communications will flow from your core message.

**Plan:** Plan your communications carefully for a better chance of successfully meeting your goals. Advanced planning gives you an opportunity to make sure your communications clearly reveal your message.

**Choose:** Words matter — choose them carefully. Jargon may cloud your intended meaning. Avoid empty phrases, e.g., “going forward in future we will soon make our decision.” Instead, be direct, e.g., “we will make a decision soon.” Consider your tone: word choice and tone can have a significant impact.

# Tell Your Story

*Make connections the human way: share your stories. Stories capture hearts and minds. Stories make your ideas come alive.*

Humans are hardwired to tell stories and learn through the stories other people tell. We watch and read stories for entertainment, and we also depend on them to make sense of our experiences.



## TOP TIPS:

**Personalize:** Anecdotes about your experiences will help to build rapport. Your personal stories demonstrate your human side, and they encourage others to pursue their own business and life goals.

**Connect:** Data is important in business, but data is not what creates a human connection. Your stories, on the other hand, may help develop relationships, creating the connections you need.

**Remember:** Memory is powerful. Stories remind us of the past and make us more receptive as listeners. Let your stories draw on real-life experience both recent and historic.

# Be Your Own Editor

*Reflect. Rework. Rethink. Heightened awareness of your message and how you communicate it leads to greater impact.*

Everyone benefits from a good editor, but in business sometimes you have to take on that role yourself. Discipline yourself to think first, write (or speak) later.



## TOP TIPS:

**Goals:** Clearly understand your goals and link your communications to those goals. Trying to accomplish too much in a single written communication or presentation risks confusing your audience.

**Needs:** You can only fulfil your audience's needs if you understand what those needs are. Research your audience to find out what they expect and want. Trim your communications to address those specific expectations and hopes.

**Persuade:** Persuading others that your ideas or services will benefit them depends on the language you use. Understand the kind of language that is most appropriate for your specific audience and edit yourself accordingly.

# Clarify Body Language

*Reduce tension; reflect openness. Use positive body language to reinforce your spoken words.*

Confidence is one of the hallmarks of an accomplished leader. Positive body language is essential in conveying confidence and in helping to inspire confidence in others.



## TOP TIPS:

**Analyse:** Your posture and gestures may convey what your words do not. Analyse your own non-verbal communication and learn to alter it when needed.

**Observe:** Learn to observe non-verbal communication in other people. Noticing facial expressions, eye contact etc. may give you insight into someone's attitude and emotional state.

**Clarify:** If another person's body language sends you a mixed message, seek clarification. Ask that person questions aimed at ironing out any contradictions.



# Take The Temperature

*Emotions open or close doors. Manage the emotional side of business communication to promote your vision.*

Accept this reality: people are emotional beings. Your employees, clients, or colleagues all have emotional reactions and specific sensitivities — and so do you. Learn to monitor and respond to emotion in a productive way.



## TOP TIPS:

**Recognize:** Identify your typical emotional responses to heightened situations, specific personality types, or to “trigger words.” You need to understand your own habitual responses in order to manage them.

**Breathe:** It’s difficult to reverse an inappropriate comment or action, better to take a deep breath and a time out. Remind yourself that everyone has thoughts and feelings, and as a leader it’s your job to react calmly and maturely.

**Wait:** Decisions made in a heated moment are rarely the best decisions. Far better to leave a meeting with the promise of a decision to come. Avoid, as the saying goes, “acting in haste, repenting at leisure.”

# Deliver Bad News Positively

*Words are powerful. Positive language used well reflects authority and builds your reputation.*

Business executives are often the frontline when it comes to delivering “bad news,” such as informing a client of an error. Delivering bad news requires confidence, thoughtfulness, and the courage to admit mistakes.



## TOP TIPS:

**Tone:** Take a positive tone, i.e., focus on how a problem can be fixed rather than the problem itself. Learn to frame a difficult situation in its most positive light — without denying the difficulties themselves.

**Talk:** Don't hide behind email as a way of avoiding confrontation. Sometimes awkward conversations are necessary. The best path to avoiding damage to your business relationships is not always the easiest one.

**Respect:** Thoughtful word choice can make the difference between a negative message that upsets its recipient, and an honest message that reassures. You can't sugar-coat problems, but you can consider the other person's feelings and choose your words respectfully.

# Be Your Best Self

*Drill down to the essence. Understand your strengths — and weaknesses. Develop effective strategies to present the best you.*

You have skills, abilities, and talent. But you're not perfect — no one is. Take the time to figure out what works in your communication style, and what doesn't. Develop strategies to strengthen weaknesses, and capitalize on your strengths.



## TOP TIPS:

**Reflect:** Think about what needs improvement. Avoid negativity about perceived weaknesses. Self-understanding depends on honesty and compassion.

**Prioritize:** Consider the skills you need to do your job, e.g., strategic planning; resourcefulness; resiliency; managing change; decisiveness; leadership skills; building relationships etc. Create a list of skills-development priorities.

**Evaluate:** Evaluate your ongoing experiences honestly and learn from them. In any new situation ask yourself what worked and what didn't. Try not to judge — remember, when we fail, we learn.

# Shape Your Message

*Choose the right medium for your message: face-to-face, video, email, phone. Understand the possibilities; avoid the pitfalls.*

Marshall McLuhan famously said “the medium is the message.” In business, the way you deliver your message plays a vital role in how it is received. The content of the message will help you to choose the right medium.



## TOP TIPS:

**Question:** Think carefully about the content of your message before choosing how it will be delivered. Ask yourself: Is it sensitive? Is it potentially controversial? Is it strictly informational? Is it likely to be shared with others?

**Consider:** The audience for your message plays a part in determining how you shape it. Consider which mediums your audience prefers, whether it be social media, video, or a written report. You will have a better chance of reaching that audience by using their preferred mediums.

**Act:** Act according to the kind of message it is, and the audience it is intended for. For example, it may be better to convey a sensitive or private message verbally, rather than in writing. Emails and texts may be quick, but are not always best.

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