

# Executive Communication

**The Common Denominator**

By John Glaneman



What is the common denominator of business issues that executives face? Communication. As executives we all know the importance of timely and valuable communication at all levels of our organization. So why does communication, similar to engagement, remain so problematic for us and the source of such major consternation and headaches?

While working with a very talented and highly motivated executive team, we found ourselves discussing communication. The organization had a major initiative in the near future critical to not just growth but overall survivability to stay with or ahead of the competition in a highly competitive landscape. By chance, does this sound at all familiar? Could this description fit your organization and/or team? We were in the boardroom and, with great pride, the title of the initiative was announced. It was at that moment that it became painfully apparent that there were serious flaws in the communication plan and we had not even started to discuss the plan; just the name.

Here is where communication becomes an art and a science and if we, as executives, don't understand or think we understand but refuse to look with a critical eye, we will continue to get the results we have always gotten - mediocre at best. Let's start with the science.

Who is your message for? Let's assume that we as the executive team are working on a major initiative that needs communicated to everyone in the organization. Let's also assume that we need their buy-in and we are crafting guidance to HR or corporate communications. How well do you know your organization so that your team can craft the correct message? The larger the organization, the easier this is. Counterintuitive for sure. If we have 25 employees, we need to know them individually and well to even begin crafting our message.

If we have 250 employees, our team leads and managers need to have those relationships, but we still have to be in touch with them or the message becomes lost. If we have 2,500 employees, then we let science do the heavy lifting. When using a DiSC profile, we know through national statistics that 55% of the population have an S temperament and the other three are evenly dispersed at 15% each. If we have a large number of employees, then we can reasonably assume that 55% will have an S temperament. We can use that science to help us craft our message based on that personality style. If you don't know where to start with DiSC, start with yourself and then the executive team. Only then can we start to understand those in our organization and craft the correct message in our communication plans. Next, for the art.

What message do we send? The art of the message is questioning our assumptions. And that can be difficult for some executives. We got to where we are because of what we know. The above executives in the boardroom example assumed that, because *they* understood the name of the initiative, *everyone* would. They were writing for themselves. As Dale Carnegie said, years ago, let's try honestly to see things from the other person's point of view and you and your team will be on your way to crafting communications that are for *them*, not *you*.