

## COMMUNICATION AS A CHANGE AGENT

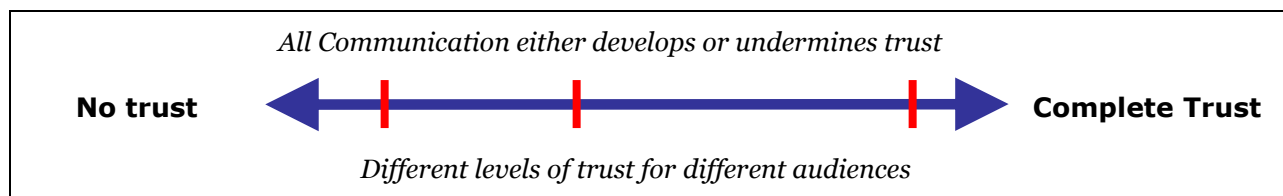
### *The dynamic interaction between players and situations*

We come into the world kicking and screaming, demanding that the world relate to us on our terms. Then we spend the rest of our lives learning how to negotiate with all those other people who want the same thing. When resources are scarce, or the participants insecure, the communication process often becomes highly competitive, even destructive, as the players struggle to get what each wants with little or no regard for the other.

**Dynamic process.** Furthermore, communication is not static: it sets in motion a dynamic process that leaves the players and their situations changed. Once you say the words, or hit the send button, or mail the package, change follows inevitably: good and bad. So it is critically important to think through your communication in advance so where possible you anticipate consequences and get the correct message details to the appropriate audience at the right time using the tools best suited to that audience and situation.

**Relationship-focused.** But effective communication is relationship-focused in addition to being task-focused. It tries to establish long term trust by engaging people honestly and using media with integrity. It looks for an intersection between the sender's wants and needs and those of the audience so that the exchange can be mutually beneficial. Of course, there are exceptions: some audiences not trustworthy and the exchange is limited; some situations require the sender to withhold sensitive information; some communications are exploratory as the sender attempts to discover what kind of relationship is possible and/or desirable. But on balance, ethical communicators concern themselves with the audience's well-being as well as their own. As Table 1 illustrates, every communication, intentional and unintentional, either develops trust or undermines it, regardless of the level of trust already enjoyed or desired.

**Table 1: Trust Continuum**



Furthermore, you will establish and maintain different levels of trust for different audiences. You might have a very high level of professional trust in your mechanic — you consistently trust his/her advice regardless of cost. The same might apply to your doctor or priest, although the risks are much higher. And you have friends with whom you have both personal and professional relationships because you have developed very, very high levels of trust over time.

**Integrity based.** Now think about how easily either of you can destroy any of those relationships, and what kinds of communication might be the cause of that loss. Almost always a question of integrity/ethics will be involved — you discover your mechanic has been padding your invoices; you fail to disclose important information about your health to your doctor (physical) or priest (spiritual) while asking for advice; you betray the confidence of a friend and damaging information becomes public knowledge. The trust that took so long to build in many cases, will take much, much longer to rebuild — if it can be.

### Win-win Starting Point

In *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton develop a win-win perspective that goes far beyond negotiation. (A detailed outline of the content is available at <http://www.cozy.org/yes.html>.) The writers focus on understanding the audience's wants and needs as a prelude to finding common ground that will be beneficial to all parties.

That's the approach we will use to begin our study of effective communication processes as they affect *both* communicators and audiences.

Normally, we know what we want from an exchange at the outset: the ideal outcome of the process for us.

**Table 2: Win-Win Starting Points**

Me	Audience
<i>W</i> — What do I <u>want</u> from this exchange?	<i>W</i> —what does my audience <u>want</u> from this exchange?
<i>I</i> —what factors will influence me in this exchange?	<i>I</i> —what factors will influence my audience in this exchange?
<i>N</i> —what do I <u>need</u> from this exchange?	<i>N</i> —what does my audience <u>need</u> from this exchange?

And we're also aware of some factors in our own environment that could limit what we obtain, and, as a result, what outcome we might have to settle for if some or all of those limiting factors come into play. We're being realistic.

Effective Communicators do a Win-Win Assessment for all stakeholders

For example, I will approach a car dealer with an opening offer (want) that is somewhat different from what I am able to pay (need) to start a dialogue that will get me the car for the best price from my perspective. Several factors will influence the difference between my opening and final offers:

- what else is available in that price range;
- what those alternatives are selling for;
- how much I trust the dealer;
- how badly I need the vehicle now; etc.

I've just done a basic WIN assessment for myself.

The dealer has also done a basic WIN assessment from his/her perspective. He/she too has similar wants, influences and needs. To survive and flourish, every business needs to turn a profit. The dealer has priced the car to start the dialogue with you, and he/she would like to get the highest price possible while being competitive, but he/she has a base price he/she will accept in order to make the sale. Several factors will influence his/her decision to accept or reject your final offer:

- the availability of alternatives and their prices;
- how long he/she has been carrying the vehicle as inventory;
- the size and frequency discounts available from suppliers depending on the number of vehicles sold each sales period;
- has the current sales quota been met for this period; etc.

Here is where effective communicators distinguish themselves: they do a Win-Win assessment for both parties in order to anticipate the audience's position and find a mutually beneficial outcome *before they engage the audience!* A conscientious dealer will rapidly discover evidence that his customer has taken time to know his business constraints, and an observant customer will recognize that this dealer has carefully thought through the customer's needs and is sincerely trying to give him/her the best deal possible. A basis for trust is emerging early in the process because both sides have taken pains to understand the other's wants and needs *in advance*.