

Making Movies

Leaders act as directors.



by Ron Crossland

MY LATE PARTNER, Boyd Clarke, and I studied leadership

communication for 10 years and gained two profound insights:

First, we assume that constituents: 1) *understand* what was communicated; 2) *agree* with it; 3) *care* about it; and 4) know what *actions* to take. These insidious assumptions are the cause of most miscommunication.

Second, the best communicators regularly defeat these assumptions, deliver better messages, gain greater agreement and engagement, and spur more action when they communicate on three channels: facts, emotions, and symbols.

The factual channel concerns how we organize and relate our facts, data, or analysis. The emotional channel concerns how we convey our emotional state, position, or mood as well as acknowledge the emotional state(s), position(s), or mood(s) of our constituents. And the symbolic channel concerns how well we manage symbolic language like metaphor, analogy, and imagery and how well we use stories, anecdotes, or illustrations to add depth or meaning.

Why do leaders who use these three channels, this “persuasive cycle” of communication, get better results?

Daily, our brains work to create sense and meaning. The brain detects, creates, stores, retrieves, processes, and edits sensory inputs, memories, and feelings and processes them in ways that are similar to movie making, editing, and publishing.

The three major processing systems of the brain—logical functioning, emotional functioning, and symbolic (semantic, language, imagery) functioning—are the primary systems creating this “movie-in-the-brain.”

The best communicators create more complete and compelling movies by

communicating what the brain needs to make a movie: facts, emotions, and symbols. When leaders do not communicate on one or more of these channels, constituents must fill in the missing channel from their own internal database, because their brain demands an answer to what is going on. And when they do, they create a movie that can be radically different from the movie the leader is trying to portray.

Communication is complete is when all three channels are filled.

Using these three channels well is like a painter using the three primary colors well or a pianist using basic chords well. Three primary colors, and their combination, create images—ranging from refrigerator art to Picassos. Seven octaves, and their combination, create piano music ranging from chopsticks to Rachmaninov’s Piano Concerto No. 3. Three channels of communication create meaning ranging from “See Spot Run,” to memorable lines like those of Winston Churchill, “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat,” and John

F. Kennedy, “And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

Alignment occurs when the three channels are used well, moving constituents to act willingly in a movie worthy of their best efforts.

We are all actors in the mini-series of our lives, and work is a dominant

storyline. Leaders create a movie that helps explain what has happened, what is currently happening, and what will happen in the future—and ask constituents to buy in. That’s vision. Constituents want a role in a movie that has meaning to them.

As they listen and edit the leader’s message, they try to create a movie that answers questions like: How will my job change? Can I get this done? What does this mean to me? How will this affect my income? Am I capable of what will be required? What if I fail? When the questions are answered, and constituents see a role they can play in making this desirable movie a reality, they sign on. Alignment is *everyone making and working in the same movie.* LE

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ACTION: *Ensure everyone is making the same movie.*

