



A Long-Term Guide to the Art of Communication

Great communicators are always practicing.

As an executive coach and business communications specialist, my passion and professional interest is to help people communicate with excellence.

To that end, Elizabeth van Geerestein and I designed a system called “Voice is Power,” with six pillars of communication. It provides the framework that will help you to maximise your communication skills by practicing with discipline and focus.

I have yet to meet anyone who says they don’t want to be a good presenter or to improve their communication skills. With this desire to better themselves, some people may take a brief course or engage a personal coach.

When the course or coaching sessions end, however, just like with dieting or a fitness programme, a significant number of people are highly likely to backslide into their old habits instead of committing to what they’ve learnt.

To effect permanent change in how we communicate, we should be guided by great musicians or athletes such as Usain Bolt in their relentless efforts to become extraordinary. In other words, practice constantly.

Anywhere, anytime

To help people practice their communication skills

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anywhere and anytime, we have developed a mobile app called “The Art of Communication”, which is now available for free download from the **Android Play Store** and the **Apple App Store**.

As a tool that people can carry in their mobile devices, the app is intended to motivate you and to help you stay focused and disciplined in practicing the six pillars of communication and your presentation skills.

The idea for it began with a video podcast that I produced a decade ago. Our MBA students and executives would watch the podcast to learn what we had to teach before our classes began. But the podcast was not interactive in nature.

So we decided to develop an app that allows users to learn by watching video tutorials, and interact by doing the exercises featured. In addition, users can film themselves practicing for a presentation, job interview, crucial conversation or a meeting and share the video file with colleagues and friends, who will then provide them with feedback and a rating based on our evaluation framework. So on the day, they can shine by communicating with excellence.

The app is free with in-app purchases for e-learning content. For users who wish to have their video files further critiqued, they can request a professional review within the app, which will be done by one of

our master coaches. They can choose to have a video review or a written review.

At this year's QSP Summit, a marketing and management conference, I hosted an interactive session with 1,500 delegates about the art of communication. I asked members of the audience to think about how they present themselves and communicate, by posing three questions:

1. Are you aware of your brand, who you are and what you stand for?
2. Are you focused and purposeful about your impact on others and how you want to be known?
3. When you speak, do you just deliver words and information, or do you also share the essence of you? That is, are you allowing your personality and character to shine through?

Six pillars of communication

In pondering these questions, the six pillars of "The Art of Communication" form a highly effective routine for everyday practice.

The first pillar is an attitude of Gratitude. This is about an upward trend versus a downward spiral in terms of attitude, thinking, being, and how you interact with and impact on others. For some the cup is always half empty, doom and gloom, for others the cup is half full and they are positively seeking ways of filling the cup until it is overflowing, and enjoying the journey.

Pillar two is Diaphragmatic Breathing. This is how we are designed to breathe and indeed it how we breathe when we were born and when we were young. The pressures of work and often hectic lives can drive us into the poor and inefficient method of chest breathing which considerably restricts our lung capacity. The quality of our breath is directly proportional to the quality of the vibration of our vocal cords. The quality of the vibration of our vocal cords is directly proportional to the quality and gravitas of our voice.

Pillar three is a Somatic Workout. This is all about connection with others, whether one-to-one, or one-to-many. Respect and honour of self, respect and honour of the other; eye contact, connection, chemistry and trust.

Pillar four is a Vocal Workout. This is a wonderful workout to both warm-up and strengthen your voice and as such enhance the quality of your spoken voice and your singing voice... even if you think you can't sing. Be prepared to be pleasantly surprised by your voice.

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Pillar five is Voice Visualisation. This is all about lifting your words off the page and breathing life and energy into them. Storytelling. Conveying the meaning behind your words. The opposite would be a monotone delivery, just lifeless words and information. The latter simply does not cut it and indeed should be classified as a crime against communication!

The final pillar is your Leadership Presence. This is all about how you choose to show up. Your brand, your essence, your values, what you stand for. This is about making conscious and purposeful choices in order to allow and authorise yourself to be who you are truly capable of being. We also call it the "Gift of You", i.e. you as a person, your knowledge, your expertise, your experience, and what you bring to the table.

Together, the six pillars form an enjoyable and meaningful daily 10 to 15 minutes "keep fit" routine to help you be a champion athlete in the arena of communication.

Your gold medal awaits.

Steve Knight is Adjunct Professor of Business Communication at INSEAD, a Certified Executive and Leadership Coach. You can download the app via <http://artofcomms.com/>.

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