

# Reset Your Communication Radar

by Margaret Keys

The only communication that counts is the message *received*. When you are speaking, be it one-on-one or to a large audience, you have to keep your communication radar in working order. If you stop getting “echoes” back from the receiver, it’s time to use one of these three reset buttons—and get your communication back on track.

Button #1: *Make sure you’re not trapped in your own monologue.* You need to be constantly answering the audience’s unasked question, “What’s in it for me?” Get in touch with them for *their* reasons, not just your reasons. The easiest trap to fall into is to communicate with people for our reasons only, and assume they will “get” it.

Your communication has to get through many filters and barriers. Fatigue, boredom, anger, and frustration are only a few. You need to find ways to break through these filters and barriers to check that the audience has not only heard what you’ve said but understood its meaning, and that they are willing to act on it.

Do this by getting them involved. Ask questions. Make sure you’re locked into them and not just trying to get your message out. Build in ways for the audience to respond and give you feedback *during* your message.

Button #2: *Hammer it home.* Increase the impact of what you’re saying by repeating it, either visually (on paper or with other methods such as slides or overheads) or verbally.

Experts say that it takes 17 repetitions of an idea or message before people begin to integrate it or “get it.” If you are face-to-face or on the phone, *repeat, repeat, repeat* and have them repeat back or paraphrase it to you. Keep in mind that spoken communication is *managed attention*. You can use the tools of inflection, pauses, long silences, volume, and your body movement and gestures with one “voice” to get the attention of the message receiver and to focus it—even in a one-on-one meeting.

Button #3: *“Read” your audience (not just your message).* Not only do you have to understand the audience or the individual you are trying to communicate with before the fact, you must be constantly monitoring what you are doing as you speak.

Often we are so busy “doing the job” just to keeping things running that we forget to “read” the audience as we go. Ask yourself these questions:

1. What is \_\_\_\_\_’s perception of you?

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2. What is \_\_\_\_\_’s experience with this idea or this topic?

3. What is \_\_\_\_\_’s relationship to you? (Subordinate, colleague, boss?)

4. What is your communication history with \_\_\_\_\_? (If you have a

long and good relationship, the odds are that your communication will worsen over time because you start using “shorthand.”)

5. What is your credibility factor with \_\_\_\_\_? (Must you build it, keep it, or monitor it?)

6. Is there tension? Do you need to open up the communication or use humor or candor to break the tension or open the truth in a situation?

7. Is there an intimidation factor at work? Do you intimidate \_\_\_\_\_? Does \_\_\_\_\_ intimidate you? Communication may shut down just because of that.

8. If face-to-face, have \_\_\_\_\_’s eyes glazed over? Does \_\_\_\_\_ seem responsive? Angry? Puzzled?

9. Do you know if \_\_\_\_\_ responds best to spoken or written communication? Does \_\_\_\_\_ prefer that you call first? (Each of us has a preferred way to communicate.)

10. How do you know that you’ve communicated clearly and concisely — that your message has got across? What feedback do you count on to tell you that? Do you need to adjust it?

11. What is \_\_\_\_\_’s style? Bottom-line? Detailed? Methodical? Folksy? Adjust *your* communication.

You can never guarantee that the message you send is the one that is received. But by using your communication radar, you can increase how on-target the message is.

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