



CARY COMMUNICATIONS INSIGHTS

It's Not All About You: How to Communicate to Different Audiences

By Karen Bluestein

Most people approach communication wanting to sound smart. They want to demonstrate expertise, explain their rationale, and make sure nothing is left out. The problem is that sounding smart is rarely the audience's goal. Understanding is.

When communication falls apart, it's usually not because the information is wrong. It's because the message is framed around the speaker instead of the audience.

Start With the Audience

Before writing anything, define who the audience is and what they care about right now. Different audiences pay attention to different things because their responsibilities and risks are different.

- **Senior leaders** focus on money, tradeoffs, and outcomes. How much does this cost? What does it return? What risk does it reduce or create?
- **Employees** focus on expectations and stability. What is changing? What stays the same? How does this affect my role, my workload, or my team?
- **Clients** focus on results and confidence. Do you understand the problem? Can you deliver? Do you have proof? What happens next if they move forward?
- **Peers** and collaborators focus on efficiency and credibility. Is this worth the time? Does the logic make sense? Is there a clear path forward?

The core message may stay the same, but the emphasis must change depending on who is listening.

WIIFM and So What

Every audience is asking two questions, even if they never say them out loud.

- What's in it for me? (WIIFM)
- So what?

They want to know about personal impact. What will they gain? How does this affect priorities, success, or risk?

"So what?" must be answered. Why does this matter now? What decision does this inform? What action should follow?

If those questions are not answered early, attention drops and boredom or confusion set in.

Clarity Over Sounding Smart

Clarity should always be the goal. Not flair. Not clever phrasing. Not proving how much you know.

Clear communication focuses on what matters most, removes what does not, and makes the message easy to follow. That takes discipline. It means choosing words carefully, structuring ideas logically, and resisting the urge to explain too much.

If people have to work to understand why something matters, the message is already in trouble.

Listening is Part of Communicating

Listening is not passive. It involves reflecting key points back to the speaker, checking understanding, and asking follow-up questions. It also means responding to what the audience raises in the moment.

Too often, presenters hear a question and then rush back to their script. They answer partially, or not at all, and move on as if the concern never surfaced. That breaks trust.

Good communicators adjust. Pause. Address what was asked. They clarify before continuing.

The Difference That Matters

Effective communication is not about getting through material. It's about making sure the audience can follow the thinking, see the implications, and know what comes next.

When we stop trying to impress and start focusing on clarity, listen as carefully as we speak, and answer the questions the audience is asking, communication becomes useful and the action becomes clear.

And clarity is the point.

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