

Preface to “Communicate, Lead and Transform”

Numerous books exist on communication and leadership. Consequently, why is this book being written, and why now?

To begin, why this book? Numerous books on communication (Four Essential Keys to Effective Communication¹) and leadership (How Successful People Lead²) tell the reader what they should do to become better communicators or leaders based on the respective authors' experiences and established practices and then provide examples demonstrating how to improve. This book employs an empirical approach. That is, to assist you, the reader, leverage your own observations, experiences, and learning experiments. You'll be asked to explain what worked and what didn't, as well as what you did to achieve or hinder desired outcomes. Based on your analysis, you will be asked to elaborate on what behaviors you believe you should start, increase, stop, or decrease. We then share our observations and what we have learned, and the observations and knowledge of others, to assist you in identifying focus areas for improvement. As you might infer, the emphasis is a hands-on, practical application of behavior-based skills and how to acquire the skills you believe you need to be a successful communicator and, ultimately, a leader.

After each chapter, there is a pause to allow you to add to, or amend, your focus areas. In chapters 9 and 14, you'll have the opportunity to prioritize your focus areas and select no more than three high priority areas then transform them into precise goals, develop plans for achieving your goals, and detail how you'll track your progress. Chapter 1 goes into greater detail about this process.

Second, why is this book being published now?

Leadership and, its supporting skill, communication impact everyone, regardless of their position or role in an organization, whether in their professional or personal lives. Consider how your communication skills have influenced your life. You can probably think of numerous instances when you were an excellent communicator and others when you were not. Consider others who have influenced your life. Was their ability to communicate a critical component of their effectiveness? Almost everyone to whom the authors pose this question responds *yes*. As a result, we believe that communication is one of the most critical skills to acquire as you make your way through life and, much more so, for effective leadership.

This is particularly true today when the world's populations appear to have lost their “rudder” amid the COVID19 pandemic, racial injustice, socioeconomic disparity, migration/immigration disruption, the unending political rhetoric, and the wail of those who feel they have been left behind. Pick up a newspaper, listen to a newscast, or open your smart phone to see the preponderance of evidence telling us that we are talking louder than ever to ears that are not listening, to minds so tired they are closed.

Regardless of the communication “pandemic,” the assertion about the significance of communication is based on research about successful leaders and our experiences working with thousands of people during our working, consulting, and training careers. These professional experiences have taken place in some of the largest oil, petrochemical, healthcare, airline, banking, and information technology organizations throughout the world. Our experience as adjunct professors at Rice University and the University of Houston, as well as certified trainers for the Project Management Institute, have reinforced our conviction that good communication is a vital component of a leader's success.

“How do leaders communicate to transform organizations?” is a legitimate question. It encompasses more than motivational lectures. A splendid illustration is the story of the transformation of Continental Airlines' in the late 1990's under Gordon Bethune³ (CEO) and Greg Brenneman⁴ (COO). Continental offered employees a \$65 bonus every month that Continental was among the top five US

airlines with on-time delivery. When Gordon Bethune entered his office, one of the authors was waiting to meet with him. Kay, Gordon's administrative assistant, waved her first check and thanked Gordon for acknowledging everyone's work. Gordon looked at the check and said, "This is not \$65." "They have to take out taxes," Kay responded. Gordon picked up the phone, called HR, and told them to "Gross up all the checks and ensure that everyone receives \$65." It cost Continental less than \$10 per employee per month for this call, but the tale spread like wildfire throughout the company. Finally, senior executives at Continental began to listen and communicate the importance of employees by deeds, not just words. Bethune developed a strong team at Continental, fostering relationships and trust across the firm. Continental moved from being the poorest among the largest airlines in the United States to being first in all ten of the Department of Transportation's customer service indicators in less than a year. By the way, the initiative was self-funding due to the cost savings associated with flight delays or cancellations.

Transformative communication and leadership behaviors involve a commitment to improvement, patience, practice, change, hard work, and small victories to reinforce your efforts. However, you have to start somewhere. This book is intended to serve as a jumping-off point. We wish you success on your adventure!

End Notes

1. Leal, Bento C. *4 Essential Keys to Effective Communication*, (Scotts Valley, CA., Create Space, 2017).
2. Maxwell, John C. *How Successful People Lead*, (New Your, Center Street, 2013).
3. Bethune, Gordon. *From Worst to First: Behind the Scenes of Continental's Remarkable Comeback* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998).
4. Brenneman, Greg. "Right Away and All at Once: How We Saved Continental," *Harvard Business Review*. 76 no 5(Sept-Oct 1998), 162-168.