

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION THE LEADERS GREATEST SKILL

Probably no skill would be more helpful to acquire and develop than that of being an excellent communicator. I believe that communication is a skill that can be learned. A number of years ago I realized that my ability to communicate well needed major work, so I joined Toastmasters International in order to improve both my private and public communication. It was by far the best investment in my leadership portfolio that I have ever made. I am still reaping the benefits of the eleven years I was a Toastmaster.

Brian Tracy, author, speaker and seminar leader says, “Your ability to communicate effectively with people will contribute more to your success than any other skill that you can develop. I’ve studied success and achievement in America for more than 30 years. I’ve spoken to more than a million people, individually, and in groups, and I’ve taken extensive courses on speaking and the art of persuasion. I’ve read countless books and articles on how to influence, negotiate with and persuade people. I’ve learned that fully 85% of what you accomplish in your career and in your personal life will be determined by how well you get your message across and by how capable you are in inspiring people to take action on your ideas.” Wow! Is learning to communicate essential, or what?

What is involved in saying what you mean, meaning what you say and having others understand your meaning and respond positively? Let’s go way back to Aristotle who lived, wrote and taught three centuries before Christ. What he had to say still serves us well today. He believed that effective communication was comprised of a combination of: the speaker, the message and the audience. To get across what you want to say, to be understood and not misunderstood was a combination of ETHOS (the credibility of the speaker) LOGOS (the truth and relevancy of the message) and PATHOS (the emotional and appropriate response of the receivers). The ethos of the speaker sharing the logos of the message will elicit pathos in the audience. What he believed has been accepted, taught and practiced for 23 centuries. Must be something to it!

For the remainder of this installment of “Leadership for the New Millennium,” I want to focus on the ETHOS of the leader. Realizing, of course, that having well-prepared, truthful and relevant content (Logos) and understanding and listening to your audience so as to elicit a response (Pathos) is equally important.

ETHOS-We, of course, get our word ethics from Ethos. Aristotle identified three principles in the communicator’s ETHOS (*intelligence, character, good will*). Translated, I believe it means: Knowing our subject. Being a person of inward genuineness, conviction and sincerity. Having the interests of others as a high value. It is safe to say that people want to know three things about the person who is communicating. Do we really believe what we say we believe? Secondly, do we live by it? Thirdly, does it make much difference?

I think that an important aspect of Ethos is being passionate about what I say. It has a grip on me. I recall hearing about two leaders who were discussing what they believed and how it was different or similar. After a few minutes one said to the other, "Well, it appears to me that we believe the same things". To which the other replied, "The difference is that you have it on ice and I have it on fire." Ethos should be truth on fire, conviction, deep passion that is picked up by the listeners. Aristotle believed that people are much more likely to respond to a message if, in addition to understanding it, they experience the emotion that elicits an appropriate response. This emotion starts with the communicator. In today's high tech, information overload culture, facts and reasons alone are unlikely to trigger action. We need some fire, some excitement. I am not suggesting phony trumped-up enthusiasm, empty emotionalism, but conviction from the heart. I believe that effective communication is first and foremost a "work of heart." People know if you really believe it and if it grips you. If not, why should they care?

DL Moody was once asked how he had become such a dynamic communicator. He replied that before he spoke, he went off to a field by himself and asked God to set him on fire! That is my constant prayer.