The great enemy of communication, we find, is the illusion that it has taken place.

Communication, like relationship building, is really central to the work we do as leaders. It's absolutely everywhere and it's really, really complicated. When it comes to our effectiveness at work, it matters because 70% of mistakes at work can be attributed to poor communication.

And almost half of people walk away from meetings- and think of all the meetings you have- having no idea what to do next.

You can bet the person running that meeting is quite confident that they were clear as a bell and that everybody's on the same page.

When we try to talk about communication and break it down, it can be challenging because it's so complex, but it can help to think of it in these three main areas, which is

1)   What are you trying to communicate?

        What is the information or the message?

2)   How are you trying to communicate it?

        Are you sending a stern warning to somebody?

        Are you having a casual, fun conversation?

        Are you sending an enthusiastic, celebratory message?

3) Through what medium?

There are some principles of communication that hold true across methods, and then there's nuance to whether you are communicating by phone or video chat or text or email or the millions of ways we can communicate nowadays.

There are so many rules, many of which are unwritten.

It matters because it affects everything we do and when we do it.

It can really benefit what we're trying to achieve by improving efficiency, eliminating misunderstandings, frustrations, and wasted time.

It can help us resolve conflicts and provide clarity.

Again, it shows up everywhere.

These are just some examples where being an effective communicator will really help get you a positive result from any of these situations: in meetings, discussions, praising

people, interviews, building relationships, and on and on.

If you're not an effective communicator or at least in that moment, then it can really create some negative consequences.
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I love this picture.

My sister, nephew, and I are on this constant text chain where we're always sending each other puns and kind of funny misunderstandings. This is one of our favorites. It's a smoke detector. Printed on it is, 'installed on' ostensibly asking for the date to know when to switch it out. But the person who installed it instead wrote 'the ceiling'.

Were they trying to be snarky or did they not understand what the aim was?

Who knows?

Either way, communication is complex and we can make it much more simple by being as clear as we possibly can.

In this situation, they could have written 'date of installation' or something like that so that it's even more clear what they're looking for.

Of course, regardless of how clear you think you're being, there's always an opportunity to misunderstand or interpret it in a different way. Nothing you say or do will be perfect, but the clearer you can be, the more that you'll eliminate some of these situations.

As you're getting to know how the different people you work with communicate, it's important to talk with them and ask them directly how they like to communicate.

There's value in asking that but be cautious because 1) not everyone's self-aware and 2) how they communicate is a really complicated question.

What do you mean to communicate?

In what way?

These are all different categories and then some about how people communicate- if they're big picture or detail-oriented, emotional or logical.

Direct or indirect.

One that's very salient for me is introverted or extroverted and how they communicate.

As someone who's introverted, I think a lot before I speak. I'm often in meetings with people who are extroverted and they speak in order to figure out what they think. This can be challenging for me just as I'm sure my way is challenging for them. There's not a right or wrong.

It's just how people communicate and operate.

Although there are areas to improve when it comes to communication, be careful of trying to change things that aren't really wrong. It's just not the way that you like it.

Some best practices when it comes to improving communication is to engage in meta communication. Meta communication is communicating about how your communication is going. Ask your staff directly almost every chance you get, if they understand something. If what they thought about something, check for understanding. Ask about how the communication is going.

What could change?

What could you be doing better or differently?

And keep working at it.

I think of people who have been in my life forever and I have been communicating with for decades and we still have miscommunications.

They're always going to happen and you keep working at it and keep working at it. Expect those bumps along the way and always have different methods.

If you have a conversation with someone where you're sharing information or asking them to do something you can then follow up with an email so they have that to refer to.

Or you can sometimes do text or email or a shared document. There are so many ways to communicate. Use those different ways.

I always like to tell people to learn the language of the other person.

By that, I mean, what do they care about?

What are their values?

What are their motivations?

How do they communicate and how can you empathize and really be generous in your communication by adjusting and learning their language?

To improve your communication, make sure you're having consistent, frequent one-on-ones with each of your direct reports.

I like to do it weekly. Every other week is okay, too. I really wouldn't encourage going any more than that.

With your team meetings every other week, I think it works well.

I used to do one week one-on-ones the next week team and we just flip flopped like that.

You want to be in consistent communication. Not every meeting needs to be an hour or 90 minutes. Sometimes you can have a 10 or 20 minute meeting, You just want to have that consistency.

Model and create space for disagreement. If everybody's agreeing all the time, it means people aren't comfortable being honest. Make sure that you're creating the opportunity for people to disagree.

Always explain why you are doing something and never assume anything including an assumption that people are understanding what you're saying.
Because what you say and what is heard is often very different.

Always check for that understanding.

This one is a little piece of humble pie for you- your way isn't always right or the best way. There isn't always a best way. It just might be a good way in that situation with that person, but be careful if you're constantly blaming miscommunication on other people.

You are contributing to it.

I promise.

It's okay.

I contribute to it too,

It's important to acknowledge that you're contributing too- maybe it's just a little percentage-maybe it's just a little bit but it takes two to tango and you're a part of that communication.

Own up to your part and think about how you could have communicated better with that person in that situation.

Just like in relationships when you're communicating with different people, some will feel easier. Others will feel like a chore. When it comes to your team, at the very least, you have to continue communicating with both.

Don't just default to the ones that you enjoy or that are easier and neglect the ones that are harder. You need to work through and communicate with everybody on your team.

So, the most important question for you is, how will you commit to effective communication on your team?