



By Doris Amstutz

# Great Leaders = Effective Communicators

**“Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate and doubt, to offer a solution everybody can understand.”  
—Colin Powell**



There are many famous leaders who have inspired others by setting an example, while at the same time, demonstrating one of the most essential traits of leadership—effective communications.<sup>1</sup> Whether it is Dr. Martin Luther King, Winston Churchill, Mahatma Ghandi, or more recently Nelly Yusupova,<sup>2</sup> these are all leaders who understood that knowing their audience, capturing their attention, reading their non-verbal cues, and moving them to action (or agreement) was the key to success.

Who does not recognize and associate with Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech or Mahatma Gandhi’s “...be the change you want to see in the world...”? These leaders knew how to capture their thoughts and communicate them in a simple, yet powerful way that would resonate with their audience.

When Nelly Yusupova said in an interview that her motto was, “Never fear what you don’t know,” this clearly and succinctly summarized her entrepreneurial drive for the audience.

As demonstrated above, in order to be a great leader in any area—personal, professional, political, religious, or other—and to be an integral part of a leadership group or team, one must be a great communicator. The ability to quickly relate with an audience is to understand what motivates them, and then put communications into a context that will paint a clear picture in their mind of its importance to them.

In her interview for *33 Voices*, Nelly Yusupova was able to clearly and concisely give advice for why her audience needs to understand the basics of technology.<sup>3</sup> This ability to shape the story in a way that would have the most impact on the audience is the way she promoted the vision and objective for learning about technology.

Another critical element of communications and leadership is the ability to accurately read non-verbal signs. As Steven M. R. Covey points out in his book *The Speed Of Trust*, “...Remember that communica-

tion is more than just words, so you will have to listen to nonverbal messages as well. If a person is displaying a high level of emotion, they don’t feel understood. Keep listening....”

Non-verbal signs are clear indicators of the level of engagement an audience member has with the person communicating or presenting. Engagement and agreement with what the communicator is saying manifests itself into eye contact, leaning forward, or nodding. The flipside (eyes glazed over, side conversations, frowning, and pursed lips)

## Here are some tips for SBOs that go beyond preparing content for a meeting or presentation, but planning with effective communications skills in mind:

### Start with impact

When preparing to present the budget or the forecast to the district leadership team, the union or the public, remember that this may be the first time they have been presented with these facts. Those outside school finance need to relate to the details differently. Consider starting with the impact of the numbers and then give the details behind them.

### Know your audience

Before presenting at a levy meeting, do some research in advance to find out about the professions of the audience members. Then tailor the presentation to the majority of the audience.

### Keep it simple

When in negotiations with teachers or bus drivers, keep in mind that presenting financial facts as you would to a group of fellow treasurers would be like them presenting to you the requirements for developing a lesson plan or the details of routine maintenance of a bus. Keep the facts simple and to the point but give enough background information to help the audience understand what the topic of the discussion is.

is a clear sign that the audience has zoned out, or worse—that they disagree.

In the school business world, it can be all too easy to lapse into “school business speak” when giving a presentation or leading a discussion on district finances. If a puzzled or glazed look comes over audience members, the SBO might be overwhelming those who do not think in terms of numbers or acronyms. SBOs need to find a way to paint a picture. Instead of just talking about the financial facts, SBOs need to find a way to tell the story of what impact the numbers will have on the students.

Taking the time to read these signs and tailor communications may seem daunting at first, but it can go a long way toward capturing an audience’s attention, holding their attention, more effectively getting a point across, and most of all, moving the audience to action (or agreement). 🍷

**Author’s note:**

Improving communication skills is an essential part of growing leadership potential. In order to do this, I would recommend that you examine your recent interactions or communications and critique the areas where you should put your focus. Do you need to improve your clarity? Your listening skills? Knowing your audience? Once you have your areas of focus, there are a lot of tools available.

I am an avid reader and enjoy sharing what I learn. A few books that I would recommend are: *The Eighth Habit*, by Steven R. Covey, *The Speed of Trust*, by Steven M. R. Covey, and *Crucial Conversations & Crucial Accountability* by Kerry Patterson, et al. There are many other books, blogs, videos, articles and materials as well as training. The most important thing is to assess your strengths and weaknesses, develop a plan of attack, and make a commitment to learning and growing as a leader.

Doris A. Amstutz is a software executive, thought leader, and agile mentor. She is the founder & managing director of My Gen Consulting, LLC. For her thoughts on leadership, go to [www.doriannsworld.wordpress.com](http://www.doriannsworld.wordpress.com).

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<sup>1</sup> Read more at Buzzle: <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/famous-leaders-in-history.html>

<sup>2</sup> Yusupova is the CTO of Webgrrls International, an organization that has been at the forefront of the women in technology movement since it was founded in 1995.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.33voices.com/authors/nelly-yusupova/media/digital-woman-nelly-yusupova-gives-advice-to-entrepreneurs>



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