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An Interview with John Baldoni

Q. Why is it important for leaders to communicate?

A. Communications is the process of speaking and listening. Leaders need to articulate their point of view as a means of persuading others to come along for the journey. Part of that persuasion process involves connecting with people. You connect by listening, taking time to find out what people think of your ideas and how they might contribute.

Q. How do leaders connect to people individually?

A. I have developed something I call the "leadership communications cycle." It is the process of speaking, listening, and learning as a leader. Let me explain. As a leader, you must present the leadership point of view; you must tell people where they need to go and why it is good for them to go there. As a listener, you must find out what is on people's minds. You do this by asking questions, listening to the answers, and responding in a give and take manner. Lastly, as a leader it is important to learn from what you say and what you listen to. You process what you've seen and heard, as well as what you have not seen and heard. This leadership communications cycle is perpetual; leaders practice it daily with different people at different points in the cycle.

Q. How do leaders communicate with the organization?

A. Communications is central to leadership because it is the means by which leaders and followers exchange ideas and ultimately build trust. Trust is essential to driving results. Leadership is all about achieving inspired results by developing the skills and talents of your people and enabling them to achieve.

Q. What do communications tell us about the leader?

A. Communication is the process of articulating authenticity. It is the means by which you as the leader connect in a real and personal way. Leaders do this in their public speeches as well as their one-on-one meetings.

Q. What role does communications play in coaching?

A. Communications, as we have stated, is the means of connecting, of projecting leadership and in the process authenticity. Coaching is a form of leadership communication that occurs on a personal level. Coaching is essential to management, in fact it may be the salient edge in successful management. Coaching is a process of

enabling. As a leader you enable by delegating authority and responsibility and the means by which to accomplish a goal. You may challenge, cajole and counsel as you do this. The entire process, however, is a matter of communication.

Q. Why is humor important to communications?

A.Humor is the great leveler. It demonstrates the frailty of the human condition in a way that brings people together. Humor punctuates pomposity and in the process makes people laugh. The chief rule in humor is to use it positively, never negatively. You may make jokes at your own expense, but not at the expense of others.

Q. Why are stories important to leadership?

A.Stories are ways that leaders can illustrate the situation in ways that make it manageable. By relating a challenge of the day to a challenge that occurred in the past leaders can demonstrate that it is possible to overcome adversity. Stories can be inspirational as well as humorous. The challenge is to use them wisely. The best stories are those that emerge from the leader's own background, or his experience. Such stories demonstrate humanity and genuine connection.

Q. Part of your consulting involves speech coaching.

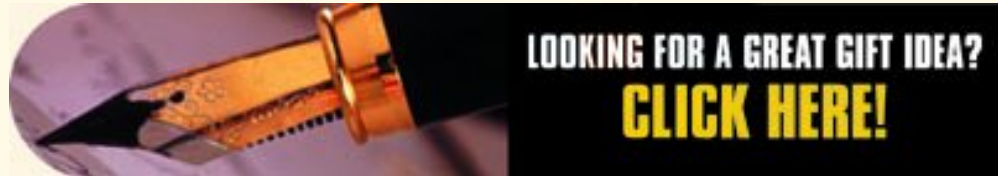
A.**What do you teach managers about speaking in public?** I focus on three things: one, adopting the leadership point of view; two, using your voice and body as instruments to communicate; and three, shaping your message with resonance. Let me explain. As a leader when you speak in public, you demonstrate a sense of authority; you own the topic and you own the stage. Your message becomes your means of connecting. You use your voice to project your message with conviction and passion. Your body becomes an extension of the voice; it reinforces what you believe. And finally your message must echo in the hearts and minds of the audience.

Q. Your next book is on motivation. Why did you choose that topic?

A.The focus of my consulting is leadership communication, helping managers build trust and drive results. Motivation is an outcome of communication; it is a net result of effective communications. People want to do what you ask them to do because they believe in you and because they think its good for them, too. That is motivation and it is a topic that holds endless fascination for me.

About the author

John Baldoni is a leadership communications consultant who works with Fortune 500 companies as well as non-profits including the University of Michigan. He is frequent keynote and workshop speaker as well as the author of four books on leadership, the newest being Great Communication Secrets of Great Leaders (McGraw-Hill). Readers are welcome to visit his leadership resource website at www.johnbaldoni.com.



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