

Session 5

Connecting Is More Skill Than Natural Talent

“All great speakers were bad speakers first.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Great communicators are not all cut from the same cloth. But they do all share the ability to connect. And that does not develop by accident. You cannot expect to succeed through dumb luck as did the leader of a wagon train of pioneers that was heading across the western plains. When a lookout spotted a cloud of dust in the distance moving toward them, they knew they were in trouble. Sure enough, a tribe of Native American braves thundered toward them and the leader ordered the wagons to form a circle behind a hill.

When the leader of the settlers saw the tall figure of a chief silhouetted against the sky, he decided to face the chief and attempt to communicate with him using sign language. Soon the chief backed away and returned to his men.

“What happened?” the pioneers asked the leader.

“Well, as you probably saw, we couldn’t speak each other’s language,” he said, “so we used sign language. I drew a circle in the dust with my finger to show that we’re all one in this land. He looked at the circle and drew a line through it. He meant, of course, that there are two nations ours and his. But I pointed my finger to the sky to indicate that we are all one under God. Then he reached into a pouch and took out an onion, which he gave to me. Naturally, I understood that it indicated the multiple layers of understanding available to everyone. To show him that I understood his meaning, I ate the onion. Then I reached into my coat and offered him an egg to show our goodwill, but he was too proud to accept my gift he just turned and walked away!”

Meanwhile the warriors were readying for an attack and awaited the order from their chief, but the old warrior held up his hand and recounted his experience.

“When we came face-to-face,” he said, “we immediately knew that we did not speak the same tongue. That man then drew a circle in the dust. I know he meant that we were surrounded. I drew a line through his circle to show him that we would cut them in half. Then he

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raised his finger to the sky as if to say that he could take us on all by himself. Then I gave him an onion to tell him that he would soon taste the bitter tears of defeat and death. But he ate the onion in defiance! Then he showed me an egg to tell me how fragile our position is. There must be others close by. Let's get out of here."

What Makes People Listen?

If you want to be a better communicator or a better leader, you can't depend on dumb luck. You must learn to connect with others by making the most of whatever skills and experience you have. When I listen to great communicators, I notice that there are a handful of factors they seem to draw upon that cause people to listen to them. As you read about them, think about which of them you could use to connect with others:

1. _____ – **Who You Know**
2. _____ – **How You Have Lived**
3. _____ – **What You Know**
4. _____ – **What You Have Done**
5. _____ – **What You Can Do**

Key Concept: The skills you learn to connect at one level can be used to start connecting at the next level.

Question: "What connecting skill is a strength in your life? How can you make it better?"