



THE HIERARCHY OF COMMUNICATION

With Rhiannon Bush

INTRO

“Do I need a life coach?” You’re listening to Episode 6, with Rhiannon Bush

Welcome to the Do I need a life coach? Podcast. We’re here to discuss the ins- and outs- of the life coaching industry and give you tools to use, to see for yourself. I’m your host, Rhiannon Bush. Mother, management consultant and a passionate, certified life coach.



I was recently approached by a SAAS company to run a training series on communication with their developers.

It never ceases to amaze me that with the amount of communicating we do in our daily lives – no matter whether you're in tall, CBD ivory towers, or whether you work from home or not at all, that enhancing our ability to communicate is always beneficial, and is something we can always be better and clearer and more concise at. Always.

The biggest hurdle, I believe, when it comes to upskilling anyone in communication is that it's a soft skill, and soft skills require intrinsic change. Change requires acceptance of and experimentation with the idea, a decision to go with the change, and then engagement with the change. Then, it requires repetition to really implement the change and see the desired effects.



Therefore, I have three aims to achieve in this podcast for you:

- To educate you about the most effective way to communicate and why
- To bring your awareness to how you yourself communicate
- And to get you to consider, next time you go to communicate meaningful information, how to do it better for both you and the recipient
- If this episode results in you educating others on how best to communicate with you, I'm all for that as well

Let's get into it!



When it comes to our brains, the connection and speed of our neural pathways determines how quickly or slowly we adapt to change. And this happens through repetition. Have you ever experienced that split second where you've gone to do something, and you think "oh no don't put your hand there" or "don't swing yet" and it's too late, your brain has already sent that electronic signal and you have to finish it off? That's what I'm talking about right now.

How quickly we can firstly adapt to the idea of change, then accept the change and then beginning the actions required to implement that change. It requires repetition over a much longer time period than we often allow or are willing to give it, to embed and 'normalize' the change. 21 days to change a habit? No. It's how many times you have to repeat it (and how many times you actually repeat it) before it becomes firstly, comfortable and secondly, ingrained so we don't have to think about it so much and it doesn't require so much energy. Think of Tiger Woods and his golf swing – how many times he repeated it to perfect it.



This rate of change and times of repetition is the biggest hurdle I see with Change Management programs and cultural change in organisations especially. Everyone's on a timeframe. Boards, C-Suites and the leadership teams wanted things done yesterday to hold or grow the bottom line, and time is often the thing that's cut. Much to the peril, in my opinion, of longer-term success in both culture (which means staff retention and engagement) and the bottom line.

This is the biggest contradiction to allowing room for embedded change and after all, business is people, change takes repetition over time and often support if the change hasn't been accepted.



When communicating today, it's far too easy to hide behind a screen. Instead of picking up phone, having a meeting or going to see the person face-to-face, it's way too easy to send an email or a text message instead.

I remember my colleague sitting across a desk from me. She was my senior and I recall this day when she sent me an essay of an email with all the dot points she required for a report I was writing for a client we were on together. I read through the email and thought she may as well have set the report out in a template for me to work from, or just written the report herself. The amount she put into that email, and also the amount of energy it required from me to read and comprehend the email... it would have been much more effectively communicated face-to-face. Even if it was a 15-minute meeting, where she read that email to me aloud and gauged my response. Why?



I'm sure you've heard this before but if not, 93% of our communication is non-verbal?

- 55% is body language or physiology
- 38% is tonality – phrasing, speed, tone, inflection
- 7% is language – words

So can you imagine me reading this email trying to comprehend the exact way my senior wanted this report written? Can you see how much room for error this left?

When have you emailed somebody in a similar way, or sent a text message when it would've been maybe a little more uncomfortable or time consuming from the outset, but more effective in the long-run to have the conversation face-to-face, or to pick up the phone?



I was interviewing for a role once and was asked 'so if you had a client who was valuable to the organisation but you couldn't get hold of their representative to have a conversation and get feedback, what would you do?'

From the interviewers reaction I knew this wasn't a hypothetical question, and I asked what the organisation's process was and what they had already tried.

They gave me some examples, but the first thing they said was "send an email". I said I would never send an email first and they looked at me fairly blankly and asked why not. My response included a few reasons.

1. It's much harder to brush somebody off when they've picked up the phone, or if you see them in person.
2. It's instantaneous – by picking up the phone I can have the conversation and get what I need straight away
3. Effective – by getting what I need straight way, it saves me writing and sending an email, then waiting for. Response. This means if they need anything I'm able to get a solution much faster than if we'd wasted days emailing back and forth
4. Respectful – it's an invitation to engage informally where things can be said and exchanged without it being in writing which opens up the ability to share honestly
5. It's more personable – by hearing their voice, them hearing my voice, it's much more harmonious and conducive to pleasantries



Let me give a more personal and a more uncomfortable example. I remember as a child, playing with my cousins at my grandparents house. My grandmother was an avid gardener. Loved her garden so much. And her lemon tree, which sat in the middle of her lawn had more fruit on it than anybody knew what to do with. It was an incredibly abundant lemon tree.

While playing with my cousins, I started a lemon fight. Keep in mind I was like 6 or 7 years old. I picked them, threw them and then my cousins joined in. The next day, my mother asked me what happened because my grandmother was devastated with all the wasted lemons she'd found on the lawn, she was very upset. I remember telling her the truth – I was, and still am, very honest – and my mum made me phone my grandmother to apologise. I really didn't want to. The thought of having to hear the disappointment in her voice, and having to dial the phone and actually say I'm sorry was not something I wanted to do. I was very upset that I'd upset her, but I still didn't want to pick up the phone. I'd owned up to my mum, wasn't that enough?



Doing the thing you don't want to do, the thing you know deep in your gut and if you're like me, makes you feel a bit sick, is the often the right thing to do when it comes to communication.

When you've hurt a friend and don't want to see them in person to apologise, or pick up the phone. When you want to break up with somebody. When you have to decline a job offer or let somebody down. All of these instances where it's uncomfortable and you know you're going to have a negative impact on somebody, it's important to realise that there are better and worse ways to approach communication and that has a lot to do with your level of integrity.



Because emails, texts and private messages are one-way, they don't allow a response from the recipient or even an instantaneous delivery. This makes it easier for us to maintain our emotional state and keep a safe level of detachment because we don't have to feel the other person's pain at what we've said, done or are about to do. If we deliver news this way, it's a "dump and run" approach where you don't stick around to support the recipient through receiving the news, allow them the opportunity to ask any questions, or even ask if they're ok.

Keeping this in mind, the more that's at stake emotionally for the recipient, the more carefully considered the conversation needs to be.



If you know you have news or information that's going to upset somebody, and if you know what you want or need to say and accept that you need to rip the band-aid off, then you have an obligation to do it within the realm of your integrity. Do you remember somebody delivering you bad news? Do you remember where you were? I know I can, in vivid detail. It's burned into my memory. It maybe a break-up, a "we're letting you go", or a "you didn't quite make it"... anything? Now, have you ever received that news via text? Or email? Or through the gossip grapevine?

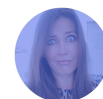
Even if, with hindsight, you look back and think "no, I would rather have found out via text" or another detached means... you'll never know how you would've felt about it or recovered from it had the news been delivered to you face-to-face and how you would've navigated it and received it with that person.

If, as the deliverer, you can anticipate the worst case scenario before actually having the conversation, the better equipped you'll be to handle any unknowns that may be flung at you in the context of heightened emotions. Therefore you're able to monitor your emotional state to support the recipient through and out the other side of the conversation. This will leave both you, and them feeling better than not preparing at all, and hopefully, assist in you being able to reach an amicable outcome.



For example, if you know you want to fire somebody and you know they're going to be blindsided and devastated by the news, possibly anxious and clingy. Instead of either putting off the conversation and stringing it out even further, or sending a text, or getting a colleague to do it for you, make plans. Get organised. Give yourself a deadline.

Figure out, ahead of time, what you want to say and why you're letting them go so you can communicate that to them clearly. Avoid being vague. Also, by anticipating that they're not going to take it well and the ways they may react, you can plan how you'll be able to overcome that, support them – even if they never know that's what you're doing – to enable them to feel as good as possible by the end of that conversation. It will also help you to stay strong and stick to the decision you've made, and help them as best you can because you can see that they've shut down. Not being true to you is not helpful for you, or them, in the longer-term.



By anticipating the way the conversation will go and planning the outcome, no matter what the scenario is, it gives you more control. And control feels good when emotions are running high. If you choose to own the conversation and instigate it, you'll be able to steer the ship. There's always the unknown variable of the other person – their response and their emotions, but provided you know what you want to say in the conversation and you've planned on how you'll conduct yourself and respond to things that may trigger you, you'll be able to manage any unknowns better to stay on track, while also helping the other person understand and get clarity on why this is happening. You want to know that they'll be ok and move on, knowing that this is for the best.

It's not an innate thing. To hold space for somebody in pain. We want to comfort and we want to move away or through it as fast as possible but when you're the instigator of that pain, whether you mean to be or not, it's your responsibility to help the recipient through it as best you can while still sticking to what you yourself need.



So what is the hierarchy?! It's so simple. Always do the thing you'd rather not do, and go from there... well in all seriousness, that's how it often goes, but let me make it a bit more logical and easy to follow.

1. If you can do it physically, in person, do it. I don't care if COVID's revolutionised the way we communicate or brought archaic organisations into the 21st century. In person is always best. I'll go into why in a minute.
2. If you can't do it face-to-face in person, do it face-to-face over video conference – Zoom, MS Teams, Loom.
3. If you can't do it face-to-face, do it on the telephone. Why? Immediate feedback. Two-way, timely.
4. If you get voice mail, if you have bad news, don't ask them to phone you back and don't **not** leave a voice message because then they'll call you back. Leave a voice message saying you'll try them again soon.
5. Then, true to your word. Try again! If you get their voice message a second time, say you'll try tomorrow.
6. If it's not a serious conversation, leave a voice recorded note – you can do this via Whatsapp, FB Messenger, iPhone messenger – it's awesome, it's personable, and the recipient can hear your intonation, inflections and other vocal qualities – absolute gold!



After you've exhausted all the spoken options, only THEN do we revert to text or written options. Again, keep the purpose and outcome in mind and write it carefully. Write it as you would want to receive it, or write it like you're writing it to your grandmother. This will soften your language, give you pause to carefully phrase your sentences and write with compassion.

1. Email – when there's a lot of information to share, when you need something recorded in writing for legal reasons, performance management or other more serious reasons,
2. Messenger / Text



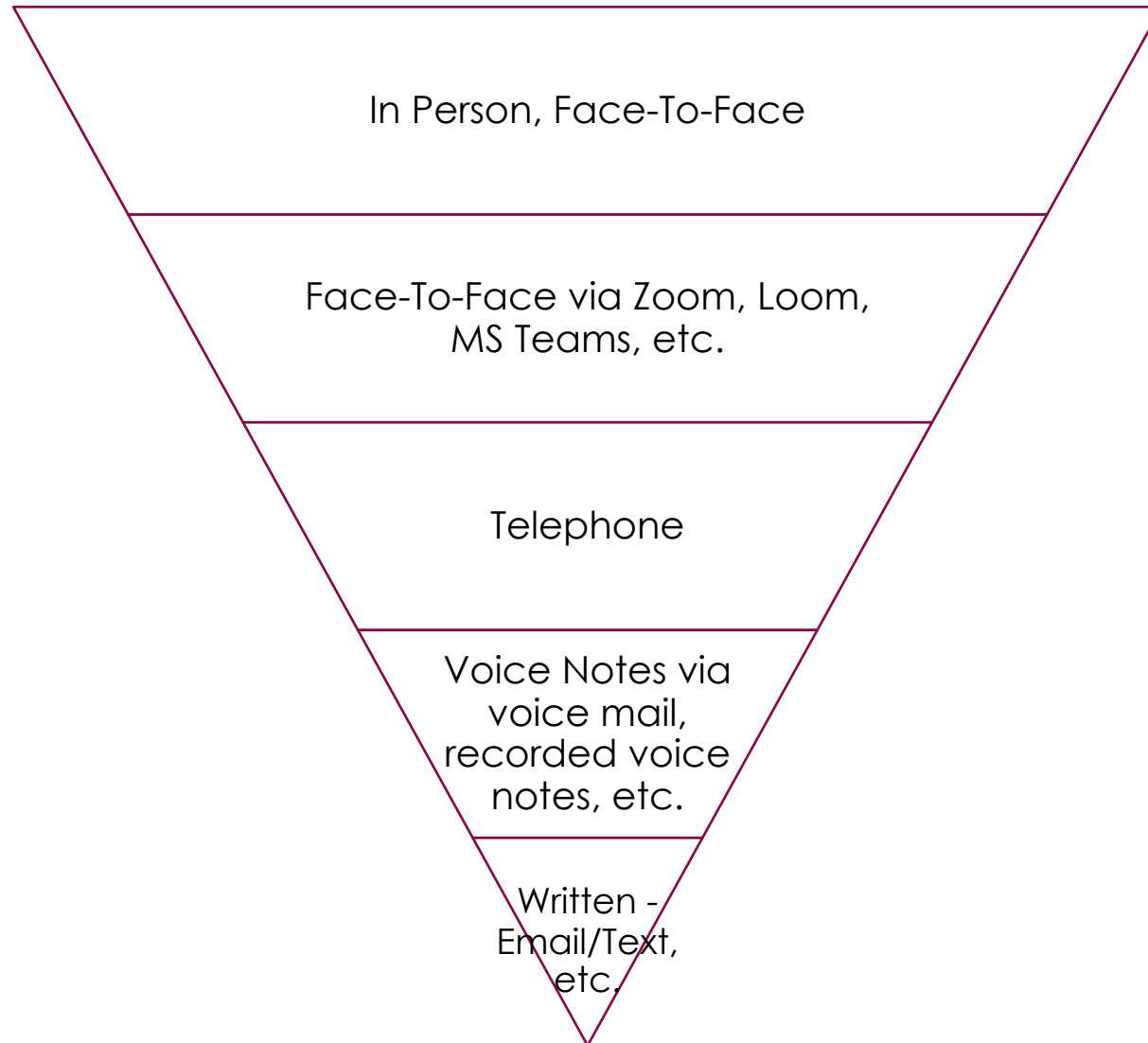
Yes there are caveats. Sometimes, people prefer to communicate via text. They're easier to get hold of because they may be able to access texts or emails, but not listen to a voice message where they are – like a board room, or a cinema, or a classroom.

But my rule is, if you're delivering news that you suspect or know is going to cause emotional turmoil – in the way of information they don't see coming, or bad news, you never EVER deliver this news via written word. We do not live in the late 1800s / early 1900s. There's never an excuse for that!

Basically be a human being. Be the adult.



THE HIERARCHY



OUTRO

Hey! Before you go, I always find reviews really helpful when looking for new information or insights...

If you've found this podcast valuable, please take a minute to write a quick review about what you've found most beneficial for you, so other people can benefit from your insights, and listen in too. I would LOVE that!

Also, if there are any topics you'd like me to cover specifically about life coaching or the life coaching industry, visit rhiannonbush.com to contact me. Thanks for joining and I'll see you in the next episode of Do I Need A Life Coach?!





THANKS FOR LISTENING!

