

“5 Rarely Talked About Tips For Every Communicator”

If you write anything for a living, you know the pressure that comes with staring at a blank screen with a deadline approaching. If you communicate within the context of the local church you quickly discover that Sundays come around whether you're ready or not.

1. Focus Initially On The Quality Of Your Thinking Instead Of The Quality Of Your Writing.

So how do you get to a killer message, article or post? You *think* your way there before you *write* your way there. A great idea *adequately* expressed is worth more than a *bad* idea eloquently expressed.

If you put lipstick on a pig, it's still a pig. If you're trying to develop fresh angles, perspectives and insights, time is your best friend. Start thinking through a sermon series or book a year or two in advance.

If time is your best friend, change of venue is your next best friend. I personally find that ideas get better not when I'm sitting at a computer keyboard, but when I'm doing something else: cycling, cutting the grass, washing the car, listening to a podcast or music or even cooking. Something in the back of my brain will connect dots I didn't think connected. When that happens, all you need is a place to record the idea.

This approach may not get you to next Sunday or your Wednesday deadline, but don't get discouraged. Instead, this week, why not start keeping notes on *future* series, articles and posts? Use whatever system you want, but just write your ideas down and let them gestate.

If you keep notes like this and refine your thinking over weeks and months, you'll develop a catalogue of great ideas that can be put into use at any point in the future. A good idea gets better over time. A bad idea gets worse over time. So give yourself time as a communicator or writer.

When you jot down your ideas and revisit them as time passes, you'll have a much clearer sense of which is which, and the pressure to get to Sunday disappears. Plus you can keep refining them and making them better.

2. Spend A Lot Of Time On A Few Key Words Or Thoughts.

When you're keeping your journal of ideas and concepts for the future, keep them simple. Notes can look like a series of key phrases and ideas that you keep refining until they resonate.

If your thinking is strong (see #1 above), then the next most important thing is to phrase your thinking so it's both memorable and impactful. Many communicators summarize their thinking in a bottom line: a short, memorable statement that outlines the main point of the message you're delivering.

Here are some examples of bottom lines I've written recently:

- Changing your mind can change your life.
- Moral compromise compromises you.
- You can make excuses or you can make progress but you can't make both.
- God is bigger than your circumstances, and He's better than your than your circumstances.

It can take weeks or months of letting an idea simmer to reduce to a simple statement like the statements above, but it's so worth it.

Once you have a key idea stated as simply as that, the message becomes relatively easy to write, because the statement has so much pre-loaded into it. Why is this so important? It's simple. If you're not clear on what your message is about, no one else will be either. If you can't state the main point of your message in a simple phrase, then you don't understand it well enough to deliver it.

3. Test Your Key Ideas On A Team.

Three things happens when you present your outline to a team:

- a. You learn which ideas resonate and which don't. Better to find this out now than when giving the talk.
- b. The team will frequently offer better ways to phrase key ideas than you've developed on your own. This makes the message or talk far better.
- c. Verbally processing your ideas in front of a team often helps you discover better ways to say things than you would have discovered on your own.

Walk ideas into a meeting like this a month or two before you need to finish the message. Then go back and finish up the talk on your own, sometimes checking back in, but sometimes not if the talk or piece is now resonating well.

4. Think More About God And Your Audience Than You Think About Yourself

Most of us naturally over-focus on ourselves. *Will I deliver this well? Will people laugh at my jokes? Will I knock it out of the park?*

We all have those thoughts. But when we focus on them, we tend to do less well than when we focus on two other elements: God and my audience.

- A sermon is not really about how you 'did' as a communicator; it's about God's interaction with His people.

- A talk isn't about how you 'did' as a speaker; it's about whether you helped your audience.

For sure, you need some personal elements in your talk ... some stories, and maybe even some humor. But even while those elements are about you, they're not. They're about God using you and about your audience.

When you take the focus off of yourself, your insecurities lessen their grip. You begin to serve God and serve your audience through your communication, and you find you actually help people far more.

5. Focus On Understanding Your Message, Not Memorizing It

How do you memorize a 45 minute talk? You don't. But you can give 45 minute talks without using notes. The best piece of advice I've ever received on how to 'learn' a talk is this: don't memorize your talk, *understand* it.

Think about the next conversation you have today at work or with your family. You don't memorize what you're going to say before you say it. Instead, you understand what you're trying to accomplish.

A talk is obviously more complex, but not much more. Your talk has 4 or 5 larger components:

1. Introduction
2. A story or bridge or some kind to get to the main point
3. The main point
4. Application
5. Conclusion

If you do this, all you have to remember is the big idea of what fits in each part of the talk. Sometimes it's as simple as thinking "How do I get to the main point again? Right, the story about last summer's vacation!"

Personally, I will write out some stories and key phrasing in detail, but I don't write a full manuscript any more. I just write enough so I understand what I'm going to say.

That takes the pressure off of you as a communicator, because if you forget something the only person who knows is you. And the talk is shorter, so everyone wins.

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