

“Ways To Get Better As A Communicator”

So you really want to get better as a communicator. Great.

But how do you do it? Especially when you plateau?

In the early days as a preacher, speaker or communicator, it's almost impossible not to get better. After all, you're actively learning every time you step behind the mic or podium. You learn a lot quickly and fairly easily. But eventually, all of us plateau. It might take a year or a decade, but all of us reach the point where we don't know how to get better. What makes it more difficult is that most people aren't public speakers. As a result, there's a point at which they can no longer give you a meaningful critique.

Ask your best friend, colleague or even spouse what they thought and often you get “That was good” or “That wasn't your best.” But the problem is they can't tell you why. And if you don't know why you were good or bad, then you won't know what made it that way and you clearly won't know how to make it better. Knowing something was good or bad but not knowing why is exactly why all of us get stuck. As a result, you can't grow.

How do you break through that lid?

1. Include A Clear Call To Action To Every Talk

Why does a call to action make all the difference? Easy. If people actually *do* something as a result of your talk, they *remember* it.

And if you're a preacher and your call to action is tied to applying God's word, you actually help them put God's word into practice and grow in their faith. Many communicators struggle with making their messages memorable. Sometimes your messages can be clear and you can even use a prop or visual aid, but they're still not memorable because nobody did anything different as a result of hearing the message. If people aren't different on Wednesday because of what you said on Sunday, change what you say on Sunday.

Don't blame people for doing nothing after your talk if you never showed them something to do. It's amazing how often you can communicate without asking anyone to do anything. Knowing isn't the point. It's what you *do* with what you know that counts. So include a call to action every time you speak. Will everyone do it? No. But that's not important. Over time, *many* people will take action. And their lives will be different as a result.

2. Solicit User Input

We live in an interactive era. Fifteen years ago, who would have guessed that one of the top websites in the world would feature mostly user-generated content? Take a lesson from YouTube. Start soliciting user generated input for your next talk, series or message.

User input does three things:

- a. It makes sure you're answering questions people are actually answering. It stops you from guessing. When you know what your audience is thinking and struggling with, you can directly address their challenges.
- b. It creates an instant bond with you audience. They have skin in the game. They're anticipating your next talk or message because they helped create it and they know you're going to address issues they're actually struggling with.
- c. It takes you into places as a communicator you wouldn't naturally go. We all have ruts and pet topics. Finding out what people are actually dealing with will take you in directions you never would have gone. As a result, you'll grow.

Bottom line? When listeners help shape your next message, they can't wait wait to hear your next message.

3. Watch Or Listen To Yourself (Because Everyone Else Has To)

Watching yourself on video is one of the most painful things you might do in this life. We all hate the sound of our own voice. Because all but the most narcissistic among us truly hate listening to and watching ourselves communicate, most of us don't. But that's a mistake.

You should listen to your messages or talks. And event if your church or the event you're speaking at doesn't record video, you should have a friend shoot your talk on a phone. And then you should watch it. And after you've watched it, you should watch it again with a friend who loves you enough to tell you the truth. It will be one of the most awkward things you ever do in your life, but you'll get better. You'll eliminate nervous ticks, speech patterns that don't help, and awkward body language that distracts.

The reason you want to watch it with a friend is because you're also a terrible judge of what's working and what's not working. You'll want to cut out something you do and your friend will say "Don't do that. That's the very thing that makes you so endearing/compelling/creative." And at other times you'll say "I think that was pretty good" and your friend will say "Look man, I love you, but that's got to go." You are the worst judge of what you do best. And you're the worst judge of what you do worst. So pull in an honest friend. You will be tempted to skip this exercise because it's so painful. Don't. Make yourself watch yourself. Why? Because everybody else has to.

4. Work Ahead

Life is busy, and chances are communicating is something you do in addition to everything else you do. Preparing for your next talk also likely the one thing nobody every asks you to do. They'll ask you to have lunch, schedule a meeting, pick your brain or go play golf. But they'll never ask you to work harder on your next talk.

Which is why you need to schedule time in to work on your talk. And—better yet—work far ahead on it. Writing a talk is like preparing a stew. The longer it has to simmer, the better it is. The longer you live with an idea, the more deeply you will own it. And when you *own* your ideas, when they *live* in you, you'll be a far better speaker. So work ahead on your next talk. Your talk will be so much better than the last Saturday night scramble.

5. Preach Less Content More Often

For those of us who preach in a local church, this can be challenging, but you should do what you can to preach less content more often. There was a day when a preacher used to preach up to 150 messages a year—creating a fresh sermon for Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night. The challenge of course, is that it's almost impossible to create 150 highly impactful messages in 52 weeks. In communicating, quantity and quality compete.

One of the current (and welcome) trends in ministry is for preachers to preach less often. With Wednesday night and Sunday night services either disappearing or being shared among a communication team, preachers are preaching less often, which is generally a good trend.

Preaching fewer messages translates into preaching better messages for most communicators. But take it one step further. Preach the same message more than once in multiple venues.

Do that from time to time as a conference speaker. Re-use ideas and even complete talks and give them in different places. What does that do? It allows you to polish your talks better. When you repeat a talk in a fresh venue at a different time, it helps you understand (even better) what worked, what didn't, and why. As a result, you grow.

Don't speak at conferences? Just take one of your recent messages and see if you can guest preach it at another church. Or present the ideas at a local community group. Basically, the next time you are asked to speak somewhere, don't write a new talk. Bring an old talk, polish it and see what you learn. You'll learn a ton. Then take the principles you learned and apply them to writing your next talk.

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