

Mindful Communication: My Number One Goal For 2016

By Peter Arvai

Being a CEO means I need to communicate effectively with my team. This is a topic dear to my heart as, back in 2009, my co-founders and I launched Prezi squarely focused on improving communication across the world. History has taught me that conscious practice can help improve any skill, and with communication in mind, my biggest goal for 2016 is being less reactive and more proactive in my communication techniques.

Why is this so important to me?

Three reasons:

#1: Being reactionary is too easy.

Scientists agree that the tools we use to share information have a huge impact on how we communicate. Television and radio allow for us to instantly bring stories to groups of people, but, in turn, create communities of passive viewers. The Internet allows us to be more active, but it has also created an overwhelming number of messaging apps that constantly compete for our attention. These apps feed our fear of missing out and many of us end up living in a never-ending stream of content, inspiring us to 'like' and comment without taking the time to think.

There are several high-profile examples of this, including the 2014 fabricated story that an entire Texas town was quarantined for Ebola after a family tested positive for the virus. The story spread across social media and it wasn't until after more than 300,000 shares that news broke of its untruth. Or the 2015 lie that Facebook was going to institute a fee to keep user information private. This went away, but only after a firestorm of controversy.

At Prezi, we are not immune to the phenomena of too much reactionary communication. Our employees readily use email, Facebook, Slack, Confluence, Honey and Blue Jeans, among other tools. While they are great tools, I think it pays to stop for a second and ask: *Are we using these tools in a way that helps us be more effective and fulfilled by the work we do?*

#2: Mindful communication is necessary in the workplace.

Employees are reporting a loss of engagement in the workplace; this is something that needs to change. According to a recent Gallup study, a whopping *87 percent* of employees worldwide report disengagement at work. Given all the opportunities technology creates for engagement, how is this possible?

Part of the issue is how we communicate with each other. Sharing ideas with people can increase opportunities, yet so much of our current communication habits have become a chore, and in some cases, anxiety-inducing. The concept of always being reachable makes us present nowhere. "Likes" and messages confirm our social status but seldom help ground us.

If we want people to have meaningful conversations, it is important to have variations in the pace of our communication.

Opposite of reactionary communication is reflective communication, the “slow food” of interpersonal relationships, if you will. It requires us to step back before talking to someone and spend time connecting the dots. At best, it allows us to craft the gift of insight once we share an idea.

#3: Idea-sharing should be fun.

How can we change our communication habits to make them more effective and fulfilling?

By creating a mindful balance between reactive and reflective communication. The outcome of exchanges between people depends on what they bring to the table. Steve Jobs, a master of reflective communication and perhaps one of the best presenters of modern times, serves as a great example how to make space for reflective of work.

He would spend days rehearsing his presentations; this thoughtful prep work allowed him to circulate his message throughout the world. Learning from him on how to make reflective communication effective, we need to turn off the buzz and focus on developing meaning. This effort can help us connect the dots.

Once we’ve put aside time for reflective communication, we can message with colleagues and friends in an enjoyable way. Honoring a shared, real-time experience can enable relationships.

How will I practice more mindful communication this year?

I plan to implement three strategies:

#1: Don't let notifications and messages trigger me.

I will limit my time on email, Facebook, Twitter etc. And before hitting reply, I will ask myself: *What is the outcome I'm looking to achieve, and is writing back my best option, or is there another form of communication that would be more effective?*

#2: Practice non-judgement.

As a CEO, it's easy to get stuck in a judging role because people are looking for you to make judgments every day. The problem is that judgmental communication is not best for learning. This year I will challenge myself to bring a curious mind to every meeting and do my best to frequently ask: *"Why?", "How?", and "Could you tell me more?"*

#3: Focus on the end result.

The time I plan to save with less emailing and messaging, and the things I hope to learn by listening more, will help me to focus on connecting dots so that when I do share ideas, they will be grounded in a solid "why" and a clear call to action.