



6 Obstacles Keeping You from Getting Your Ideas Heard

People often assume that when they speak, others listen. Just because you shared an idea in a meeting, explained a change to your team, or presented next quarter's plan to leadership, it doesn't mean anyone listened or that they will *do* anything different.

If you want to have an impact, you need to stop speaking and start influencing.

There is an important difference between speaking and influencing. When you speak to people, you focus on what you're going to say. You evaluate your success by whether you made your points. When you influence, you focus primarily on the impact you want to have including, changing the thinking, feeling, or the behavior of your listeners. You evaluate your success by what changed because of what you said.

- Do you want people to buy into your ideas?
- Do you want your team to adapt to change quickly?
- Do you want leadership to feel confident in your plan?

To influence effectively, you need to overcome the six obstacles below that will keep people from hearing your ideas and ultimately keep you from having the impact you need to have.

6 OBSTACLES YOU NEED TO OVERCOME

1. Your purpose is fuzzy

Getting your message heard begins with knowing what you want to accomplish. In other words, you need to have a clear purpose. When you aren't clear about your purpose, your listeners won't understand what you want from them. A clear purpose specifically states the impact you want to have and provides the direction for a strong, concise message the people can follow.

Most people I work with think they know their purpose, but they really don't. They focus on what they intend to do rather than what they need their audience to do afterward.

For example, they may tell me that their purpose is, "To talk with my team about a new initiative". Simply talking about something isn't a clear enough purpose because it doesn't specify the impact. Are you talking about it because you need to make a decision? Because you need their buy-in? Because you need them to do something differently?

A better purpose would be, "To make sure the team understands the initiative and is confident they can meet all deadlines." Identifying your purpose before preparing what you want to say will determine what points to make and how best to deliver them. How can you make a clear call to action if you're fuzzy about what action your audience should take?

You know your purpose is clear when it specifies the impact and is concise enough to be just one sentence.

2. You aren't adapting to your listeners

To influence people, you must first understand them. Before you begin to formulate your thoughts, consider things like the kind of information that is important to this particular audience, their pace, their emotional state, and how you think they will react to your ideas. Making people feel understood builds trust and opens their minds to your message.

Even a group you know well can change from one week to the next. One week they may be energetic and easily get on board with a change. The following week, they may feel overwhelmed and resist.

You must continue to adapt to your audience as you deliver your message. Do they look like they understand and buy into your ideas or are they confused, doubtful, or resisting your message? To achieve your purpose, you need to notice the impact you're having at the moment and be able to adjust on the spot.



3. You're Rambling

Rambling confuses the message, and people won't listen to a message they don't understand. You may find that you ramble when you're nervous, unprepared, or you're so comfortable that you decide to "wing it".

Just because you're comfortable doesn't mean you're effective. In fact, your chances of rambling increase because you put less effort into preparation.

How do you prevent rambling? Prepare at least enough to add structure to your points. The structure makes them easy for you to remember and easy for your listeners to follow. For example, instead of saying, "There are a *few reasons* we're making this change.", say, "There are *three reasons* we are making this change." Don't let rambling keep people from hearing your message.

4. Your delivery isn't engaging

There are more distractions today than ever before vying for the attention of your listeners. Nothing you say or show your audience will matter if you cannot grab their attention and keep it!

One thing that grabs attention is new information and ideas. Using stories, statistics, thought-provoking questions and interesting images all help you grab attention and maintain engagement.

We also pay attention to emotions. Raising the energy with movement can bring back attention when it begins to fade. Small movements will suffice if you're sitting at a table, but very large movements are required if you're on stage in front of a large crowd. Speaking louder and faster is also an effective way grab attention and raise energy. Remember, if they aren't listening, they won't be influenced.



5. You're not making an emotional connection

It isn't enough to simply tell people what you want them to do. Connecting on an emotional level builds trust and increases the likelihood that your listeners will feel compelled to think, feel, or behave differently. There are many ways to do that, including eye contact, smiling, stories, and humor.

People are not only more likely to buy from people they like; they are also more likely to remember information when it's presented in a way that connects emotionally. Find ways to connect with your listeners, whether it is one person or 100.

6. You don't convey confidence

Emotions are contagious, and your listeners will “catch” yours. When you sound confident, they're more likely to feel confident about you and your message. The opposite is also true. If you look nervous, your listeners will begin to feel nervous and question your message and credibility.

A confident presence begins with good posture, eye contact, and a confident tone. As you talk, include pauses that allow points to sink in and to replace fillers. Your body and your tone are your two most effective ways to convey confidence.

If you need to impact the thinking, feeling, or behavior of others, you'll need to influence, not just speak to people. Overcoming these six obstacles will help you get your message heard and ultimately achieve your purpose.

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