

# *LeaderPerfect Newsletter*

November 1, 2010

## **Communicate More Effectively In One Simple Step**

**by Dr. Mike Armour**

How can you maximize your influence on people as a communicator? What style of communication should you use to have the greatest potential impact?

Answers to these questions are, of course, myriad. But in the next five minutes you can learn one little technique that will immediately leverage your impact both as a speaker and as a writer.

The technique builds on the most basic of principles, namely, that to persuade people, you should make it as easy as possible for them to grasp your message and follow it.

Or to put this another way, you need to communicate in a way that is most compatible with their way of framing communication. And ultimately we all frame communication in one of two ways.

### **Communication Styles**

Aristotle first described these two communication patterns almost 2500 years ago in his book Rhetoric. Athens of his day was a centerpiece of great political oratory. And since political issues were debated daily and publicly before assembled throngs, Aristotle regularly observed masters of persuasion at work.

He noticed that some people approached their topic in a manner that he called "deductive." Others relied on an "inductive" approach. Here is the basic difference between the two.

Deductive communicators start by telling you what they are asking of you or what they are recommending as a course of action. They then spend the balance of their communication building the rationale for their position, typically concluding with a restatement of their call for action.

Inductive communicators, on the other hand, withhold their call for action until near the end. They preface it with a lengthy discussion of background information relevant to the rationale for their conclusion. With inductive communicators, you may be half way

through their presentation before you begin feeling a sense that you know where they are going.

Both people have a solid rationale for their style. Deductive communicators presume that you need to know the conclusion so that you can test it against the rationale that they then present.

Inductive communicators believe you cannot fully understand the relevance of their conclusion until you are fully acquainted with the background from which you are advocating your viewpoint.

Mere observation is all that you need in order to determine which style a person leans toward. Notice lengthier emails from your colleagues. Which ones start off with their conclusion, then devote several paragraphs to defending it? And which ones withhold their conclusion until you are well down into the communique?

The first is obviously a deductive communicator, the second an inductive one.

Do something similar when you are with a group of friends at a social occasion. As they are exchanging views on some topic of mutual interest, notice how they build their arguments. Which friends are deductive in their approach? Which ones are inductive?

## **Developing Your Communication Strategy**

Once you understand whether someone is most inclined toward deductive or inductive communication, you have identified the best pattern to use in communicating with this person.

If you are communicating with deductive thinkers, but are heavily inductive in your style, they will often mentally disengage before you get to your recommendation. Their mind will wonder as they speculate about where you are going. "Why don't you just get to the point?" they will ask silently.

Conversely, inductive thinkers often find deductive communicators too pushy and brash. When inductive thinkers hear a call for action up front, a voice inside of them begins to mutter, "Wait a minute. I don't understand enough of the factors surrounding this topic to know whether your suggestion is a good one or not."

So here is the technique that I mentioned at the top of the article -- use it regularly and you will enhance the power of your communication. To be specific, when communicating with deductive thinkers, use a deductive approach. With inductive thinkers, switch to an inductive approach.

## **Stretching Your Communication Style**

As simple as this sounds, it is a bit challenging to execute because our own preferred communication style keeps getting in the way. It is deeply engrained as an unconscious mind pattern. As a result, we draw on our own preferred style effortlessly, without even thinking about it.

To break out of that pattern and begin utilizing the other pattern is therefore a bit difficult. Let me use myself as an example. If you study the style of my newsletter articles, you readily discover that I lean toward an inductive approach. Using a purely deductive method moves me far outside my comfort zone.

I learned this in spades when I ran for Congress. When reporters ask questions, they are looking for sound bites. And sound bites are not long enough to permit inductive responses. You must make your point quickly, in as few words as possible, and then rapidly add the rationale for your position in one or two bullet statements.

That was always a stretch for me. My urge was to frame my conclusion with preliminary background information. But if I did so, news editors tended to cut out all of the background material and use only the conclusion. So I gained nothing by being inductive.

But if it is a stretch for me to use a deductive approach, it is no less a stretch for highly deductive communicators to fashion a presentation around inductive techniques. Through the entire presentation they feel as though they are wasting too much time getting to the point.

Yet when we are willing to get outside of our comfort zone and master the techniques of communicating in our non-preferred style, our ability to build persuasive rapport with others rises exponentially.

## **Mixing Techniques**

Now for the second stretch. Much of our communication, whether verbal or in writing, is to a mixed audience of deductive and inductive communicators. What should we do when addressing or writing to a group like this?

One tactic is to use what I call a soft deductive opening with the clear implication that your process will be inductive. Then intermix your follow-on comments, so that you are building rationale for the deductive thinkers in your audience, while simultaneously building background for the inductive thinkers.

And what do I mean by a "soft deductive opening"? This approach calls for offering a sweeping generalization of your conclusion without spelling out the specifics. You might follow this generalization with words to this effect: "Some of you, I know, will want me to develop my recommendation in greater detail. And I will do that gladly. But first permit me just a few moments to lay out the rationale for my position."

This gives the deductive thinkers a clear path from the outset and a sense that they know what your conclusion is. More details are to come, they know. But for the moment they have enough information to evaluate your rationale building.

At the same time, your methodology is giving your inductive thinkers an opportunity to have more background before they have to make a decision about final recommendation.

To see a slightly different application of this technique, look at the first two paragraphs of this article. By the end of the second paragraph, the deductive readers knows where we are going and can determine whether they want to join the journey.

But the specifics of our destination are tantalizingly withheld, keeping curiosity high. Heightened curiosity will help deductive readers bear with the tedium (to them) of the background information (Aristotle, the Rhetoric, the importance of rapport) that is about to follow.

### **Further Application of the Technique**

If this were a much longer article, one in which I advanced one rationale after another to support my case, I could also blend deductive and inductive techniques into each rationale, stroking both type of communicators in my audience.

Again, I would start each rationale with a "soft deductive" opening. Then I would honor the preferences of inductive communicators in the way I built the rationale.

For instance, I could say, "There are five compelling reasons for the position I am advocating. The first reason is that the latest research supports my position. Let me show you that data. But let me introduce it by giving you some background information that will help you see its full import."

Did you notice that subtle shift from deductive to inductive in the last sentence of the paragraph? Again, the deductive person feels comfortable that he or she knows where I am going. And by using the "five compelling reasons" and the "first reason" language, I'm playing to the deductive frame of reference. But I'm holding the inductive thinkers by building the body of the rationale with an inductive style.

Perhaps you are now beginning to think that this "simple technique" is not all that simple. But it truly is. The more refined applications of the technique do take practice. A lot of it. But I've been amazed at how rapidly my clients have been able to become adroit at adapting their communication style to the preferred style of their hearer or reader. You can, too.

### **Getting Started**

How then should you proceed? Here are a few succinct suggestions.

Start first by being an astute observer, an astute listener. Practice making swift determinations as to whether a person is relying on a deductive or inductive approach.

Be equally attentive to your own communication. Go back and read six or seven of your lengthier emails of late in which you were advocating a course of action. Were you deductive or inductive in your approach?

Once you have identified your own instinctual approach, be more consciously attuned to the approach you are using. Monitor yourself even as you are speaking or writing.

Again at the conscious level, guard against overusing your preferred style when communicating with someone inclined toward the other approach.

Just as you practiced identifying styles by listening to friends at a social event, use the same setting and occasion to practice communicating in your non-preferred style. It's a great way to stretch yourself with no particularly adverse consequence of messing up.

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