

BOOK REVIEW

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“COMMUNICATE TO INFLUENCE – HOW TO INSPIRE YOUR AUDIENCE TO ACTION” by Ben Decker and Kelly Decker

The authors:

Ben Decker and Kelly Decker are leading experts in the field of business communication. They run Decker Communications, a firm that trains and coaches thousands of executives a year. Their trademarked Decker Method is dubbed “the gold standard” of communication training programs by “USA Today”. It shows leaders how to deliver messages that don’t just inform but influence and inspire others to action.

The book:

Business communication often sucks. “There is an endless deluge of data, facts, and figures”, say Ben and Kelly Decker. As a result of information overload, people are thirsting for inspiration. They want to be part of something greater. Every person in the audience is thinking: “What can you do for me? How does this relate to me?” And therein lies the great opportunity to influence them. However, many presenters miss out on it.

In their practical handbook, the Deckers list the five white lies about communication that we tell us:

White lie no. 1: If I say the words, people will get it.

White lie no. 2: When I’m “on”, I’m great.

White lie no. 3: I don’t need to prepare. I can wing it.

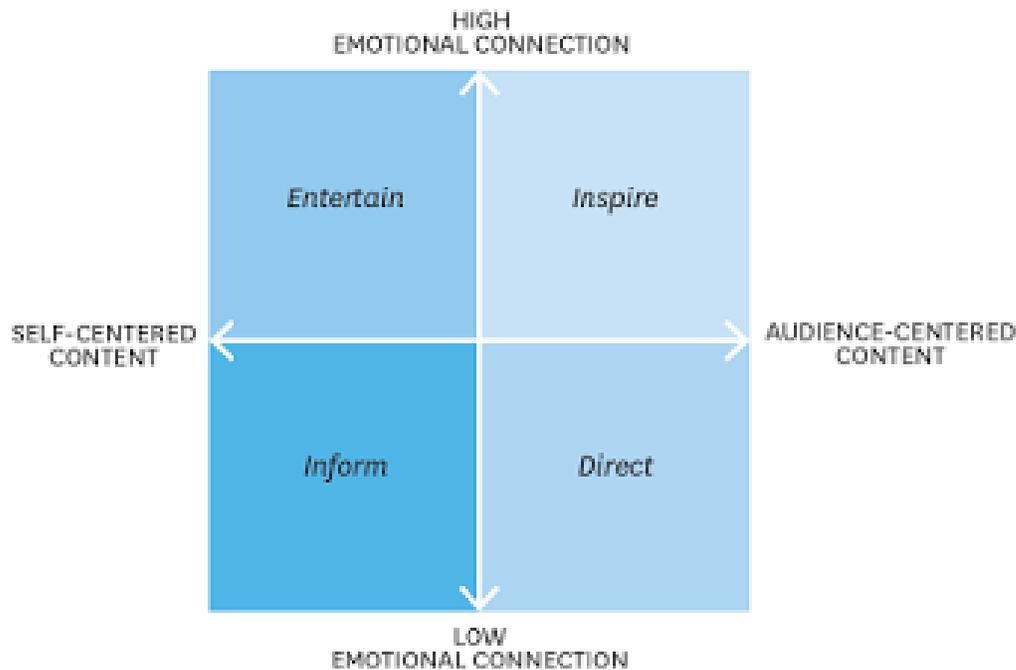
White lie no.4: People tell me I’m pretty good at speaking.

White lie no. 5: That’s not the way we do things here.

To help you to create an ideal communication experience for your audience, the Deckers have developed the “Communicator’s Roadmap”.

The Communicator's Roadmap

A guide to creating the most effective message.



SOURCE COMMUNICATE TO INFLUENCE, BY BEN DECKER AND KELLY DECKER

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It is a two by two grid with the vertical axis being "emotional connection", and the horizontal axis being "the content of your talk".

We all know how boring business presentations typically are. And from my own observation, often the higher the presenter is ranked in a company's hierarchy, the more boring the presentation is. Most of these tedious talks fall in the lower left quadrant. The presenter doesn't connect, because he is low in emotion, and he talks only about his own stuff.

Adding some emotional content, e.g. through stories or humor, brings you up to the left upper quadrant, the "entertain" quadrant. Since your content is still your own stuff, you are not in a position to influence the audience.

The right upper quadrant is "inspire", and that's where you should always try to be. If you are there, it means people feel connected to you. They trust and like you. And in this quadrant, the content of your talk applies to your audience. And that's where you can influence them!

In the right lower "direct" quadrant, we just give instructions without any emotional connection, but the content is all about the audience.

What are the best ways to move on the axes? On the horizontal axis, it is simply to change your content from self-centered to audience-centered. Regarding the vertical axis, the Deckers state that it's not our competence but our warmth, humility, genuineness, and generosity that people

pick up on first when they are evaluating you. These are the qualities that engender trust and will move you right up the emotional connection axis. They recommend to add one or more of the following elements to your presentation: stories, humor, analogies, references, or pictures and visuals.

So when you attend next time a presentation, think about in which quadrant the speaker falls. And don't forget to reflect about your own talks and in which category they typically fall.

Always aim to be in the right upper quadrant. Then you will reap great rewards: you will influence your listeners, and you will inspire them to action!

One more practical tool in the book is the so-called “Decker Grid”. It shows you how to plan your talk or message.

Step 1: Always frame your message around the listeners.

Step 2: Get focused with a clear point of view.

Step 3: Tell your audience what to do.

Step 4: Tell them what's in it for them.

The ability to communicate is the power to shift people's thinking. It's the power to influence and generate action on a massive scale.

And the last sentence of the book says it all: “Informing, entertaining, or directing is not enough. **Inspire!**”

Conclusion:

“Communicate to influence – How to inspire your audience to action” should be considered required reading for anyone looking to improve his communication skills significantly. It enables you to drive real change. If you aim to be a leader, you have the responsibility to do better than just inform, entertain or direct your audience.

**** Heinz Landau is a leadership expert, speaker, and advisor. He is the former Managing Director of Merck Ltd., Thailand, whom he has led to record sales and profits during his 16 years at the helm of the company. He can be reached at heinz.landau@gmail.com*