



### **Letters on Leadership #15: Effective Communication Using “CLAPP”**

At The Program, we are often asked by leaders to help them improve communication within their organization. Effective communication is a hallmark of successful organizations. By contrast, poor communication can doom an organization, even if their other critical functions are top-notch.

There is a big difference between talking and communicating. At The Program, we don't try to change the way anyone talks. When you are hanging out with friends, talk how you talk. Based on where we are from, we all may talk differently. We may have different accents or use different slang.

At The Program some of our Boston teammates steadfastly refuse to pronounce their “R’s” when talking. Others, in a futile attempt to remain “hip”, still use phrases like “make it rain.” Talk how



you talk. However, when we are “communicating” information, be it during a staff meeting, a time out, or a mission brief, there are very specific ways in which we need to do so.

The acronym we use on how to communicate effectively is CLAPP. It stands for Clear, Loud, with Authority, Pauses, and good Posture.

**Clear** – We can say all the right things but if it isn’t received by our intended audience it does us no good. Speaking clearly is paramount to ensuring that all our information is received. For many people this is as simple as slowing down. What may seem an appropriate tempo in our heads often comes out way too fast for our audience to keep up. As a general rule, speak slower than you think you should. Using pauses helps as well. This will be discussed later.

**Loud** – We can say all the right things, but if our audience can’t hear it, it does us no good. Always speak loud enough so that the person farthest away from you hears every bit of information. Project your voice. This will not only ensure that everyone hears it, but will display confidence in your messaging as well.

**Authority** – In stressful environments, we don’t have time for “fluff”. Tell people what you need them to do. We don’t need to preface our statements with “If it is not too much trouble...” or “If you don’t mind.” These modifiers waste time and make you appear less confident in your messaging. If you have proven yourself to be a good leader and teammate through your words and actions, telling your teammates authoritatively what you need them to do will not be received negatively.

**Pause** – Although it may feel awkward, inserting pauses into your speaking cadence allows your audience to keep up. It also will allow you to properly formulate your next thought. It is important that these be actual pauses and not just fillers. Using “like”, “umm”, or “know what I’m saying?” after every sentence is distracting to the audience and will ruin the clarity of your messaging.

**Posture** – Much of our communication is nonverbal. Weak body language and poor posture can ruin confidence. You can say all the right things but be betrayed by your body language. There are many intricacies of body language but the easiest one to address is posture. Before you communicate, make a conscious effort to stand tall and pull your shoulders back. If you are not a naturally confident speaker, fake it. Assume a power pose, keep your chin up, and spread your chest. Like magic, you will become more confident.



For most of us it may not be realistic to be great at all of these things right away. Pick one to start with. Just focus on being loud if that is your weak point. Once you can communicate louder, work on your clarity or authority.

I learned the true importance of effective communication during the initial invasion of Iraq. I was in charge of a light armored reconnaissance platoon. Each vehicle commander wears a helmet that can send and receive radio traffic. They can communicate internally with the crew, tell the driver where to go, tell the gunner what to shoot, etc. They also have 2 radio channels they can use. Typically, one channel is used to communicate with the vehicles in their unit, while the second channel is used to communicate with other or higher units. The vehicle commander can choose with whom to communicate; however, he needs to listen to ALL the channels simultaneously. In the span of 30 seconds, he may need to tell his gunner to engage a target over the intercom, issue commands to other vehicles on one channel, and give a situation report to his boss on another.

When the invasion kicked off we had already been awake for nearly twenty four hours. It seemed like absolute chaos when we crossed the breach into Iraq. The oil fields had been set ablaze and you could barely see through the smoke. Artillery rounds exploded in the distance and fighter jets and attack helicopters screamed overhead. We fully expected to run into an enemy tank unit over every hill we crested. The radios were a constant flood of voices. In addition, every time anyone in the area received any type of rocket or mortar attack we all had to don our gas masks, sometime for hours at a time. This meant speaking over the radio was like trying to talk on the phone with a pillow over your face. This was the most challenging environment I've ever had to communicate in. Effective communication wasn't a luxury but an absolute life or death necessity.

The stakes in Iraq may have been different but the principles are the same. Effective communication is the hallmark of a successful organization. Focusing on CLAPP and communicating Clearly, Loudly, with Authority, Pauses, and good Posture will help to you accomplish your mission.

Attack,

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