

processing areas of our brains, but also those devoted to dealing with smells.⁴ These areas draw a far richer response than merely objectively seen words like *chair* or *key*.

Metaphors, too, when they refer to texture and touch rather than mere description, draw a response from the sensory cortex. Finally, just as with the mirror neuron system described in [Chapter Two](#), the brain does not seem to make much distinction between reading or hearing about an experience and encountering it in real life. In each case, the same neurological regions are stimulated. Paul quotes Keith Oatley of the University of Toronto as saying, “A story goes beyond stimulating reality to give . . . the opportunity to enter fully into other people’s thoughts and feelings.”

As you begin to develop your Communication Guide, you need to look at the specific ways of communicating that appeal to this limbic brain, to that part of the mind that doesn’t make distinctions or judgments, but rather connects with the other holistically. Focus on forms and language that will help you express your subjective Self, rather than merely your objective knowledge. Image, symbol, analogy, metaphor, story, myth, and the emotional component of personal experience are the tools of this type of communication. Each of these is distinct in appeal as well as function.

Image and Symbol

Image and symbol are best discussed together as they are often confused. An image can be a symbol, but it doesn’t have to be. As Carl Jung explains, images “*stand* for things—they *name* things, but do *no more* than denote the objects to which they are attached.”⁵ Pictures of machinery, your group, or your house fall into this category. “A symbol conversely can be a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in everyday life, yet it also possesses specific *connotations* in addition to its conventional and obvious (objective) meaning. It *implies* something vague, unknown, or hidden from us.”⁶ An image that carries such a connotation (and is therefore a symbol) is retained in our consciousness in vivid detail; when we recall it, we are visited with the emotion originally attendant with the image. The logo of the Red Cross or the Olympic games conveys a *feeling* derived from our experience. For most these would be mercy or international good will.

Good brands are of course symbols, but there are universal symbols that affect the psyche even more profoundly. This is why all religions employ symbolic language or images. A cross, a chalice, a Buddha, the star and crescent—all mean much more than their objective appearance.

James Joyce used this distinction in describing what he called “proper art” and “improper art.” Improper art is common and in some way moves us to act. Modern advertising would fall into this category. Proper art, conversely, requires us to stand still, to enter into the feeling of what is behind the rendition.⁷ In contrast, words and concepts are retained as mere ideas, unless they can hook our emotional involvement. Thus emotional commitment is unlikely to come from pie charts or data on PowerPoint slides. These electronic products are wonderful for display—and for allaying the fear of exposure and personal vulnerability—but they separate potential leaders from others and discourage real contact. The images we most vividly recall are not those from clip art or from the reflection of complex material on a screen. Rather, the images we remember are those we can see in a greater context of life, those created by human communication.

What we see and feel in one dimension can be translated to others through our imagination . . . our “ability to image.” William Blake’s words, “to see a universe in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour,” accurately describe the symbolic perspective of the effective leader. Thoughtful leadership communication includes memorable images—images that at least approach the power of symbol, and sometimes actually attain it. For example, if you want to convey your company’s desire to minimize the level of pesticides in oranges throughout the world, do you show the words “Minimize Pesticides in Oranges,” show a picture of the machine that makes pesticides possible to detect, or show a young healthy child biting into an orange? The answer should be obvious. Some object to this idea as blatant false advertising, but it can be authentic—and when it is, it can be a powerful motivator.

A dramatic example reached the news in March 2012, when a federal judge in Washington delivered a judgment in a suit brought by several tobacco companies. The suit had sought a reversal of a federal mandate that the companies affix graphic photographic images to cigarette packaging. The nine color images depicted, among other things, a man exhaling cigarette smoke through a tracheotomy hole in his throat, a pair of diseased lungs next to a pair of healthy lungs; a diseased mouth afflicted with what appears to be cancerous lesions; and a cadaver on a table with post-autopsy chest staples. The tobacco companies were suing to stop the order based on the first amendment rights of free speech. Bear in mind that requiring stern printed warnings on packages was found to be constitutional in 1965. It was also true that none of the tobacco companies were claiming that the warnings of the printed material were incorrect—they admitted that cigarettes could cause cancer, birth defects, and other devastating illness, including the illnesses and conditions depicted in the images.

Judge Richard Leon ruled for the tobacco companies, drawing this distinction between the warning labels and the pictorial images. “The graphic images ‘were neither designed to protect the consumer from confusion or deception, nor to increase consumer awareness of smoking risks; rather, *they were crafted to evoke a strong emotional response calculated to provoke the viewer to quit or never start smoking*’ ” (emphasis mine).⁸ While the defense in this case argued that the judge got both the science and the law wrong, he clearly saw and articulated the difference in affect between a logical “fact-based” sentence and the emotional appeal of a provocative image.

I feel the need, from time to time, to affirm that I am not advocating an abandonment of words in favor of images; nor am I suggesting that facts and figures are not necessary. Indeed, they are. However, if we want to engage others emotionally as well as logically, we can heed the power of image and symbol and use that power as a supplement to help us communicate the emotional possibility of progress.

Analogy and Metaphor

Metaphor literally means to “carry across.” Analogy and metaphor move us from a known to an unknown, or from the subjective to the objective. Is the building of the information superhighway in the nineties like the building of the automotive highway system in the fifties? Is cutting corporate cost to avoid layoffs like cutting family costs to avoid having college students come home for lack of tuition money? Is creating a national health care system analogous to creating the social security system? These analogies could be useful, as they point to both similarities and dissimilarities in a known and unknown situation, allowing people to learn by past experience rather than mere explanation.

Metaphor is to analogy as symbol is to image. Like symbol, metaphor offers something beyond the literal. Metaphor leaves out the “like” and just declares a truth that gets below the objective surface. It is the stuff of poetry—it encourages an experience that is greater than a mere surface comparison. Is love a flower, a bird, or a pothole? It is literally none of these, yet to express any of these as a truth is to convey an experience that will surely not be lost on

listeners. They will learn the essence of love—love is beautiful, it blossoms, it is delicate, it soars on its own, challenges gravity, sings a beautiful song each day; love can be treacherous, can stop you in your tracks, can injure you. All these feelings can be experienced in the metaphors. Analogy and metaphor both bring a realization of the unknown from a reminder of the known, but the metaphor also provides an emotional understanding of the nature of a subjective feeling. The analogy states that competing in a marketplace is like conducting a war. The metaphor states that competition *is* war. Analogy invites comparison. Metaphor invites engagement.

Metaphor has four primary applications in leadership communication. One is the identification of the vision of the organization or movement you are trying to lead. In 1996, when Gil Amelio became CEO of Apple, he stated his metaphorical vision: Apple would become “the Maglite of the Computer Industry.” Maglite made quality flashlights, and had indeed been given many industrial design awards, but Amelio needed to communicate his image to several thousand Apple employees, and it needed to be an image of a company with big margins, great reliability, and attractive designs. Few people at Apple knew anything about Maglite and the metaphor fell flat. Scott McNeely, long-term CEO of Sun Microsystems, drove his company to success and eventually down a steep grade with “Eat lunch or Be lunch.” He also emphasized the “war” with Microsoft, a tough metaphor to come to work with every day. Mission metaphors can define your organization and determine whom you attract.⁹

In 2000, Karen Chang, then head of branches and business development for Charles Schwab, was addressing five hundred of her charges regarding their need to provide more specific customer solutions. Karen is one of the most respected women in American business—and in my view is also among the best-dressed. She used the following to make her point that her organization had to be more flexible to individual client needs: “We need to be more like Nordstrom. One customer can walk in needing an Armani suit, another might want some Donna Karan evening wear, and still another might simply want a Nordstrom’s brand T-shirt. They can all be served in the same store.” Karen’s analogy got the point across in a succinct way, and a way that a major portion of her audience understood instantly. For those who might not, she continued: “Now I know that some of you guys didn’t understand what I just said. You probably think that you saw ‘Armani’ on the menu at last night’s Italian restaurant, and you’ve never heard of this ‘Donna Karan’ chick, but I’m tired of sports metaphors!” Very effective; extremely memorable.

A second application is to define a strategy or a tactic to focus others on what roles they play and what energy is needed. Depending on your choice of comparison, your communication can have very different results. Consider this choice. Suppose that you want to convey that your organization needs to become more proactive and less reactive. Which metaphor would resonate?

“We need to get out of the foxholes and get up there and take that hill!”

“We need to stop defending our own goal and get out there and score some of our own!”

“We need to stop wandering around the museum looking at paintings and get out there and create some masterpieces of our own!”

Each of these metaphors has an appeal, but the central point is that *people in the organization will identify with the metaphor you use*. If you use a military metaphor, then the enterprise is war, you are the general, they are the “grunts,” and the stakes are life and death. This might not be the most productive atmosphere to be a part of for the long haul. Conversely, there are times in the cycle of most organizations when such a metaphor might well be appropriate.

If you use the sports metaphor then you are involved in a competitive game. You are the coach, they are the players, and the stakes are win or lose. This is why sports metaphors work so well—most people would rather play a competitive game and take the chance on losing than go to war with the risk of losing their lives.

The third example is for the creative professions. This enterprise is in creating and observing elegance in creativity. As the leader, you are either the master artist or a curator, each member of your team is a creative artist, and the enterprise is elegant innovation. It is not hard to see the metaphor’s application in software development or research.

Choose analogy and metaphor carefully. Since people identify with these figures of speech immediately, and since these experiential referents have their roots of understanding in the limbic system, misstatements frequently result in misunderstandings—and at worst, they can create an understanding opposite from the truth.

In 2012, Mitt Romney referred to strategic focus in the primary as different from that of the general election. Eric Fehrstrom, Romney’s adviser, referred to the impending shift in strategy as an “Etch A Sketch” phenomenon. One had to question his understanding of the power of metaphor. Not only did the metaphor suggest constant flip-flop (complete with erasure), but by using a toy as a referent Fehrstrom was also inviting even more assertions that Romney was condescending. To the detriment of his campaign the remark was referred to through both the primary and general elections.

A third, and perhaps the most important use for metaphor is to describe a compelling future. Again, choose with care, for some of the conclusions of those hearing you might be counterproductive for your cause. For example, when bioengineered food was initially becoming a possibility, food biotechnology experts were fond of drawing analogies between the development of genetically engineered food and the development of the monoclonal antibodies used in modern medicine. While the process is similar, few people want to consider food and medicine as equivalent. One executive even commented, “Within the next few years, you will be able to open your refrigerator and your medicine cabinet and see the same thing.” This image was not helpful to his cause.

In fact, used intentionally, negative analogy or metaphor can bring home a real concern. Organized crime, budget deficits, and runaway costs are often referred to as “infectious diseases” or “cancers.” These are both powerful metaphors, used frequently to emphasize progressive decay and potential death. Change is often referred to as “the tide” or “the wind,” indicating a force that is beyond the listeners’ control, but within their power to use for their own purpose. People fill in the attributes of the metaphor and assign them to the subject of discussion without further elaboration. Metaphors of few words create concrete images and make the abstract take form in the real world. Themes such as “climbing mountains” or “crossing chasms” can be used for multiple images and multiple connections.

Richard Mahoney, former chairman and CEO of Monsanto, spoke about innovation to the Council on Foreign Relations with these images: “Our freedom to innovate is being starved by tax and investment policies that eat our seed corn . . . rather than save it for planting.” This real-world comparison has substantially more impact than the abstract translation of the facts: “Our freedom to innovate is being thwarted by policies that consume our investment capital.”¹⁰

Finally, effective analogies can point others toward a conclusion that is in keeping with your intent. In 1992, NASA Administrator Daniel Goldin addressed the Association of Space Explorers in Washington, D.C., on the question of why the United States should send a human expedition to Mars. In setting the stage for his advocacy, he drew the following analogy from the time of Columbus’s voyage:

Only [Queen] Isabella was willing to look beyond the many problems on her own shores, and see the potential reward for her investment in the future. The voyages of Columbus set the stage for more Spanish explorers, who turned Spain into a great world power. As a consequence, the language and culture of Spain prevail in most of Latin America to this day.

On the other side of the world, however, in China . . . the intended destination of Columbus . . . their emperors turned their backs on the rest of the world. Sixty years prior to 1492, Chinese explorers had traveled as far as Africa. But a new emperor considered such journeys wasteful extravagances. His successors burned the boats, and banned all Chinese from leaving the country. Those who tried could be executed.

That 15th century decision to *not* explore still reverberates in China today. What was one of the world's most advanced and innovative civilizations is today an inward-looking nation. For a country with the most people on Earth, it is almost an afterthought in global affairs.¹¹

Much has happened since Goldin's comments, and China could hardly be accused of having an inward focus today. Still, this is an apt historical comparison because the conclusions are unmistakable. The nation that has the foresight to explore space will lead progress in other areas as well. Going to Mars may not be the logically correct decision for the United States, but certainly at some point, someone *will* send human beings to another planet, and it is possible that other nations will then be forever catching up to the nations that demonstrated more courage and foresight.

Whether for a vision, for a strategy or tactic, or to describe a compelling future or warn of a disaster, a leader chooses analogies and metaphors knowing that the entire organization will be influenced by the choice. Whether these comparisons have resonance is largely a function of the experience of those who hear the analogies and metaphors, whether they are familiar with the shared characteristics, and whether they react positively or negatively to those characteristics. Metaphors are never just general; they are personal in their appeal. Karen Chang did it well. Had Gil Amelio gone on to explain his reference to Maglite, perhaps even personally distributing some of these exquisite pieces to Apple employees, he might well have created an entire communication platform based on his observation. But he did not explain it, and it fell flat.

Narrative as Connection—Myth, Story, and Experience

Twentieth-century political theorist and philosopher Hannah Arendt observed, “Story-telling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it.”¹² Indeed, “Tell me a story” is the most repeated refrain in millions of households around the world every night. We want to hear tales of success, of heroes, of tragedy. Hardly anyone says, “Will you read me a few bedtime concepts?” Concepts don't create resonance; stories do. Leadership communication is about “growth” and “progress,” words that contain a past, a present, and a future—a story line.

Despite the universal scientific evidence and our collective intuitive sense that time is an illusion, it is, as Einstein said, “a most *stubborn* illusion.” The journey through space and time is basic in its import; it is part of the unseen atmosphere of our very existence without regard to culture. The story is to most humans like water is to fish: so integral to existence that only our self-reflective ability allows us to see it. Everyone's life lies between some version of “once upon a time,” and “they all lived happily ever after.” Because stories are about our lives, they inspire us with possibility. When leaders build them liberally into communication, others have the opportunity to identify with the story and all of its elements . . . and change it to make the story come true for them as well.

Myths: Creating Cultural Values

Myths are a most particular type of story, not literally true but metaphorically effective and broad-gauged. Myth is symbolic and steeped in meaning, so the nature of myth is more important as we define the nature of communication that connects with multiple cultures, and even more deeply as symbolic (creating meaning that is inherent in our existence).

Joseph Campbell defined the purpose of myth as fourfold. First, to reconcile our lives to what we actually see as the nature of life in the world. Early myths about the constellations moving through the heavens are examples of these myths . . . they helped the ancients make sense of their physical world, including birth and death. Myths about all of nature's phenomena accomplished the same function, and humans frequently personified these energies into Gods and Goddesses. We still have myths that help us reconcile our values with what is observable in life. Hence the creators of *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, and other classics crafted personifications of good and evil, of the magical and the mundane, and of the hero and the heroine and the villain, in order to retell myths that have been with us since the dawn of consciousness.

The second function of myth that Campbell identifies is to present an image of the cosmos “that will maintain and elicit an experience of awe.”¹³ This is a mystical function that recognizes that which we have yet to explain—the mystery of life itself. We can only point to it, theorize about it, and tell a plausible story that is consistent with the state of our scientific understanding. There are few scientists, however, who believe we will ever be able to define, cognitively and without question, the origins or fate of our universe.

When my sons were young, we would frequently stretch out in a field across from our house and look at the stars, or during our annual fishing trips to Montana, take advantage of the “big sky” to imagine even more broadly. For them (and for me) it was hard to grasp that what we were seeing at that moment had actually happened millions or billions of years ago. The scale of the universe comes alive with this type of activity, just as it does with any story that sparks our sense of awe at the ultimate mystery. Myth is the story that we make up to explain this mystery.

The third function of myth, one that is central to my purpose here, is to “validate and maintain a certain sociological system: a shared set of rights and wrongs, proprieties or improprieties, on which your particular social unit depends for its existence.”¹⁴ These myths are, for example, about the nature of capitalism, whether humankind is a steward, a participant, or has dominion over nature. In the United States, myth is the basis for statements like “We hold these truths to be self-evident.”

The fourth function of mythology is psychological. The myth must carry the individual through the stages of life, from birth through maturity through old age to death. The mythology must do so in accord with the social order, the cosmos as understood by the group, and what Campbell refers to as “the monstrous mystery that is existence.”¹⁵

I went back to graduate school in 2004 to understand the universal nature of myths and archetypes in order to help leaders increase their scale of effectiveness. Most of these global stories operate below the surface of consciousness. Just as the Judeo-Christian myths operate below the consciousness of the West and in Islam, systems of religion and mythology in other parts of the world are literally “baked in” to the society. Biblical and Koran stories in the monotheistic traditions are mirrored with elaborate stories from the Mahabharata and Ramayana in Hindu civilization, “Monkey” from the oral traditions of narrative in the religions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shintoism, and in the myriad personified stories in the nature-based ancient religions of Africa, now also popular and practiced throughout the southern hemisphere. Some understanding of these fundamental stories is a requisite for global leadership. It is also a worthwhile study for anyone wishing to inspire others with varied backgrounds. Knowing these stories will help you understand what might be important topics for your own stories, the ones you will use in your Personal Leadership Communication Guide.

Story: Closer to the Everyday

Because they define civilizations, myths change very slowly, but our more mundane stories are more facile. We make up stories that reflect the way things are, and a leader's task is to move from the status quo to a place defined as progress. Because my education included an emphasis in depth psychology (the psychology of Jung, Adler, and more recently James Hillman), I occasionally attend programs for therapists on myth and story as methods of healing. In one such program, the director, Jonathan Young, suggested to the therapists that their patients were really looking for editors. "When they come to you," he said, "they are saying 'I don't like my story. Can you help me change it?'"

This is actually the task of the leader: to edit the story of the organization, to change the ending, to infuse a new plot line into a story that has become stale, lifeless, or irrelevant. It is not done by merely adding some people, firing some others, and rearranging the talent. As discussed in [Chapter Seven](#), describing a new future is one application of story; others are inspiring new behavior, building a new culture, or preserving the past. Business literature is rich in urban legends, stories of great brands: how the FedEx employee hired a helicopter on his own, or the UPS driver found the artist and had a damaged painting repaired for a client in time for Christmas, or the most famous of all, the Nordstrom's employee who gave an elderly lady a credit for faulty tires that her former husband had purchased on the Nordstrom's site before the store was built. Stories will help others experience the need for change and the excitement of being part of it. Your Guide has to include stories to ground whatever other evidence you might offer.

Personal Stories About Others—Convincing Evidence

Stories that illustrate the change that is needed, the reason for change, or the effect of change will resonate deeply with others. In fact, stories have been shown to be a most powerful form of evidence. A study conducted by organizational psychologists Joanne Martin and Melanie Powers concluded that a story provided more credibility to a proposition than a mere declaration by an executive, data alone, or data combined with the same story. In their study, they asserted to four distinct groups of people that a particular company had followed a practice of no layoffs for its entire history. To prove this proposition, they offered one group the data, and to another a simple statement by a senior executive. A third group simply heard a story of a long-term employee, and the fourth got all of the data and heard the story as well. The group that heard only the story were the most convinced.¹⁶ Why would this be the case?

Given modern knowledge of the brain, it seems reasonable to conclude that the limbic system is the receptor of analog data, like stories, while digital data needs to be processed by the cortex. When presented with digital data, the cortex does what it is supposed to do . . . analyze, doubt, and judge as ways of reaching the correct decision. Conversely, analog data like the story does not require judgment or decision. Imagine telling a story around the campfire and hearing someone say, "Oh, I disagree with that!" It doesn't make sense.

Here's an example. I feel very strongly about the value of community, and whenever I am speaking with people about it, advocating a less mobile and hectic way of life, I tell this story of my former father-in-law:

Harry Magner was orphaned in the 1920s, when he and his brother were in their early teens. At the time they were living in Seattle, but they had an aunt and uncle in Buffalo. They had a used Model T Ford, and drove the car east from Washington to New York, working when they needed cash to buy food and gasoline. It took them over a month to make the journey.

When they arrived in Buffalo, the boys enrolled in high school. The next year, Harry met Marge. They were married just out of school; Harry went to work for the local bank, and they were able to buy a house in the suburbs. Harry and Marge had a son, and then twin daughters. They joined the local church where Harry served as treasurer, youth group leader, and deacon.

They never moved their home. For the next sixty years, they lived in the same house, raised three well-adjusted children, traveled a little with friends, played cards often, and served in just about every capacity that the community offered. Harry retired from the bank after more than forty years on the job. He died of cancer at home when he was eighty. He was cheerful to the end, and his house was full of friends and family when his spirit left the earth.

While Harry was alive, he was the happiest and most grateful person I knew. Several hundred people attended his funeral. He rarely left Buffalo; he didn't accomplish anything that will be printed in a history book; yet the accolades about his love and devotion to family and community set a benchmark for my own life. His oldest friend present at the funeral had known him for more than seventy years.

Plenty of data record the delinquency rates of kids who move a lot. Plenty of surveys track the happiness of people who stay in communities for long periods of time. If I were advocating a change in policy that would allow people to remain in their communities, this data would be valuable, but it would not replace the story of Harry Magner. I'm sure that as you read this story, you were relating to it in some way. If you have moved a lot, you might have been reflecting on the consequences. You might have been thinking of parents or friends who have also had the experience of living in one place for a long time. Certainly, you weren't trying to figure out if my numbers were accurate, or wondering about the source of my information.

To most of us, stories are reality; certainly much more so than some concepts, data, or a few insights. Using stories to communicate links us with others on a human plane.

Connecting Through Personal Experience

While we can relate to others effectively with stories about situations regarding other people in our lives, connection will be strongest when what we have to say is real—when we can relate our own relevant personal experience. Metaphor is twice removed, like a copy of a photographic print. Story is once removed, like the negative itself. The personal experience of someone we are directly communicating with is the real thing, not removed at all; and because leadership is personal, the leader's life experience is, without doubt, the best grist for authentic connection.

I can illustrate from my own experience.

One of my own fundamental values is the freedom and ability to express oneself fully. I'm passionate about this subject, probably as a result of being the smallest kid in my school classes, feeling like I had to speak louder than other kids to be heard. I was also raised on a farm, where each member of the family subordinated his will for the good of the family enterprise. As a final influence, I had an older brother who was substantially larger than I was, and who was occasionally willing to use his size to make sure his little brother didn't become a pest. We had always been close, but his early influence contributed to my later need to be heard. In short, it seemed that few circumstances of my early life encouraged me to speak. Therein lies the source of my passion for self-expression. Accordingly, throughout my corporate and teaching career, I've been a proponent of building skills for developing other people, or, in today's jargon, "empowerment."

As a result of this passion for self-expression, I have done some analysis of the components of good delegation. While most authorities on this subject correctly identify the objective components of teaching, giving authority, and assigning responsibility, few have acknowledged the subjective or emotional components of delegation. Clearly, when real delegation occurs, the boss feels a sense of insecurity, some anxiety that the job will not get done properly. The boss also might feel some loss, as the delegation means letting the student go, no longer connected by the tether of the teaching relationship.

I advocate the use of subjective measurements to confirm that the boss has truly empowered someone else. I maintain that if you have taught someone well and then given them complete authority and responsibility, you will feel some anxiety and loss. I can offer data in support of this assertion, but the most compelling evidence is my own profound experience of delegating as a parent. Since everyone in my audience has been a child, and many of them are currently parents, they inevitably relate to this narrative:

In 1982, I became a single parent, and had sole custody and responsibility for my two sons, then thirteen and eleven years old. For the next few years, we grew uncommonly close through a series of personal trials. I had left my career at IBM and finances were particularly tight; then I had remarried too hurriedly and caused some further anxiety. Nonetheless, the boys had done well in school and in life, having formed fast friendships and developed solid values. I took tremendous pride (and still do) in their attitude toward life and in the way they conduct themselves.

My oldest son, Jeff, was admitted to the University of California at San Diego in the fall of 1986, and I elected to drive him to school from San Francisco, a distance of approximately five hundred miles. It was September, but still hot in California's central valley along Interstate 5. We drove the ten hours, making small talk and generally cracking nervous jokes. I tried to be serious about the future a couple of times, but found Jeff only interested in the next months of testing his ability to fend for himself, a very natural concern.

We arrived at the campus in midafternoon and I helped him move into his dorm room, the oldest housing on campus but in a choice location and setting. It faced a large square carpet of grass in a quadrangle perimetered by six two-story green buildings. On this particular day, it was sparkling with the nervous laughter of new students and the brilliant colors of Southern California clothes.

I helped him move his stuff into a second-story room and started playing "Mr. Mom." I hung pictures, made his bed, and unpacked his Eagle Scout mug. In my concentration I had failed to notice the growing contingent of kids in the hall, the escalating sound of music, and the lack of interest on his part in what I was doing. To Jeff's credit, he was very patient, but when his roommate arrived and they began to compare histories, I realized that I had overstayed. We agreed that I would come back that evening to take him to dinner, and I returned to the hotel for a swim. I was beginning to feel anxious.

That evening, just at sunset, I made my way back across the quad to his room. As I approached, I could see the lights of his room and hear the music of the growing gathering of excited newcomers. By now the group was co-ed and there was some dancing in the common area. It was difficult to get his attention as I stood in his room door.

Of course, everything I had done was changed. The beds were on opposite sides of the room, the pictures had been replaced with posters, and the Eagle Scout mug was not to be seen. He was engaged in conversation with a group of three students and clearly not pining away for an early dinner with his Dad.

I finally waved an arm and he joined me in the hall. I suggested that rather than go to dinner he should stay with his friends and that I would see him in the morning for breakfast before I had to return up the coast. He protested just enough, then agreed, letting me know that he was looking forward to breakfast.

I left, and hurried down the stairs and into a nearby grove of eucalyptus trees, where I walked alone and cried for about an hour and a half.

This was true delegation. I had done my best to train this young man for the task ahead. I now had to give up any aspect of control over his life and let him live it. My role would be only to respond, not to direct. And because I loved him, it hurt.

I've relayed this experience many times. It never fails to connect me to my own conviction on the subject, and it never fails to connect me with others. Everyone can see themselves in one of the roles in the experience. The feelings that these events engender not only strengthen my advocacy, they also provide a convincing realization that true delegation is difficult; that in the absence of a certain amount of rich and wonderful emotional pain, delegation probably doesn't happen. Because I had this experience and am able to connect it metaphorically with other instances of delegation, I can speak on this subject with a great deal of intensity.

Taking Jeff to college was only one experience. My parents' values, my upbringing, my parents' deaths, my experience on the farm, my successes and failures as an athlete and scholar, my choice of college, my studies, playing music, my children's births, my career at IBM, running across the United States, trips to the old Soviet Union, the times when I have been hurt, elated, sick, married, divorced . . . these and *all* of the other less notable experiences of my life have formed the convictions that compel me to speak. Fortunately, my biography is not yet over. Experiences that I have today will help form the basis for my conviction in years to come.

So it is with you. Using the relevant experiences of your life to support your advocacy for change is the most effective way of connecting to your own conviction and assuring an authentic bond with others. All this belongs in your Leadership Communication Guide.

The Rules of Engagement—Authenticity Is Paramount

As powerful as stories and experiences are, they are fraught with potential for manipulation. This is all the more reason to be careful as you develop any change message. Stories can be made up and then generalized illegitimately in an attempt to prove a point. Without data, such generalization is only manipulation. Relating personal experience can also be manipulative and even substantially detract from a leader's credibility. Remember that we now know that our brains actually can and do recognize intention—although we are not always conscious of that fact. Everyone has had that feeling, when they are communicating, that something is off, there is a lack of understanding, something unsaid, but few of us have the courage to say so in the moment. To others to whom a leader relates, nothing is so clearly inauthentic as an attempt to move them with a disingenuous story or experience. Here are some guidelines to help avoid these pitfalls.

The experience must be clearly relevant to the point you are making. My former colleague Harvey Stone likes to refer to the sharing of irrelevant stories as "therapy"—and it certainly can have that flavor. If the experience you relate does not support your advocacy, others lose interest.

Personal experiences must be related from memory, not from a script. When I begin the story of taking Jeff to college, I transport myself through imagination back to the car, back to the central valley of California. With my son in the passenger's seat, I relate what I see and feel during that reverie. I know that the images in my memory will generate a legitimate emotional response in me, and I know that others will respond in a much more holistic way to that actual memory than to a recitation. Consider, would someone you trust read you a report of a real incident, or tell you of experiencing that incident?

When his son was injured in a tragic accident in the late 1980s, soon-to-be vice president Al Gore was often interviewed about the impact of the incident on his life and his political career. His answers were always spontaneous, authentic, and touching. Clearly this incident was a turning point in Gore's maturity as a human being. Unfortunately, the version that he told at the 1992 Democratic Convention was cued and rehearsed, and to anyone who had heard the story authentically, its staging there felt like a mere emotional appeal for support. There was a calculated personal tone, aimed at manipulating rather than connecting, and to me, it hurt Gore's human credentials. Had he simply left the script and read from his internal memory of the day of the accident, letting the camera operators fend for themselves to find Gore's son in the candidate's box, he might well have connected with himself again, and therefore with the audience as well. Regardless of how compelling the facts of a story are, the reporting of those facts and the emotional authenticity will trump the circumstances themselves.

When the Republican candidates were debating in the 2012 primary, one seemed strident and aloof, one seemed like an unyielding zealot, while another, the favorite, couldn't seem to connect with any consistency. He presented himself as defended and proper, and I for one wished I could see the real person just once. I realize that press coverage, innuendo, and a constant stream of news might make such an approach frightening. Still, I longed for a connection, as I believe others did.

Another rule of engagement is to leave nothing out. The memory of a substantive experience includes all aspects of the original happening, the sensory-rich details that guide the imagination of those you are relating to and bring your own passion to the surface. Exactly what you saw and heard, exactly what you perceived and felt; these minutiae will turn the experience into one that taps your own heart and the collective heart of others.

Finally, when relating personal experience, you have to use the first person. Revert to "you," "they," or "one" and your message becomes an opinion rather than a reality, an example rather than an experience. Others might get the lesson, but they will miss the connection that is so vital to hearing your authentic voice.

Connecting with others—creating limbic resonance—is largely dependent on your choice to be vulnerable and authentic in what you communicate. The content of the message will determine what comes of that connection. The next chapters provide a framework for content, specific instructions for asking yourself the right questions to assure that your Communication Guide is complete, and some examples that will give you the experience to make your leadership communication both clear and deep.

Notes

1. For more general discussion of brain function as it relates to human connection, see Robert K. Cooper and Ayman Sawaf, *Executive EQ* (New York: Grosset Putnam, 1996) and T. Lewis, F. Amini, and R. Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York: Random House, 2000).
2. Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, p. 64.
3. A. M. Paul, "Your Brain on Fiction," *New York Times*, March 17, 2012; available online: www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-neuroscience-of-your-brain-on-fiction.html
4. Paul, "Your Brain on Fiction."
5. C. G. Jung, *Approaching the Unconscious: Man and His Symbols*, edited by Carl Jung (New York: Dell, 1964), p. 3.
6. Jung, *Approaching the Unconscious*.
7. J. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Viking, 1964). Originally published 1916.
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9. For a thorough discussion of the metaphor as a descriptor of business, see Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organization* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997).
10. R. Mahoney, "Politics, Technology, and Economic Growth," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 59, no. 20 (1993): 627.
11. D. Goldin, "The Light of a New Age," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 58 no. 24 (1992): 741.
12. H. Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1983), p. 147.
13. J. Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss: Mythology and Personal Transformation*, edited by David Kudler (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2004), p. 7.
14. Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss*, p. 8.
15. Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss*, p. 9.
16. J. Martin and M. E. Power, "Organizational Stories: More Vivid and Persuasive Than Quantitative Data," in *Psychological Foundations of Organizational Behavior*, edited by B. M. Staw (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1982), 161–168; also see J. M. Kouzes and B. P. Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993).