

# The Balancing Act

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There is something interesting about the world we live in today.

We have more ways to communicate than perhaps any generation before us. We have email, text messages, social media, video calls, surveys, newsletters, group chats, websites, and notifications constantly competing for our attention.

Yet with all those ways to communicate, sometimes it seems like we are listening to each other less.

That's the balancing act.

Whether you're leading an organization, managing employees, volunteering in your community, raising a family, maintaining a marriage, or simply trying to be a good friend, communication matters.

But more communication doesn't necessarily mean better communication. Sometimes more becomes noise.

## When the message gets lost

Think about your own habits. How many emails arrive every day that you never open? How many social media posts do you scroll past without reading? How many notifications disappear from your phone almost automatically?

It's probably not because every one of those messages is unimportant. There is simply too much competing for our attention.

Leaders can unintentionally create the same problem.

We might have important information about workplace practices, legislation, organizational priorities, upcoming events, improvement opportunities, or successes that deserve recognition. Because we believe the information is important, our instinct is often to communicate more.

Another email. Another post. Another meeting. Another survey. Another reminder.

Eventually, however, something happens. People stop hearing us.

The problem isn't necessarily the message. The problem may be the volume. Leadership requires us to recognize that distinction.

The question shouldn't always be, "How do we communicate more?" Sometimes the better question is:

**"How do we communicate better?"**

## Five questions before you hit send

Before communicating something, consider asking yourself five simple questions:

1. **Does this need to be communicated?**
2. **Who actually needs this information?**
3. **What is the most important thing they need to understand?**
4. **What is the best way to communicate it?**
5. **Do I need a response — or do I simply need them to be informed?**

Those questions can dramatically change communication.

A three-page email might become three paragraphs. A 30-question survey might become five meaningful questions. A meeting might become a phone call. And sometimes an email might become a conversation over coffee.

Good communication isn't measured by how much information we distribute. It's measured by whether people understand what matters.

## Listening is part of communication

There is another side to the balancing act that may be even more important. Listening.

Communication cannot simply be about getting our message out. We also have to create opportunities for other people to get their message in. That's where leadership and everyday relationships begin to overlap.

Think about conversations with your spouse, children, friends, coworkers, or teammates. How often are we truly listening?

Sometimes while another person is talking, we're already preparing our response. We're thinking about what we're going to say next. We're thinking about how to solve their problem. We're waiting for an opening to explain our side.

Technically, we're hearing them. But we're not necessarily listening. There is a difference.

Listening says:

**“For the next few minutes, what you have to say matters more than what I have to say.”**

That's powerful.

## Not every problem needs a solution

This may be especially important in our closest relationships. When someone we care about tells us they're frustrated, worried, disappointed, or struggling, our natural reaction may be to fix it.

We offer advice. We explain what we would do. We tell them how they should handle the situation.

Sometimes that's exactly what they need. But sometimes they don't need us to fix anything. They need someone to listen.

There is tremendous value in looking at another person and asking, "What's on your mind?" — and then giving them the space to answer.

No phone. No television. No interruptions. No immediately turning the conversation back toward ourselves. Just attention.

Sometimes the greatest thing we can give another person isn't advice. It's our attention.

## **The leadership connection**

The same principle applies to leadership. Strong leaders don't simply communicate expectations. They create opportunities for feedback.

They don't simply ask questions. They make people comfortable enough to answer honestly. They don't conduct surveys simply to say they gathered information. They ask questions because they're prepared to learn from the answers.

That requires balance. We have to provide direction without controlling every conversation. We have to share information without overwhelming people. We have to advocate for priorities while remaining willing to hear different perspectives. And sometimes we have to stop talking long enough to discover something we didn't know.

A leader who always has the answer may eventually create a team that stops offering ideas. A leader who listens creates something very different. They create ownership.

People begin to believe their voice matters. And when people believe their voice matters, they're much more likely to become part of the solution.

## **Connection over communication**

Maybe that's the larger lesson. Our goal shouldn't simply be communication. Our goal should be connection.

Communication delivers information. Connection builds relationships.

Communication can happen through an email. Connection usually requires attention.

Communication tells people what's happening. Connection helps us understand how people feel about what's happening.

We need both. That's the balancing act.

And there isn't a perfect formula. Different situations require different approaches. Sometimes the right answer is an email to a thousand people. Sometimes it's a five-question survey. Sometimes it's a social media post. Sometimes it's a meeting.

And sometimes the most important leadership decision we can make is to sit across from one person with a cup of coffee and listen.

## **One person. One conversation. One cup.**

That's why this Coffee Cup Family message matters to me.

We sometimes believe impact has to be measured in thousands. Thousands of followers. Thousands of views. Thousands of people reached.

But leadership and relationships don't always work that way. Sometimes change begins with one person.

One person who finally feels heard. One conversation that clears up a misunderstanding. One conversation that produces a new idea. One conversation that repairs a relationship. One conversation that reminds someone they matter.

That's impact.

So this week, think about your own balancing act. Are you communicating too much — or not enough? Are you listening to understand — or simply waiting to respond? Are you giving the people around you information — or giving them your attention?

And perhaps most importantly:

**Are you communicating with people, or are you connecting with them?**

Grab your cup. Find one person. Start one conversation. Then listen.

You never know where that conversation might lead.

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**One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.**

COFFEE CUP WORKBOOK

Episode 13

# THE BALANCING ACT

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**One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## The Big Idea

Effective communication isn't about saying more.

**It's about making what we say matter —  
and creating enough space to hear what others have to say.**

Use the following exercises individually, with a leadership team, workplace group, organization, family, or small-group discussion.

# 1. Your Communication Check

Think about how you normally communicate with others.

**What are the three methods you use most often?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Which method do you rely on too heavily?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Which method creates the most meaningful conversations?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Reflection.** Are you choosing communication methods because they're best for the person receiving the message — or because they're easiest for you?

## 2. The “Too Much” Test

Think about your workplace, organization, team, or family. Where might communication have become noise?

- ☐ Too many emails
- ☐ Too many meetings
- ☐ Too many social media posts
- ☐ Too many text or group messages
- ☐ Too many surveys or questions
- ☐ Too many priorities at once
- ☐ Not enough communication
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**What is one thing you could simplify?**

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**What information actually matters most?**

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### 3. Before You Hit Send

Take one message you need to communicate this week and answer:

**Does this really need to be communicated?**

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**Who actually needs to receive it?**

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**What is the ONE thing they need to understand?**

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**What is the best method?**

☐ Email

☐ Text

☐ Social media

☐ Meeting

☐ Phone call

☐ Face-to-face conversation

☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Can I say it more clearly or simply?**

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## 4. The Listening Check

Rate yourself on each statement.

*1 = rarely*

*5 = consistently*

| Statement                                                      | Rating  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| I listen without interrupting.                                 | ___ / 5 |
| I put away distractions during important conversations.        | ___ / 5 |
| I ask questions before offering solutions.                     | ___ / 5 |
| I listen to understand rather than prepare my response.        | ___ / 5 |
| I make people feel comfortable disagreeing with me.            | ___ / 5 |
| I don't automatically turn someone's story back toward myself. | ___ / 5 |

**Which area needs the most work?**

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## 5. Everyday Relationships

Think about someone important in your life. It could be your spouse, family member, friend, coworker, teammate, or someone you haven't really talked with lately.

**Who is that person?** \_\_\_\_\_

**When was the last time you gave that person your undivided attention?**

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**Do you normally listen to them — or try to solve their problems?**

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**What could you do differently during your next conversation?**

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## 6. Leadership Reflection

If you lead others, consider these questions.

**Do the people around me feel comfortable telling me something I don't want to hear?**

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**Do I ask for feedback and then actually use it?**

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**Could people clearly identify our top three priorities?**

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**Am I communicating for understanding — or simply distributing information?**

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**What is one change I can make this week?**

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## 7. The Five-Question Rule

Before your next survey, meeting, email, or request for feedback, imagine you were limited to only five questions or five key points.

**What would they be?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**If these are the five things that really matter, what can I remove?**

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## 8. Coffee Cup Challenge

This week's challenge is intentionally simple.

Choose one person. Put your phone away. Remove the distractions. Sit down together — coffee optional, but highly recommended.

Ask:

**“What’s on your mind?”**

Then listen. Don't immediately offer advice. Don't interrupt. Don't turn the conversation toward yourself. Give that person your attention.

**Afterward, write down what you learned.**

**Who did you talk with?**

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**What did you learn by listening?**

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## 8. Coffee Cup Challenge (continued)

**Did anything surprise you?**

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**What would you have missed if you hadn't taken the time to listen?**

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# Final Cup

Finish these three sentences.

**I need to communicate less about...**

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**I need to communicate better about...**

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**I need to listen more when...**

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## Take This With You

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**More communication doesn't always create more understanding.**

Sometimes leadership means speaking.

Sometimes leadership means informing.

Sometimes leadership means asking.

And sometimes leadership means doing something much harder:

**Being quiet long enough to truly hear another person.**

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**One Person. One Conversation. One Cup.**