

See Yourself as Tour Guide of Your Ideas

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I just returned from a month long tour of the Asian Pacific rim, visiting Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. In each country, I had a different tour guide. What struck me as impressive were their extraordinary communication skills. It occurs to me that we need to function as tour guides of our messages to ensure our ideas are heard. Here are the things I noticed our great tour guides did that are worth emulating.

- **Spoke Slowly.** Obviously, none of our guides had English as their first language. To compensate for any differences in pronunciation, they spoke slowly. They tried to carefully enunciate, even though some letters were difficult for them. Wouldn't it make your ideas sink in if you spoke slowly instead of rushing? Wouldn't speaking at a slower pace be enormously helpful to those who are not native born speakers.
- **Framed up what we would be seeing.** If we were about to go to a temple, before we would enter, they shared why the next site was significant and what we were about to see. Maybe it had to do with the age of the temple or the intricacy of the carvings, etc. In your environment, do you give a short overview of why the meeting is important and what actions you will be requesting as you conclude? So often, we skip the overview and jump right into the details.
- **Looked us in the eye.** To make sure their explanations were resonating, our tour guides watched our facial expressions, looking for any indicators that said, "Not understood." Many of us think we are looking people in the eye, but mostly, we scan the room. Without strong eye contact, we cannot read the reactions of our listeners. Do you scan or engage people one at a time with sustained eye contact?
- **Took ownership.** If by the look on our faces, our guides could see we didn't under-

stand, they would re-explain. They would automatically apologize for not being clear or for their poor English. Do you pay attention to whether people seem to be understanding? Do you routinely pause and ask if an explanation is clear to everyone? Do you re-explain in simpler words? Do you apologize for not being clear?

- **Exuded passion.** Our tour guides were very proud of their national monuments, whether they were temples, waterfalls or scenic vistas. Their enthusiasm came across in their voices and in the descriptive words they chose. When you speak, would your listeners hear your passion? Would they be able to picture what you said through the colorful language you used?
- **Shared stories.** To highlight points, for example, about the Vietnam War, the guides all shared stories of how the war personally affected their families. Many of us feel it is inappropriate to share background about ourselves, but it is our personal stories that people remember. What do you do to make your ideas vivid?
- **Gave us the abridged version.** During my month long tour, I saw many Buddhist and Hindu temples. To a westerner, these are complicated religions. Our guides typically gave us three important things to remember about any site. They were very sensitive to boring us with too many details. If I asked, they would go deeper, but they would wait for an invite. As you think about your own explanations, how simple are your explanations? When ideas are simply explained, decisions are easy.

Touring four countries and retaining what I learned isn't easy. Great tour guides made all the difference. I encourage you to think of yourself as a tour guide to your message and carefully guide people through your ideas. By paying attention to

Continued on page 2

the ideas listed above, you will enhance your ability to be successful.

***Question:** What additional points can you add to make your ideas stand out? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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