

From Ordinary Communicator to Extraordinary—What Are the Steps

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The New Year is always a time to think about making changes to some of our habits. What better time than now to think about making some adjustments in the way we communicate! The tricky part is that change is always uncomfortable. It's easier to go back to our old ways. However, if you want to be considered an extraordinary communicator instead of an ordinary one, "refinements" need to be made.

As you look at the way you currently communicate, it undoubtedly falls within one of four levels. We all begin at Level One. However, communicators with impact function at Level Four.

Level One—the unconscious incompetent. In this level, a speaker is ineffective, but unaware that he is not doing well. For example, this speaker may fill his speech with all sorts of non-words or lack eye contact, but he is oblivious. Most individuals don't seek help at this level because they are "unconsciously" incompetent. In fact, it may be difficult for these individuals to accept suggestions for improvement because they feel they are "just fine." It is only when they get a bad review that they are possibly ready to do something about it.

Level Two—the conscious incompetent. People who are consciously incompetent are still not effective, but now they realize there are some things they could do differently. Often, it is because they take a class or purchase a DVD, and, by doing so, they become aware that there are some odd behaviors that they also have. However, in this level, they still haven't firmly committed to doing something about them.

Level Three—the conscious competent. Individuals who are consciously competent now know what would make them a better communicator, and they

work very hard at improvement. For example, they concentrate on looking people in the eye versus reading from their speaker notes or their slides. They do meaningful gestures instead of fidgeting. The trouble with this level is that because it does require extreme concentration, people feel it is too mechanical. Some say it interferes with remembering content. Although almost at the pinnacle, often, people give up and go back to their old ways. However, if they commit to practicing in "low stakes" situations, such as in meetings or at home, they can move to Level Four, the desired state for any communicator.

Level Four—the unconscious competent. In this stage, people are effective without thinking about having to do certain things. They are relaxed and don't have to think about what needs to be done. New habits have been formed. They have progressed from Ordinary to Extraordinary.

The question that always surfaces is how long does it take to become unconsciously competent? The answer is "It depends." It can take from three weeks to three months to three years depending upon the type of commitment one makes and the number of things we need to change. However, the starting point for any communicator who wants to become known for having impact on an audience needs to be to understand what skills chip away at credibility. Once that is known, a speaker should try to master one skill at a time until it becomes natural.

A poor presenter can kill any deal, but a powerful one can sway decision makers. Make sure that you put your best foot forward by committing to improve how you communicate.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.