

BUSINESS EYE

The art of listening

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This week's meagre attempt at communicating something which at best might be of tangential value to your working life, comes to you from 39,000 feet above the Atlantic.

I am high-tailing it back to Blighty from the Caribbean in what will no doubt prove to be a failed attempt at making something worthwhile of the third short working week we have enjoyed in close succession.

I've been thinking a lot about communication recently.

Despite the fact that we are swimming in communication devices from iPads to laptops to smartphones, and are drown-

ing in what has become a perpetual storm of multi-media messaging, effective communication remains a holy grail which rarely, if ever, sees the light of day.

The first problem with communicating is ages old and has been with us since well before the rise of Facebook and Twitter.

Put simply, it is the inadvertent over-amplification of unnecessary aspects of irrelevant supportive content, or not keeping the message simple.

Keep it simple, stupid, is a powerful maxim for any communication, be it an email, a sales proposal, a quiet word with an errant member of staff or a speech to thousands.

So, too, has the second challenge been with us forever.

Between the two voices inside our heads, observation of our surroundings and replaying memories from the past and daydreams of the future, there is not a lot of processing capability left to focus on attentive listening.

Half of the time, when someone else is speaking, we are re-

ally wondering whether we turned the gas ring off, and the other half we are working out what we can say next to win the argument, or at least avoid appearing like some sort of gormless social pariah who knows less about Kim Kardashian's bubble butt botox than an interesting person would.

And these days this all happens if people don't suddenly transplant themselves mentally to somewhere completely different by checking their emails or Instagram feed.

If clear messaging and active listening are two of the three foundation legs of effective communication, then the third is the level of trust placed in the quality of the message itself.

How often does someone mumble or deliver a voice message laced with an emotion that gets in the way? How often do you receive reports that prove to be inaccurate? How much are you prepared to believe someone for whom you have little respect?

With the sheer volume of messages being thrown at your

PHOTO BY CHARLY TRIBALLEAU/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Phones are one of the many reasons why people can get distracted while talking business

team members every minute of every day, it is a wonder any communication happens at all these days.

When you are speaking in a team meeting, especially if you speak for as long as I do (mental note to self... must stop domi-

nating meetings), don't for an instant assume your message has been understood clearly, or indeed in the same way, by those present, that they have been listening, nor indeed if they have believed a single word you have said.

Communicating effectively is essential and needs your focused attention if you are in any way serious about building a high-performance culture.

Is that clear? Have you been listening?

Do you believe me?