

# Interpretation is key

WRITTEN BY

## ALEX PRATT

Founder of Serious Readers in Bierton and chairman of Institute of Directors South



www.bucksherald.co.uk  
@Bucks\_Herald

**P**robably the biggest failure in business going on in full sight and ignored by pretty much everyone is the fact that clear unequivocal communication rarely takes place. We all assume that what is said matches what is understood.

Given the fundamental nature of communication in making a success of a business, you would think that we would all have mastered this.

Most businesses are all about communication. You communicate and do deals with suppliers. You have to get through to your staff and it's a rare business that doesn't

need to communicate actively with its customers to get them interested, serve them and to get them to come back. The best businesses get these groups talking as advocates to generate word of mouth.

The challenging issue is not what to say, although we can agonise for weeks over every word and comma in a piece of advertising copy, but understanding what is going to be heard. The same piece of communication will mean two completely different things to two different people. Communication is not about the broadcasting, it is about narrow listening. We fail to make this distinction, which is why we fail to communicate. To communicate effectively with someone is mostly about understanding what they are hearing, and not about what you say.

Take the targeted bombing of chemical weapons sites in Syria. We have all been served with the same basic information and reasoning. Some have heard we've sent a

clear unequivocal message to the Syrians and Russians that we will not sit idly by and that "enough is enough". However, this clear message has not been heard by most. There are some for who the episode means Theresa May has become Donald Trump's poodle and disrespected Parliament.

For others, the message is that there must have been no weapons because we struck before the weapons inspectors had the chance to verify their use on the ground. And who knows what Mr Putin has taken away from the event.

Communication only occurs in the receiver if they are listening, and every person being communicated to is playing their own pre-existing story of the way of the world which any new evidence is used to re-enforce. This means you will be getting a message from me that is unique to your listening of what I have written here.

Communication is all in the interpretation, not in the scripting.