

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

On May 10th, Microsoft announced its whopping \$8.5 billion-dollar purchase of Skype. Why would the software giant pay such a princely sum for a company that had suffered \$689 million dollars worth of losses in the previous year? Put simply, because Skype has lived up to its stated purpose: “to break down barriers in communication.” For eight years, the VOIP provider has been on the leading edge of harnessing Internet technology to allow people to connect with one another across the globe.

Let’s look at three communication barriers Skype’s innovations have helped to break down and how leaders must learn to overcome similar communication challenges.

Distance

When phone customers dial to a destination outside of their network, rates skyrocket due to the connection fees required to route to the originating call to its intended recipient. Also, as anyone who has ever been billed roaming charges can attest, making calls when traveling across international borders incurs substantial costs. By translating voice waves into data packets and transferring them across the World Wide Web, Skype circumvented pricey dimensions of international calling.

Distance acts as a barrier to communication for leaders who face the challenge of casting vision to a network of middle managers, front line workers, customers, and partners. The farther the vision must travel, the weaker it becomes. When the leader at the top is the only one who can express the vision, he or she has little to no chance of seeing it spread throughout the organization. However, by equipping and empowering leaders at all levels to articulate the vision in a compelling way, the best communicators overcome the distance separating them from their audience.

Cost

Not only does Skype reduce surcharges associated with long-distance calls across international boundaries, it allows any customers to get in touch with anyone, anywhere for no cost whatsoever. Skype decided to keep its basic communication service and software free for users. As a result, people can chat with one another, for free, from anyplace on the globe as long as they are connected to the Internet. By making its basic product free, Skype attracted millions of users. Then, Skype marketed extra services like ringtones, voicemail, and group video calling to earn its revenues.

Obviously, a product has far greater appeal when its manufacturers have figured out how to remove costs so that customers can access the product with little to no expense. Communication works much the same way. An audience will only invest a certain amount of energy to understand a message. The more time and attention

people must pay to absorb what you say, the fewer people will connect with your message. As a communicator, you must eliminate the costs upfront by investing your time and energy to make the message simple, to put it in context, and to share it in a creative and entertaining way.

Diverse Audiences

People use a variety of electronic devices to communicate with one another, thus any application designed for widespread usage must function across a variety of platforms. Skype has been engineered to work well on a wide range of gadgets. Thanks to its flexibility, Microsoft can employ Skype to help its customers connect across several platforms: personal computers, smartphones, email clients, gaming consoles, etc. With Skype, people no longer are limited to calling one another on a phone, but they can talk together while playing video games or surfing the Internet, too.

Just as Skype has learned to tailor its product to appeal to customers using a variety of communication channels so leaders must broadcast their messages in several different ways to connect with diverse audiences. Not everyone loves to read books; some people obtain and retain information better by watching videos or participating in learning exercises. Leaders who communicate the most effectively deliver their messages in numerous formats and share those messages across a wide assortment of platforms. By communicating through outlets familiar to their audience, leaders “speak their language,” and influence the greatest possible number of people.



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