

CHAPTER 20:

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# ACTION THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS

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*“The meaning of your communication is the  
response you get.” – NLP presupposition*

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*I took responsibility for engaging a consultant to perform a review of a technically complex cross-functional process.*

*Finding someone with the skill set we needed was pretty challenging, but in the end, one of my Line Managers pulled someone out of the bag for us.*

*We held a meeting to scope out and organise the work he was going to do.*

*I'm going to be honest; I didn't really warm to him. He was a bit too much of a stuffed suit for me, so I hurried things along to minimise the amount of time I had to spend in his company.*

*I also decided that I would delegate the project's management to one of my Line Managers, so I spent a few minutes with her outlining what I wanted.*

*Two months later, the final report was ready, and I sat down to read it. Anxiety welled up inside me as I read the contents and slowly realised that the work had gone in completely the wrong direction to what I had envisioned.*

*I'd invested £50,000 in a review that didn't do what I wanted it to do.*

*As I sat back in my chair and ran over how I had got to this terrible point, I had the inescapable insight that this was my fault.*

Some conversations take place for the sake of the discussion itself. For example, when we talk with family over dinner or 'chew the fat' with friends in the pub, we often have no outcome or intention for the conversation.

We are concerned with conversations designed to compel action, whether it be support, collaboration or a decision from the other person. In other words, how do we gain the commitment of the other person?

The purposeful conversation always comes to a point where we ask or confirm that the person will do what we have requested and commit to the next step. This exposes us to the potential for rejection or not getting the answer we wanted.

This can be easy enough if this is a simple, well understood, or often repeated task.

It becomes more challenging when we ask others to make a decision with a level of uncertainty attached to it or take a complex or novel action.

Ensuring everyone involved understands and is committed to taking the decisions and actions arising from conversations is the last step in closing the communication cycle.

Always confirm understanding...

Once a conversation concludes, we can quickly get distracted, forget or even allow our thinking to begin to undo all of the commitment we had at the time<sup>32</sup>.

At least one quick next step should be programmed after an agreement is made in a conversation.

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32 In sales, this is referred to as the law of diminishing intent (the propensity of people to change their mind if no deal is done on the day).

Ultimately, when we don't get the action or decision we thought we were expecting or had been agreed, it will be for one of these simple reasons:

1. They didn't understand what, how, why, who, where, or when. So when we agree to any action that we aren't sure of, one of two things happen. Either we add our own interpretations and meanings to the action, or we procrastinate/avoid it.
2. They didn't want to do it, and this wasn't resolved when they agreed to take action. So sometimes, we make vague commitments that we don't really mean to avoid social embarrassment.
3. They didn't have the resources (time, money, energy, skills, contacts and tools).
4. The consequences of not doing the task (whether positive or negative) were not strong enough to overcome their resistance.

These should be dealt with at the point of commitment. That is why the meaning of communication is the response you get.

With the commitment and support of the people we need, we are ready to move in the direction of travel, leading us to our desired outcomes. Then, finally, we can cross the threshold into the action itself.