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## Are You Conveying Information

## or

## Are You Asking for Commitment/Cooperation?

## Select your communications tools based on business objectives and not convenience.

Environmental Interiors, Inc. manufactures and installs specialized metal finishes in large buildings like airports, museums, and stadiums. When this company was a client of ours, CEO John Montgomery would constantly preach the following:

**“Face to Face First; Telephone Second; Voice Mail Third; Email Only To Confirm Meetings or to Write ‘I have been trying to get in touch with you….’”**

The purpose of this article is to explore the Montgomery Method as a framework for eliciting cooperation.

In business communication, is the purpose to convey information or to elicit cooperation/commitment? Confirming a date for a meeting does not require more commitment. But asking the person to free up time to meet with you is asking for commitment.

**Email: “Only To Confirm Meetings.”**

What is unique about the Montgomery method is its clear disdain for e-mail communications. This issue is important to organizations because so much work is done in teams. Many work teams are geographically dispersed. The mobile devices on the market can create text from voice commands. No need to type anymore. E-mail is almost too easy and too inexpensive.

One problem with e-mail is that it is pure text based, thus removing social cues such as voice tone or facial expression. When nuance is drained from communication, there can be unintended consequences. An example might be an interpretation that the sender is angry when that was not the case.

The ease of e-mail response makes replies more “spontaneous.” Spontaneity of communications can create unintended institutional risk. For example, in 2015 a group hacked Sony Corporation’s email system. The group made public movie producer Scott Rudin’s e-mail description of a fellow producer as a “bi-polar lunatic.” He also described a popular actress with a contract at SONY as a “minimally talented spoiled brat.”

In another example, BLOOMBERG BUSINESS reported that Deutsche Bank sold $1.1 billion in collateralized debt obligations to its own institutional clients in 1987 as Deutsche Bank’s co-head Michael Lamont sent off this email: “Keep your fingers crossed but I think we will sell this just before market falls off a cliff.” There is thus an email record showing how Deutsche Bank put its own financial interests above that of its clients.

**What is the Evidence?**

Anecdotal stories are interesting but not evidence. Is there evidence to confirm Montgomery’s disdain for e-mail? C.E. Naquin and his colleagues examined the impact of electronic communications on individual cooperation in groups. (2008). The research team took 120 undergraduate business students and randomly assigned them to groups consisting of four members each. Thus there were 14 groups who would be interacting primarily via e-mail and 16 groups interacting in face-to-face manner. Each group was given tasks that put individuals in a situation of deciding whether to cooperate with fellow team members for potentially greater financial gain versus a path that would only benefit them individually.

A group was considered to be cooperative if at least three of the four members sacrificed individual opportunity for gain for the benefit of the group as a whole. It was considered uncooperative if fewer than three group members made individual benefit sacifice.

Groups that communicated primary online were less cooperative at the .001 level of significance using Chi Square statistical technique. That is a very significant level for a social science experiment.

A replication of the study was done with 64 executive level business students attending MBA programs in the evening. The average age was 40.8 years. Once again, participants were assigned to groups of four members. Eight groups communicated via e-mail and eight groups interacted face-to-face. They were given a different situation that involved a maximization of personal gain versus contributing to the benefit of the group. Once again, online communications resulted in less cooperation. The results were at the .01 level of significance.

**Cooperation vs. Communication:**

If the issue is pure communication, e-mail may be the most efficient technique. For example, you read on linkedin.com that Jane Smith has a new job as partner at a law firm. If your objective is only to communicate that you read the notice and wish to congratulate her, then sending an email or texting her through LinkedIn is sufficient.

But if you would like to gain Jane’s cooperation to introduce you to her fellow-partners or to her clients, then a LinkedIn or e-mail response is the last thing you want to do. This is the important point in the Montgomery Technique.

You want to call her to invite her for a congratulatory lunch. If that is not practical, you wish to call her and speak with her on the phone.

**Touching Potential Job Candidates:**

One of our services is retained search and we subscribe to a LinkedIn service designed for recruiters. This service allows us to easily be in email touch with millions of people. We can search the database and find people to communicate with by title, industry, geography, and size of company. It is a great tool for communicating with people.

LinkedIn is not very effective tool in terms of getting people to cooperate with us. After all we want them to send us their resumes or introduce us to their colleagues. We do not wish to communicate for the sake of communication.

To move from communication to cooperation, we have to use the LinkedIn technology only as a first step in a phone call to establish a relationship to be followed by a face-to-face meeting.

**CEO-Board Communications**.

The distinction between communication and cooperation can be confusing for busy senior executives. Given the demands on personal time, we find that many of our CEO clients like to send out emails with attachments to Board members to keep them in the communications loop.

If the only objective is one-way communications, then e-mail is the technique of choice.

But do CEOs communicate with Board members for the sake of communications only?

Our CEOs tend to use communications for the purposes of influencing Board members. Using the Montgomery Method, one would argue that e-mail is that last technique they should employ.

**Telephone vs. Facebook.**

As a communication tool, Facebook is an excellent communications tool. But it is not a great tool to elicit cooperation. You might wish to spend more time on the phone and less time on your mobile device.

PSYCHOLOGY TODAY readers with long driving commutes to and from work can take advantage of this by using automobile time to engage in hands-free phone conversations. There are several excellent headsets on the market that allow the person on the other end to be unaware that you are driving.

**Using the Montgomery Method as a Leadership Tool:**

We know we have just given you unwelcomed news: effective communications is going to be more time consuming than you thought it would be. To get done what you really want to accomplish, you have to resort to some time consuming “old fashioned” techniques like face-to-face and the phone.

Is it really more time consuming or are we using the wrong template to measure time?

George Bernard Shaw once said, “The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” Assume that Shaw is correct. Can you even begin to calculate the amount of time you spend trying to clear up communications that get botched? How much time, for example, will Deutsche Bank spend in trying to repair its reputation with clients? If you add that amount of spent time to the equation, perhaps the old fashioned techniques might not be such time wasters after all.

Using John Montgomery’s approach gives you a decision template for selecting your communications tools.

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This article was first published by PSYCHOLOGY TODAY. Each month, Maryanne Peabody and Larry Stybel provide their perspectives about leadership and career success. To date three have been over 220,000 downloads:

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Maryanne Peabody and Larry Stybel are co-founders of Boston-based Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc. Based in Boston and with a network of 200 consultants in 25 U.S. cities and 32 countries, its mission is “Leadership and Career Success:” for valued professionals: retained search+, improved relationship management, and campaign management outplacement.

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