

Application Guide

CHARLES DUHIGG ON THE POWER OF SUPERCOMMUNICATORS



BOTTOM LINE:

Communication is a learned skill. The best communicators – supercommunicators – have learned how to connect with the person they are communicating with.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- I. We are at our best when we can sit down and connect with others by listening to what they are trying to tell us, even when we disagree.
- II. The best CEOs know they need to be great communicators to get things done because they can't do everything on their own.
 - A. As a leader, your words weigh more and it becomes more difficult to communicate.
 - B. When you're the boss, there are so many factors that nudge you to monologue, rather than converse, which can stop people from listening to you.
- III. **Communication is a back and forth**, with listening and speaking. It's about asking the right questions and showing that we're listening.
- IV. There are **skills we can practice** that our brains will easily make into habits. The goal is for it to become more natural and automatic to have a conversation, rather than dueling monologues.
 - A. Advances in neural imaging can show what's happening in our brains while we have conversations.
 - B. Every conversation is made up of multiple kinds of conversations. They usually fall into three categories:
 1. **Practical Conversations:** Talking about plans or solving problems.
 2. **Emotional Conversations:** Talking about what we're feeling. Not wanting someone to solve our feelings, but wanting them to empathize.
 3. **Social Conversations:** How we relate to each other in society and the identities that are important to us.
 - C. **Matching Principle:** All conversations are legitimate, but if you're not having the same kind of conversation at the same moment, you will not be able to connect with each other.
- V. Thinking about communication is what makes us good at it.
- VI. Four rules that relate to the kinds of conversations we have:
 - A. **Figure out what kind of conversation you are having.**
 1. The easiest way to do this is to ask questions. Supercommunicators ask 10 to 20 times as many questions as the average person.
 2. Ask deep questions that invite people to talk about their values, beliefs, or experiences. This encourages people to tell you something real about who they are.
 - B. **Share your goals for the conversation, and ask them theirs.**
 1. A goal means sharing what the conversation means to you and understanding what the conversation means to them.
 2. Sharing your conversation goals doesn't have to be super formal; it's not an agenda.
 3. You don't always need to announce it, but knowing the goal will allow you to stay on track in your conversations.
 - C. **Share your feelings and ask about the other person's feelings.**
 1. Emotions influence every one of our conversations whether we recognize them or not.
 2. When you invite their feelings in and introduce your own, two things can happen:

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- a) Emotions are positive and give us something to connect on.
- b) Emotions are negative and voicing them allows us to acknowledge them and then set them aside for a moment to connect with the person.
- 3. Long-term business relationships must engage with this in order to show genuine care.
- 4. By being vulnerable first, you open up space for others to be vulnerable in return.

D. Explore if identities are important to the conversation.

- 1. Similarities can bring us together, but so can our differences—when we acknowledge our differences, we set ourselves up to have more robust conversations to learn who the other person is.
 - a) As you acknowledge differences, you acknowledge identities, but be careful to not just talk about one identity because it can push someone into a stereotype.
 - b) People can think about issues in light of multitudes of identities (e.g. business person, parent, pastor).
- 2. Creating a habit of moving a conversation to the various identities we all hold will make an impact on the other person and remind them that the conversation is not simply transactional.
- 3. The value someone brings to an organization includes their experiences and perspectives.

VII. How to make these rules basic skills.

- A. Listen for when people tell you what kind of conversation they want. Ask yourself what state of mind they are in.
- B. Ask deep questions. Instincts will take over and keep the conversation going by asking follow up questions or sharing personal stories.
- C. Prove that you're listening, especially in conflict, by looping for understanding.
 - 1. Ask a deep question, aiming for feelings rather than facts.
 - 2. Repeat back in your own words what you heard.
 - 3. Ask if you got it right.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR TEAM DISCUSSION

- 1. Describe your past experiences with deep questions. What is your initial reaction to the thought of engaging with deep questions? Why?
- 2. What hinders your ability to listen in times of conflict? What could it look like for you to grow your communication skills in this area?
- 3. How can you implement systems within your organization to clarify the goals and expectations of your team's conversations?
- 4. What steps could your team take in the next month to grow as supercommunicators?

RESOURCES MENTIONED

[The Power of Habit](#) by Charles Duhigg
[Smarter Faster Better](#) by Charles Duhigg
[Supercommunicators](#) by Charles Duhigg

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NEXT EPISODE

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