Communication for a Change

Title: ***Communicating For a Change***

Author: Andy Stanley & Lane Jones

Copyright Date: 2006

Book Description:

Whether you speak from the pulpit, podium, or the front of a classroom, you don't need much more than blank stares and faraway looks to tell you you're not connecting. Take heart before your audience takes leave! You can convey your message in the powerful, life-changing way it deserves to be told. An insightful, entertaining parable that's an excellent guide for any speaker, Communicating for a Change takes a simple approach to delivering effectively.

Book Quotes:

Every time I stand to communicate I want to take one simple truth and lodge it in the heart of the listener. I want them to know that one thing and know what to do with it. Location 109

My goal is to raise a felt need with as many people in the audience as I can. Location 586

The GOD section of the map is where I take this emotional common ground I've established and introduce biblical truth into the discussion. Now I'm providing a solution to the need I just raised. Location 587

Don't raise a felt need that you aren't going to cover from God's Word and answer with an application. The worst thing a communicator can do is over-promise and under-deliver. Location 610

A vision of what our lives, our church, and even our world would look like if only we would apply the truth of God's Word. It's the inspirational part of the message. My goal at this point is to inspire people to make a change. Location 616

You have to connect with your audience around a real need in their lives. Something they feel. You have to raise in them an awareness of a past, present, or future need in their lives that makes them want to listen to you and follow you to the answer. It's not enough to say, 'I have the truth of God's Word up here and it's your job to listen.' That might have worked years ago, but not today. No way. Today you have to show people how the truth impacts their lives." Location 740

At some point we've got to begin caring more for the people in the audience than the person on the platform. When we do, our presentations take on real significance. Until we do, communication is really all about us. Location 1180

Our approach to communicating should be shaped by our goal in communicating. Location 1185

My friend Randy Pope expressed it this way, “Preaching is not talking to people about the Bible; it is talking to people about themselves from the Bible.” Location 1232

Preaching for life change requires far less information and more application. Less explanation and more inspiration. Less first century and more twenty-first century. While I’m a firm believer that all Scripture is equally inspired, observation tells me that all Scripture is not equally applicable. Consequently, preaching for life change requires that we emphasize some texts over others. Location 1237

So what’s your goal? How do you define success? Which concerns you more, how you did on Sunday or what your people are doing on Monday? And if it is the latter, does your approach to communicating support what you are trying to accomplish? Or does it compete? Location 1263

How would you communicate this message if your eighteen-year-old son had made up his mind to walk away from everything you have taught him, morally, ethically, and theologically, unless he had a compelling reason not to? What would you say this morning if you knew that was at stake? Because for somebody’s son out there this may be his last chance. Now quit worrying about your outline. Go out there and plead your case like your own son’s future was at stake. Location 1274

- Our approach to communicating should be shaped by our goal in communicating.
- Our goal should be life change. Specifically, to teach people how to live a life that reflects the values, principles, and truths of the Bible.
- When you commit to preach for life change, your preparation is not complete until you have answered two very important questions: So what? and Now what? Location 1283

The approach we are developing throughout this book assumes that the communicator has a destination in mind; a single idea they want to communicate; a specific thing he or she hopes to accomplish. And once that point, that idea, that destination is clear, then the goal is to bend everything in the message towards that one thing. Location 1293

When I say point I am referring to one of three things: an application, an insight, or a principle. With this approach, every message should have one central idea, application, insight, or principle that serves as the glue to hold the other parts together. On a more macro level, every message series should as well. Location 1325

Perhaps an illustration would help. I just completed a series on the three temptations of Jesus entitled Pause. The point of the series is: Temptation is always a test of your faith, not just your self-control. We came back to that idea throughout the series. But each message within the series was designed to make one specific point as well. They are as follows:

- Temptation can steal your future, your family, and your faith.
- Pause before you seek to meet physical needs in irresponsible ways.
- Cooperate with God, don’t attempt to manipulate Him.
- Never trade the immediate for the important. Location 1327

The key to this approach is refusing to stand up and speak until you know the answer to two questions:

- What is the one thing I want my audience to know?
- What do I want them to do about it? Location 1338

Once you commit to this approach and determine not to quit digging until you find the point, you will be amazed at what you unearth…Single, powerful ideas have a way of penetrating the heart. Location 1423

As I mentioned earlier, once you discover the one thing, the next step is to go back and orient your entire message around your point. Remember, we are taking people on a journey. Once you've identified the destination, you owe it to your audience to make the path clear and direct. That means you cut away the things that are not pertinent to the subject. Location 1426

Once you have discovered your point and rebuilt your message around it, the next step is to craft a single statement or phrase that makes it stick. It needs to be as memorable as possible. This will help you as well as your audience. If it is short and memorable then it will be easier for you to blend it in throughout your message. If it is a well-crafted statement, it will be more obvious to your audience that this is your point. Location 1443

The sermons that have put you to sleep were delivered by men with information but no burden. A burden brings passion to preaching. It transforms lifeless theology into compelling truth. Location 1503

In a one point message it is essential for the communicator to know the answer to two questions: What is the one thing I want my audience to know? What do I want them to do about it? For most communicators the biggest challenge will not be finding the one idea, but eliminating the other three. The process for developing a one point message is as follows:

1. Dig until you find it
2. Build everything around it
3. Make it stick. Location 1535

The outline revolves around five words, each of which represents a section of the message. They are: ME, WE, GOD, YOU, WE. Location 1553

With this approach the communicator introduces a dilemma he or she has faced or is currently facing (ME). From there you find common ground with your audience around the same or a similar dilemma (WE). Then you transition to the text to discover what God says about the tension or question you have introduced (GOD). Then you challenge your audience to act on what they have just heard (YOU). And finally, you close with several statements about what could happen in your community, your church, or the world, if everybody embraced that particular truth (WE). Location 1554

Each of the five components plays a specific and important role in facilitating the communication journey. ME orients the audience to the topic. It answers the question, "What is he/she talking about?" WE assures the audience that this is a relevant topic for them. It allows the communicator to identify with the audience. The GOD section serves as illumination. Here is where we bring a new perspective to or shine fresh light on a specific tension. YOU is simply application. WE is the placeholder for inspiration. Location 1559

With that in mind, here's how the MWGYW outline might look. INTRODUCTION: ME—Sometimes I find myself wondering how to respond to situations in my marriage. WE—I imagine you have found yourself in situations where you weren't sure what to do either. GOD—The Bible teaches that we are to submit to one another; put

the desires and needs of our spouse ahead of our own needs and desires. YOU—Next time you aren't sure what to say or do, ask yourself this question, "How can I put the needs and desires of my spouse ahead of my own in this moment?" Conclusion: In a marriage, submission is generally the best decision. WE—Imagine what would happen in our community if all of us began to model that kind of mutual submission before our friends and neighbors. Location 1579

But ME isn't really about me. ME is about finding common ground with THEM. Common ground is an essential to any relationship. Especially a communicator's relationship with an audience. An audience has to buy into the messenger before they buy into the message. You know from your own experience that if there is something that bugs you about the communicator it's difficult to engage with their content. This is especially true if they don't seem genuine. A lack of genuineness makes it difficult to trust a speaker. You may even catch yourself resisting and arguing with their content. Now, what is easy to spot from the audience is difficult to see from the stage. Nobody is arrogant or insincere or slick on purpose. But it happens all the time. And in most cases the communicator never knows it is happening. Five minutes into a talk and she has lost her audience. And doesn't have a clue. Or if they do sense something is wrong, they don't know why. Location 1589

Having made it clear to our audience that we are wrestling with a particular tension, the next step is to broaden our tension so as to include everybody listening.

- Sometimes I wonder why I even bother praying (ME). I bet you've wondered about that as well (WE). Location 1629
- Sometimes I wonder why I am overcome by the same temptations over and over (ME). But that's probably something that only I wrestle with. Right? (WE)
- There are just some people I don't get along with (ME), can anybody here relate to that (WE)? Location 1632

Now, if you are reading this book with a highlighter in your hand, I would encourage you to highlight this next sentence. Don't transition from WE to the next section until you feel like you have created a tension that your audience is dying for you to resolve. In other words, assume no interest. Focus on the question you are intending to answer until you are confident your audience wants it answered. Otherwise you are about to spend twenty or thirty minutes of your life answering a question nobody is asking. I imagine you have better things to do. Location 1643

Now for the meat. The Bible part. The God part. The text! The goal here is to resolve the tension, or at least some of it, by pointing people to God's thoughts on the subject at hand. One of my well-worn transitions goes something like this: "Well, the good news is, we are not the first people to struggle with this. The people in Jesus' day did as well. Turn with me to … " Location 1658

When it comes to handling the text, communicators tend to move towards two extremes at this point. They either skip along the surface of a few verses without really explaining or engaging the text. Or they go down so deep and stay there so long everybody in the audience is gasping for air. Location 1665

On one hand you don't want to skimp on the Scripture. On the other hand, you don't want to bog down in the text. This is where sermons lose momentum and get boring. I think it is the fear of losing the audience that motivates so many young preachers to be Scripture light and story heavy. But there is a third option: Engage the audience with the text. Don't just read it. Don't explain it to death. Engage the audience with it. Take them with you. Make this part of the journey. Make it so fascinating that they are actually tempted to go home and read it on their own. This isn't easy, but it is worth the effort. Location 1669

As I mentioned earlier, this section is typically referred to as the application of the message. This is where we tell people what to do with what they have heard. This is where we answer the questions “So what?” and “Now what?” Location 1676

- How does this apply to me?
- How does this apply to my family relationships?
- How does this apply to my relationships in the community of faith?
- How does this apply to my relationships with those outside the faith?
- How does this apply in the marketplace? Another way to mine for application is to think through the various stages of life:
- How does this apply to teenagers and college students?
- How does this apply to singles?
- How does this apply to newlyweds?
- How does this apply to parents?
- How does this apply to empty nesters? Location 1684

Like you, I love to wrap up a message with an emotionally charged story that punctuates the main point in a way that leaves the audience gasping for breath and reaching for their Kleenex. And every once in a while God graces us with those closing illustrations. But for the other fifty-one weeks of the year we need something else. That’s where WE comes in. This final component of the message is an opportunity for you to rejoin your audience as you did in the beginning of the message when you circled up around your shared frailty, questions, misgivings or temptations. WE is really about vision casting. It is a moment of inspiration. It is the point in the message when you paint a verbal picture of what could be and should be. In this closing moment you call upon your audience to imagine what the church, the community, families, maybe even the world would be like if Christians everywhere embraced your one idea. Location 1708

By own it I mean that you, the communicator, should be able to sit down at a table and communicate your message to an audience of two in a way that is both conversational and authentic. The message must in some way become a personal story you could tell as if drawing from personal experience. When you can “tell” your sermon rather than “preach” it, you are ready to communicate. But that won’t happen until you have internalized it to the point where you could do a five-minute version from memory. Location 1769

Consequently, I think every effective communicator must figure out how to internalize all of and memorize the majority of his or her message. No, not word-for-word, not a manuscript, not an outline, not verbatim. But somehow they need to be able to get up and deliver their message as a story. Location 1779

The secret is to reduce your entire message down to five or six pieces. Not points, pieces or sections or chunks of information. If you can remember the big pieces and the order in which they come, you are ready to go. Location 1801

When I’m coaching communicators, I’ll often say, “What are the big pieces? Tell me the big pieces. Give me your introduction in one statement. What’s next? What text are you using? Summarize the application. Give me

your closing thought." When you can quickly review the five or six major pieces of the message in your head, chances are you are ready to communicate without being dependent on your notes. Location 1806

I'm often asked if I practice my sermons. Yes and no. I never preach an entire message at home out loud. But there are portions I do rehearse out loud the night before. I always rehearse stories. By telling a story out loud I hear what is not clear and I bump into what is difficult to explain. Location 1865

The other portions I rehearse out loud are my introductions and conclusions. Our opening statements and closing statements are so important. If we don't engage our audience in the first few minutes, it is an uphill struggle from there. If we don't finish strong, an entire message may be forgotten before people get to their cars. Occasionally I will manuscript my introduction and conclusion. In my opinion, I think it is imperative that our opening and closing be committed to memory. Location 1868

I'm always amazed at how easy it is to retell the entire plot of a movie after having seen it once. And while I'm watching the movie I'm making no effort at all to remember anything. Stories are easy to remember and repeat. So are good sermons. Why? Because good sermons are like good movies or a good book. They engage you at the beginning by creating some kind of tension. They resolve that tension. There is a climax. And then there is a conclusion that ties up all the loose ends. Pretty simple. When you can reduce your message to a few big pieces it will read like a story. It will be memorable like a movie. People will wonder where the time went. But for that to happen you have to internalize it. It must become your story. Location 1888

Presentation trumps information when it comes to engaging the audience. Another way to state the same principle is: Attention and retention is determined by presentation, not information. Presentation matters. A lot. Location 1924

Simply put, you have to manufacture interest. On the average Sunday morning, or whenever you communicate, your first responsibility is to pose a question your audience wants answered, create a tension they need resolved, or point to a mystery they have been unable to solve. And if you launch into your message before you do one of those three things, chances are, you will leave them standing at the station. Location 2033

Here are three pairs of questions I recommend you refer to as you develop your introductions:

- What is the question I am answering? What can I do to get my audience to want to know the answer to that question?
- What is the tension this message will resolve? What can I do to make my audience feel that tension?
- What mystery does this message solve? What can I do to make my audience want a solution? Location 2049

Here's a typical transition I use when moving from WE to GOD. Fortunately for us, we are not the first group to wonder about this. Men and women in the first century shared our concern. So much so that one day a group came to Jesus and actually asked Him about it. So for the next few minutes we have the opportunity of listening to Jesus address this very issue. And once again, we are reminded of how relevant the Bible is to the issues we struggle with today. Location 2103

Here's a transition statement I used when moving from the text to the application section of a message. Now, in light of all that, what should we do? How does this principle intersect with our lives? What do you do with this tomorrow morning when you show up at the office or school? What does this look like around the dinner table? Location 2107

Here are my rules of the road when it comes to engaging people with the text.

- Have the audience turn to one passage and one passage only. You may throw a couple of others up on the screen, but don't expect your audience to be able to follow you as you gallop through the Bible. Pick a central text and teach it. It is better for people to understand one verse than to have turned to four verses.
- Don't read long sections without comment. Comment along the way. Even in narratives, don't read the entire story and then begin your sermon. Lead people through the text.
- Highlight and explain odd words or phrases. Think of yourself as a navigator or tour guide. Point things out as you go … but keep moving.
- Voice your frustration or skepticism about the text. If it frustrates you, it is frustrating someone in your audience. If it sounds unreasonable or impractical to you, you are not alone. Whenever you can say what your audience is thinking, your audience will consider you believable and approachable. "That's just hard to believe, isn't it?" "If God would allow me to erase a verse, this might be it." "Obviously Jesus has never met your boss." "If I was one of the disciples I might have walked at that point." "This is where we want to raise our hand and tell our sad story. After all, if God knew what you had been through, you would get a pass."
- Help the audience anticipate the main point of the text. "Okay, get ready, here it is … "
- Deliberately read the text wrong, inserting a word that means the opposite and then pause to let it sink in. "As it is written, it is more blessed to receive than to give." "Husbands, love your wives in the same manner that they love you." "For by consistency you are saved."
- Have the audience read certain words out loud for emphasis. "And the truth shall make you … what? What's the word? Say it with me.'"
- Summarize the text with a well-crafted statement. Remember, you have promised to address the tension, felt need, question, issue, whatever it is you established up front. Make sure your time in the text actually does that. A pre-prepared and memorized summary statement will insure that you don't accidentally leave the text without making it clear why you were in the text to begin with. That happens frequently in sermons. We think we've made it clear because we've been discussing the text for ten minutes. But covering the text is no guarantee that we've clearly communicated the point of the text. "Paul's point is that since Christ forgave us, we are to forgive one another."
- Use visuals every chance you get. Visuals are engaging. Even bad ones. If you are preaching on the great commission, get a map. If you are preaching on David and Goliath, get a slingshot.
- Resist the urge to share everything you have learned in your research. I always have a half page or more of interesting stuff that I love too much to trash but know better than to try and cram into the sermon. If it doesn't facilitate the journey, cut it. If it doesn't help your audience resolve the tension, save it. After all, you've still got YOU and WE to cover. And the last thing you want to do is rush through your conclusion. A hard landing leaves the passengers feeling a bit uneasy. The same is true of a rushed conclusion to a message. Location 2169

Err on the side of being too direct when it comes to orienting your audience to the question you are going to answer, the tension you want to resolve, or the mystery you want to help them solve. Get there quicker than

you think you need to. And be more specific than you think you need to. And repeat it more times than you think you need to. They want to know what you are going to talk about. They want to know where you are going as soon as you begin talking. The longer you hold them off, the greater risk you run of having them disengage. Location 2204

Be who you are. But be the very best communicator you can possibly be. To do that you must be willing to sacrifice what's comfortable—what has become part of your style—for the sake of what is effective. And over time the changes you make will become part of your style. Location 2258

Moral of the story, clarity trumps style. Clarity trumps just about everything. Location 2337

As you are probably aware, churches are notorious for having a mission statement hanging on the wall that is not supported by what's actually happening down the hall. Similarly, I've listened to dozens of preachers and teachers whose stated purpose for communicating is changed lives but whose style of communication doesn't support their purpose. If you are not willing to make adjustments for the sake of your goal then one thing is clear: Your goal is something other than changed lives. Your goal is to keep doing what you've always done, to do what's comfortable. Location 2369

In your quest to develop an effective style you need to constantly ask yourself two questions:

1. What works?
2. What works for me? Location 2382

Fortunately, I have a plan to help me get from where I am to where I need to be. That wasn't always the case. But a few years ago I discovered two things that help me get the traction I need to move beyond the confusion and complexity that frequently plagues my preparation. Location 2415

The first thing I do when I get stuck is pray. But I'm not talking about a quick, Help me Lord, Sunday's a comin' prayer. When I get stuck I get up from my desk to head for my closet. Literally. If I'm at the office I go over to a corner that I have deemed my closet away from home. I get on my knees and remind God that this was not my idea, it was His. He let me volunteer. I confess that every opportunity I have to open His word in front of people comes from Him and that anything helpful I've ever said came from Him. Location 2429

If I still lack clarity I go back to basics. I pull out my trusted list of questions and start over. By starting over I don't mean I trash everything I've done up until that point. But instead of trying to bring order to the ocean of words on my computer screen I focus my attention on answering five questions. These questions enable me to sort through the many ideas and help me land on the one around which I need to organize my message. When I have a succinct answer to these five questions, organizing my material is a cinch. Location 2450

1. What do they need to know? INFORMATION
As committed as I am to organizing messages around one central idea, it is still easy for me to drift during my preparation. So I have to stop, push back from my desk, and think, in light of what I've discovered from the text and the insights I've gained along the way, what is the one thing they need to know? Location 2456

2. Why do they need to know it? MOTIVATION
Here's a question very few communicators take time to answer for their audience. And that's too bad. Because when you answer this question you give your listeners a reason to keep listening. If you fail to answer this one, you are assuming a level of interest that may not be there. Location 2469

3. What do they need to do? APPLICATION

This doesn't come as a surprise. And the question certainly isn't original with me. But I'm shocked at how few communicators really take this question to heart. Every message you deliver has at least one point of application. Discover what it is and then state it. Location 2490

My two recommendations on this point are: Be specific and be creative. Give your audience something very specific to do. Something so specific they will know immediately whether or not they have done it. If it is a lifestyle issue, make a suggestion as to how long they should do it. Location 2493

4. Why do they need to do it? INSPIRATION

The first time you answered why you inspired them to keep listening. Now you've got to inspire them to action. Why should they do what you have suggested? Location 2507

5. What can I do to help them remember? REITERATION

What can I do to help them remember either my point or my application? The ledger sheet I referenced earlier was an answer to that question. We almost always hand out memory verse cards to go with our series. When I finished my series on Jonah, I gave everybody a flower and asked them to associate that with whatever it was in their lives that was more important to them than people's souls. Then I asked them to put it somewhere where they could watch it slowly die. It was a way of remembering. Location 2521

Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle "location" is provided after each entry.