

## Great Systems Communication Work System Improvement Tips

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### How effective is your communication work system?

If I could pick one thing to teach people about communication, I think I would have to select the concept of communication style. I first came across the concept of neurolinguistic programming (NLP) 30 years ago. Back then, people saw NLP as a tool to manipulate others.

As I learned more about it, and thought about its implications in the workplace, I saw other possible uses for the tool.

Primarily, it made me think a lot about how our communication work system often fails to consider communication style. For example, do our communication work systems favor an auditory, visual, or kinesthetic communication preference?

### The Communication Work System




**Intranet Use Worksheet:**  
Helps create a hi-tech, low-cost plan to capture and securely share key information with stakeholders

**Event Management Process:**  
Guide how to effectively use work time resources in group settings to improve performance

**Communications Vehicle Blueprint:**  
Clarifies how people use different communication avenues to share and obtain information

**Cultural Challenge:**  
Using negative performance feedback as our main reason for communicating

**Key Leverage Point:**  
Effectively use your mix of meetings and your intranet site



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People have preferences in terms of how they send and receive information. Most of the population has a visual preference. These people prefer to use pictures when they send and receive messages. However, the auditory communication medium is often dominate in the workplace.

Kinesthetic communicators tend to make up only 10-15% of the population. On the front lines of our workplaces however, we tend to have many more people who communicate by doing or touching.

To succeed in a formal education setting, one must have visual and auditory communication preferences. If you don't, you might do well in shop, art class, or gym, but you will struggle in a lecture-based classroom. In our culture, the visual and auditory people become managers, and the kinesthetic people work on the front lines. Thus, a foundation is laid for significant communication failures.

## Why do our communication work systems fail?

We tend to teach others as we have been taught. If possible, we try to send our messages to others in the styles we personally tend to prefer, which is usually visual and auditory.

However, if a high percentage of our workforce is kinesthetic, they may not be 'listening' or hearing our messages. What preferences drive effective communication in your workplace?

Emotion further complicates the communication issue. If we send a message that one perceives as negative, our listeners shut down. To avoid cognitive load increases, our brain keeps negative messages out of our neocortex memory bank.

Plus, when we fail to appreciate communication diversity, it triggers a negative, message-altering reaction. To make matters worse, we all perceive things differently in general. Words mean different things to different people.

You can't construct and deliver a perfect message. You can take steps to increase the odds that your message is understood. What types of messages do you send? How often does the true meaning of your messages get through?



**Top Communication Work System Design Flaws**

- Negative feedback events drive the need to communicate
- Delays in feedback limits its significance and impact
- Daily behaviors are not aligned with mission, vision, and values
- The effect of emotion on working relationships is missed
- Too much meeting time is spent on information sharing
- Visual performance trends are rarely used
- Communication content and vehicles fail to engage all cultures
- Preferred communication styles have not been defined
- Bottom-up communication opportunities are limited and infrequent
- Communication avenues are costly, redundant, and inefficient

**One Way Man**

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What percentage of your communication each day fail, and to what degree?

## The daily communication log-in

Back in the analog age, we had to rely primarily on bulletin board postings, mailbox flyers, break room gossip, and face-to-face meetings to send and receive messages in our organizations. With the advent of the internet, intranets, e-mail, texts, and social media, things are different now.

These days, the communication pendulum seems to be moving in the extreme opposite direction. If you don't have a Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter account, you might not have much of a voice or be very well-informed.

Medium	Activity	Who's Responsible	Target Audience	Frequency	Success Measure(s)
Face-to-face Meetings	Annual Recognition Breakfast	Leadership Team	All Employees	Annual	Post-event survey
	Terminal and Workgroup Visits	Quality Council and Dir. Of Quality	All Employees	Semi-annual	Internal Survey (#33) Key message recall
	Workgroup Meetings	Immediate Supervisor	Workgroup members	At least monthly	Internal Survey (#32) Meeting evaluations
	One-on-one Coaching sessions	Immediate Supervisor	Workgroup members	As Needed	Leadership Index
Print	Company Newsletter	Leadership Team	All employees	Monthly	Internal survey (#25)
	Bulletin Board Postings	All managers and supervisors	All employees	As Needed	Internal survey (#26)
Electronic	Company Intranet	All managers and supervisors	All employees	As Needed	Internal survey (#27)

It is true that texts, social media, and e-mail provide a much easier means to quickly send and receive messages. This is especially true when the message goes out to a large group of people. However, I think people learn to hide behind their messages and screens. When we only comment to a screen, we can be more bold, express different emotions, and say things that we might not have said in person.

This shift will correct itself in time. I look forward to the time when it does. A company intranet offers a lot of promise in terms of reaching our people and letting them reach back. Some companies recognize this already. They develop engagement plans that cater to all three preferences.

They provide each employee with an e-mail address and send most of their information out via this medium. Some go as far as to survey their people regularly through the use of pop-ups that appear when each employee logs in each day. How do you use today's technology to communicate?

## What are your communication work system costs?

I look at communication costs from two perspectives. First, what does it cost to deliver key communications to your people? Second, how much money do you waste as you attempt to communicate with people in your organization?

“The first step on the road to high performance begins with a choice.”

The first cost total is much easier to come up with than the second one. In the past, non-labor communication costs were paper, travel, and telephone based.

Now, we use much less paper (unless you are one of those people who still print out each of their e-mails) and travel, and much more wireless communication.

The labor costs could be any time we spend with other people, or we spend reading or writing messages. When you look at it from that perspective, communication costs represent a high percentage of the cost in most products and services. Needless to say, communication, and the ability to do it well, is very important. That’s where the waste perspective comes in.

One of the more common ‘areas for improvement’ that you find at the top of the list on most attitude surveys is ‘we need better and more communication.’ Have you heard people express such sentiment in your organization? If that area of improvement heads many such lists, then there must be some waste lurking behind those concerns. Why don’t we communicate more effectively?

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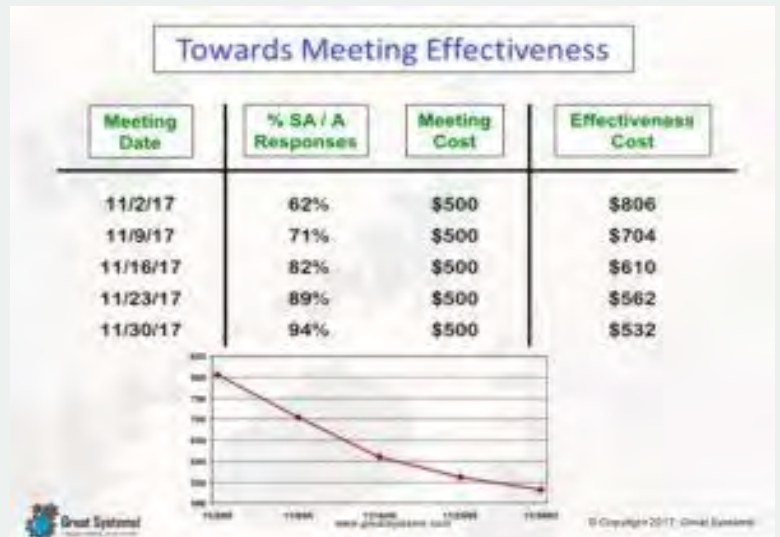
## Where are our communication waste streams?

Let’s look at communication cost and waste further. Refer to the pie chart that most of us have seen as to how people really communicate messages. The percentages go something like this – 7% of the message comes from the words we say.

Around 35% of the message is communicated by our voice tone and its inflections. The remaining 58% of the message is conveyed by our physiology.

What degree of potential message interpretation errors exist given these percentages? How many millions of body language books have been sold?

To make matters worse, communication is a two-way street. Communication involves both a sender and a receiver. Both parties can misunderstand, or mistranslate, a message. As our workplaces become more diverse, this increases the potential for diversity-based communication errors and waste. Different cultures see (and hear, feel, and read) things differently. I expect to see this trend continue in the current direction.



I may not be able to put a dollar value on communication costs, but I can say with a lot of confidence that there is a lot of waste in most communication work systems. If words only convey 7% of our message and we are using texts and e-mail more and more (which is a 'words only' medium), we create more and more waste by the minute!

There is a way out. We can improve our communication work systems. Event time can be used more wisely. We can better manage the different communication avenues that we use. Most importantly, we must each learn to appreciate the perceptual differences that we each have, and structure our messages accordingly.

## Would you like to improve your communication work system?

For over 40 years, I have helped people improve their communication work systems in many different companies and in a variety of workplace settings.

Plus, I continue to seek out value added, simple ways to help improve how we send and receive messages in our organizations.

Our tendency to rely on one way, infrequent, and often negative communication approaches is the primary performance restrictor in our communication work system.



**Creating a Better Communication Work System**

Here are eleven ways to create a better communication work system:

- Design communications to be auditory, visual, and kinesthetic
- Coordinate your communication mediums and messages
- Design systems to provide feedback as quickly as possible
- Appreciate the power of emotion in your communications
- Use pictures and stories, instead of just words, to send a message
- Use the power of technology to reach more people, more often
- Recognize the impact that diversity has on your message
- Use meeting time for dialogue, not information sharing
- Know the preferred communication styles of your audience
- Manage and measure the behaviors of all your leaders
- Minimize the degree to which you use highly emotional, negative feedback

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When you redesign your communication work system approaches, it helps you better resolve such issues daily. Done properly, these changes significantly reduce the communication costs you currently invest.

Better yet, work further with me to help you improve your communication work system. I can show you how to design great information sharing events, collect better input from your people, and help keep them better informed.

If you don't want to go after the big work systems change, you can work with me to install an effective event management process. This process will help you get the most out of the variety of meetings and training events that you spend a lot of money on each year. How much meeting and training waste exists in your organization?

Keep improving!

## About the author

As Chief Excellence Officer of Great Systems LLC, Kevin McManus provides virtual coaching and content to help people use proven best practices to enhance and optimize their daily work systems.

Over forty years of work experience in roles such as Industrial Engineer, Training Manager, Production Manager, Plant Manager, and Director of Quality give Kevin a 'real life work' perspective relative to daily work process optimization, work team engagement and empowerment, and sustainable operational excellence.



As a contract trainer for the TapRoot® root cause analysis process, Kevin has taught over 450 courses and further enhanced his ability to help leaders proactively minimize risk, reduce errors, and improve reliability. Kevin holds an undergraduate degree in Industrial Engineering and an MBA. He served as a national Malcolm Baldrige Performance Excellence Award Examiner for twenty years, including a three-year term on the national Judge's Panel.

Kevin has authored the monthly performance improvement column for Industrial and Systems Engineer magazine for over 20 years, is an Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineering Fellow and has been a member of IISE for over forty years. His newest book, "Different Company – How the Best Build Great Organizations", will be published in late 2025.

If you would like more information about the improvement tools and systems I have to offer, please send me an e-mail at [kevin@greatsystems.com](mailto:kevin@greatsystems.com).

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"The first step on the road to high performance begins with a choice."

*Kevin McManus, Great Systems!*



## Great Continuous Improvement Books by Kevin McManus!



**Pursuing Process Excellence**

- 150 pages of ideas and examples that will help you accelerate and sustain your process improvement efforts
- Over 25 examples of 'best practice' assessment tools that leaders can use to encourage and support high performance work
- 12 team exercises that you can use to begin applying each concept as it is learned



**Mistake Proofing and Corrective Action Writing**

- 156 pages of exercises, tools, and examples to help you learn about and practice the fundamentals of mistake proofing and corrective action writing
- 14 exercises you can use to practice the five key mistake proofing tactics and identify tasks and processes to target for improvement
- Over 100 proven techniques to help minimize the risk and error potential associated with daily job completion



**Error Proof**

- 162 pages of examples, strategies and dialogue questions to help you stop daily goofs for good
- Over 100 proven best practices that you can use to help error proof your key work processes
- Can be paired with the 100-page workshop workbook that contains 13 team exercises to help you begin applying key ideas



**Facilitating and Leading Teams**

- 182 pages of ideas, tools, and examples to help you improve work team, project team, and focus team effectiveness
- 10 assessments that will help you identify areas of strength and weakness relative to work and project team support
- Over 20 team exercises that will help you optimize your use of teams and improve meeting effectiveness, while also practicing your facilitation skills



**Lean Tool Use Basics**

- 150 pages of exercises, tools, and examples to help you learn about and practice the fundamentals of lean thinking
- 13 exercises you can practice to learn more about using the five key lean tools, creating a lean culture, and planning for lean success
- Two assessments to help you gauge the degree of support your lean efforts require and how much progress you make

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