



turning managers into leaders

Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – August 2004

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Merge Gupta-Sunderji helps turn managers into leaders. Through engaging keynotes and facilitated workshops, she gives people specific and practical tools to achieve leadership and communication success. Contact her at www.mergespeaks.com or 403-605-4756

Sail close to the wind

The physics of sailing offers two key lessons for effective communication.

First, consider the physics of forces. Sailing is essentially the balance of four forces. Horizontally, the force of the sails balances out the force of the boat's keel and hull. Vertically, the force of the boat's weight balances out the force of its buoyancy. If one force is greater than the opposing force, then you can't sail the boat. Effective communication needs to be a balance of forces as well - the force of speaking and the force of listening. If one person does all the talking and the other does all the listening, then you can't sail the boat!

Second, consider the wind. If you try to sail upwind - directly against the wind - you won't go anywhere. If you try to sail downwind - directly with the wind - you'll achieve success, but you'll be limited, as you can never go faster than the speed of the wind. The best way to sail is "close to the wind", typically at 45%. Together, the sails and the wind generate lift and speed, faster than either could do alone. It's much the same with communication. Aggressive interaction, where you're constantly battling for your point of view, will meet with resistance, and eventually end up going nowhere. Passive interaction, where you simply drift along, may get you there, but never at full potential. Assertive communication, sailing close to the wind by working with the other person to achieve consensus and agreement, will generate lift and speed.

To communicate effectively, listen as much as you speak, and sail close to the wind!