Keep it simple and transparent

COMMUNICATIONS is a means of transmitting and receiving information. Through communication, we can make things happen, put plans into action, achieve our goals, and accomplish our mission.

In general, only 90 per cent of communication between two people is comprehensible. Many years ago, I taught a course on cross-cultural management. One day, I brought a cartoon about Din Taxi to show my class. But I didn’t show all of them the cartoon. I had 20 students in my class so I sent 10 to wait outside while the other 10 students remained in the class to look at the cartoon for one minute. The cartoon depicted a situation in which Pak Din (the taxi driver) was trying to lend a helping hand to a driver whose car was stalled by the side of the road because it had gotten into an accident.

After that, I sent the students who had viewed the cartoon out of the classroom to tell the 10 students outside about it. After 15 minutes I brought all the students in and then I asked those who had not seen the cartoon to tell me what they heard. No one even came close. What I heard mostly was that Din Taxi was involved in a serious accident with another car and an argument ensued. From a person trying to help someone, it became the person getting into a fight with that someone.

What we can learn from this is that despite how well you transmit the message, you will still not be able to give your audience the total picture and ensure that they comprehend your message 100 per cent. That is why it is important that any information we want to transmit or disseminate be clearly communicated in a simplified manner so that it is easily understood. Otherwise, the message cannot be appreciated and even worse, it could be misinterpreted and exaggerated, and blown out of proportion.

Communication can also be a problem when people like to use other people’s name, particularly those in authority. For example, it has become quite common for people in an organisation to drop the boss’ name by telling others, ‘the boss wants you to get this done’, when the boss never actually said anything.

This phenomenon has become so rampant that it undermines the integrity and leadership of those in charge. Imagine if this was happening at the highest level?

Whether it is ministers, secretaries generals, or director generals of ministries — they could all get into trouble because there are people out there using these authorities’ names, position, and influence to get what they want.

During Tun Razak’s time, whenever he visited a place he would make sure the district officer who was in charge of the district was present. So when Tun Razak told the community that he would build them a school and repair their roads, the person responsible for making it happen knew what they had to do. That is why it is important to communicate in transparency so that everybody can hear what you have to say.

Nowadays, there is a lot of invisible communication going on where people tell you the boss wants this and that. But why is there a need to use the boss’ name to get things done? If it is in your job description and responsibility, why do you need to say the boss wants you to do it?

When this happens, it means things are not moving along as they should be and people are not doing what they’re supposed to do. And that’s when we have problems because the invisible communication is creating havoc in the organisation’s standard operating procedures, and causing a short circuit in institutions that have got processes and systems in place.

In communication, it is vital to simplify the message you want to get across. For example, do people understand the goals of high income? People talk about wanting to become a high income nation, but what does high income mean? High income means we have to work hard. And a lot of people will have to make sacrifices.

Among those people who will have to make sacrifices are the business owners. They will have to start paying higher salaries. When you pay higher salaries, the cost of production will go up and subsequently the prices of goods will also increase. And this is something that needs to be communicated clearly to consumers because they will complain about the rising costs of items.

In order to get your message across, keep your communication simple so that it is effective and do it transparently so it will not become a hypothesis, gossip or conjecture.

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