6 pro tips on communication that's sure to get you promoted

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I've been in the workforce for almost a decade now, and I've observed a rather persistent truth: *being a great IC gets you noticed, but becoming a great communicator is what gets you promoted.*

As of writing this blog, I've been working with a large organization with 5,000+ employees. It's a very dense talent pool, but after a point you get to see how some folks who were once your peers are now managing you or another team. Or even your peers who are getting high-impact and highly visible projects.

It's not because they're great at what they do, although sometimes that may be the case. They're fantastic communicators. Communication is an extremely high-leverage skill to have, and no, it's not only about writing pretty emails. These days even GPTs can do that, and a lot better than you too. So what is it?

6 communication habits that compound

1. **Don't save your best behavior for execs only:** Getting promoted is a function of managing both up and across. We often only save the prettiest decks and the most compelling narratives for a larger meeting with execs. Problem is, you're not socializing your ideas and getting buy-in from your peers on an ongoing basis. Doing it on an ongoing basis not only makes them feel involved, it builds a perception that you're taking the lead and driving it. Treat every Slack update with your peers as a practice ground.
2. **"You're not strategic enough":** This was common feedback from various managers over the years. Took me a while to wrap my head around it, but when I did, I saw a simple truth: I over-estimated the amount of buy-in I had. To me, great communication meant technical proactiveness. "Enable" your leaders and every person cc'd with all the information, all at once. What this missed was the amount of work I was expecting someone else to do just to buy into an idea. Something I learned very recently was to sell your idea. It's comms 101, where you wrap your idea into the 5 whys:
    1. "Why is this idea relevant now?"
    2. "Why is this idea going to have X impact?"
    3. "Why is this idea important for my team to pursue now?"
    4. "Why will cross-functional teams prioritize this idea now?"
    5. "Why are dollar and time resources for this idea justifiable now?"

    This doesn't have to be a deck or a long doc. It can just be a few lines on Slack or email, thoughtfully convincing your leaders on the idea, what's at stake if you don't pursue it, and how it is aligned with team and company charter using only the resources already available.

3. **Do not shoot yourself in the foot:** I've probably done this 6 out of 10 times, because I was too enthusiastic. Leaders in meetings typically go "yes, yes, next, next" when you've spent the last week combing through reports to build a case. My only comms advice here: take the yes and move on. Do not double click on it unless they've explicitly raised an objection, or you'll wind up convincing them out of the idea.
4. **Prep like you're taking the SATs:** Often your pre-reads might be very detailed, but if you haven't internalized the idea very well you will fumble and stammer, taking away credibility. Spend a lot of time editing, understanding, and going over the details. Find ways to trim it down to the absolute essentials. Read the room and think on your feet.
5. **Simulate objections:** Building on top of 4, I often use AI to poke holes in my idea. I upload the deck or doc, along with an ICP deck, and ask it to poke tactical holes. I sometimes describe what my colleagues and presenters are like from past conversations and the objections they've raised. This will help you think a couple of steps ahead in a very structured manner.
6. **How confident should I be?:** I've been in rooms where I was flushed with imposter syndrome but nevertheless had to present. I've also been among leaders I thought were the living embodiment of idiocy and paid the price with my over-confidence. If something is not backed by facts, data, or a case study, it's a hunch, no matter how strong the conviction. Don't mislead a leader. If something is a hunch or a hypothesis, say it.

Staying calm in high-stakes conversations

Over and above these tips, the real world isn't as black and white where you can easily apply X tip to Y scenario. Why? Emotions. We're emotional beings, and so are our leaders.

So how do you stay calm in these high-stakes situations? Here is what I do:

- when in doubt, always paraphrase the question asked and confirm your comprehension
- if it's a dicey 1:1, or if I'm getting into a call with someone I have a rocky working relationship with, I genuinely drive the conversation: enlist the bullets to discuss, seek alignment on the same, discuss items and note it, then send minutes
- if I don't know the subject very well and don't have an answer to an objection, I note it down as an action item and give them a timeline of when I'll be able to revert
- if I know the subject well but don't have an exact answer, I try to answer in the general direction and validate what they might really be asking

Small habits that build communication skill

Lastly, there are some ad-hoc skills you can pick up too, which compound your communication skills:

- giving constructive feedback
- putting everything on email, yes, despite the same things discussed on Slack
- getting on calls and driving them, even if it's a project where you're just the contributor

That means taking initiative to:

- send pre-reads
- explain context and decision items within the call invite
- spend the first 2 or 3 minutes discussing the objectives of the meeting
- mediate it like you’re emceeing it
- send minutes
- follow up on minutes on Slack without cluttering threads