Performance Frontiers

Amping Communication with Strategic Partners

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MidJourney

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The smooth operation and even the growth of our organisations is often significantly impacted by how well we communicate with our external partners. Yet, unlike our inhouse teams, we are not always in consistent contact with our outside stakeholders. If we only ever connect remotely and don't get a chance to be "in the room" with them, it can be hard to bring quality to these relationships.

So, what are some of the ways we can supercharge our communication with these very important connections? And how do we best represent our ourselves and our organisation in these interactions?

VIBE-ing with our Partners

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Firstly, it's helpful to look at the different aspects of "how" we communicate, in order to reflect on how we are interacting with our external partners. Though neuroscience doesn't exactly agree on what percentage of human communication is non-verbal, the consensus is that we rely on more than just words to connect.

At Performance Frontiers, we use the VIBE model as a guide. Essentially, this means keeping a watchful eye on these key areas, whether in-person, or in a virtual setting:

- *Voice* – What are we saying? How are we saying it?
- *Intellect* – What are we thinking and feeling?
- *Body* – How are we using our physical body to communicate? What is our body language saying?
- *Energy* – What kind of energy underlies how we are communicating?

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Once we know what to look for in ourselves, we can get quite granular about the ways we can heighten our communication habits. Especially when our communication is online with people we don't necessarily know well.

- Sit close to your camera and frame yourself well; it signals engagement and interest
- Increase your *emotional volume* using paralinguistics: pitch, inflection, loudness, tone
- Don't be afraid to gesticulate; it brings energy to the screen
- Mange your gaze. While in many cultures a direct gaze is important to establishing both trust and trustworthiness, we also don't want to "over" look, especially with people who interpret this differently to us
- Be thoughtful about your avatar if you need to use one – your choice of avatar says a lot about who you think you are
- Don't be afraid of pauses. A lag in the virtual environment is not the cue for you to jump in and fill the silence. Give you partner time to reply.

Key Enablers for Optimal Communication

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However, achieving an optimal communication experience with your external partners, is not only reliant on your VIBE and your online presentation. Much of the connection work is done through enabling certain processes and setting specific intentions by, above all, **making an effort to get to know them.** Here are some suggestions on what that might mean.

Intentions:

- Explore for mutual value, including unearthing where yours and your partners weakness are, and what your mutual dependencies might be. Seek to understand their "why" and how it relates to your "why."
- Allow space for your partners ideas and plans and have a clear idea of how to articulate the joint value proposition
- Seek a partnership ambition, not just a contract, something to energise you both in the same direction
- Think hard about exclusivity. Is it necessary or desirable?
- Show integrity in the relationship and put care into it. This means, above all, meeting your commitments

Processes:

- Set up regular communication channels. Don't be afraid to overservice in this area. And check in that you're using the right communication platforms for them. You

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partner might prefer a phone call to a Teams chat.

- Make an effort to learn as much as you can about the background and context of the people you're in partnership with. This will increase the likelihood of you feeling empathy towards them and will show up in your VIBE.

And remember… misalignment, which includes conflicting ambitions, lack of clarity around roles, and siloed mindsets, is the key reason for failed strategic partnerships.

Building Trust from a Distance

As Simon Sinek describes it, "trust is what happens between the meetings" – the incidental, seemingly unimportant asides and interactions. We know how difficult those moments are to replicate online, so we have to approach remote trust building with purpose and by design. This requires us to be consistent, considered, and caring enough to work at the relationship. Think about the incidental conversations you have with your external partner. If you don't have them, then perhaps it's time you should. Be interested in them outside the task at hand.

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Need More Help?

Keen to find out more about how to supercharge your communication with important connections in your ecosystem? Performance Frontiers help guide leaders and organisations develop “ATOMIC” presence: the ability to radiate energy that transcends the digital screen and facilitates a meaningful human connection. We also run a range of partnering intensives that draw upon design thinking skills and communication techniques designed to strengthen relationships and lead to optimal outcomes for clients and stakeholders. Speak to us today about how we can partner with you and your organisation to partner with purpose.

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