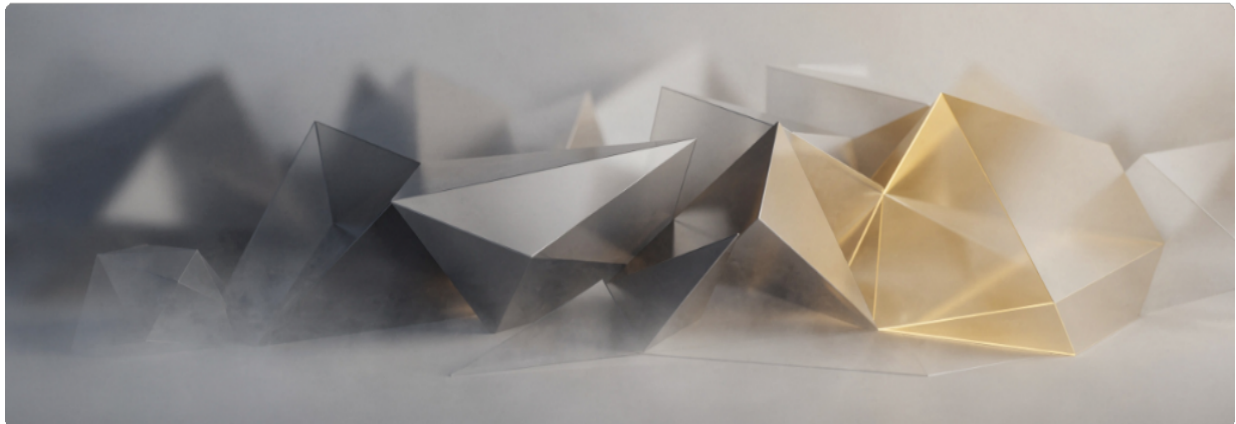


In the Absence of Clarity

BY DOUG FILTER AND JEN HUTH · EXECUTIVE COACHES, GREAT DANE GROUP



"In the absence of clarity, every single one of us makes up stories in our own head."

We all do it.

At work.

At home.

On volunteer boards.

Within our leadership teams.

When information is missing, our minds naturally begin filling in the gaps.

*Leadership doesn't know what they're
doing. My boss hates me.*

Something's changing, and they don't trust us enough to tell us.

The stories are almost endless.

Whether they're true isn't really the point.

The point is, they're human.

Our minds don't like unanswered questions. When clarity is missing, we instinctively look for an explanation.

As leaders, we often underestimate just how quickly that happens.

One of Leadership's Greatest Responsibilities

We've all heard the advice: "Leaders need to over-communicate."

There's some truth to that.

But we think there's a better way to think about it.

One of the greatest responsibilities of leadership isn't simply communicating more.

It's creating clarity.

Those aren't the same thing.

We often think we've communicated because we said something.

But if people walk away with five different understandings, we probably weren't nearly as clear as we thought.

Effective communication doesn't create more information.

It creates more understanding.

We've all experienced it.

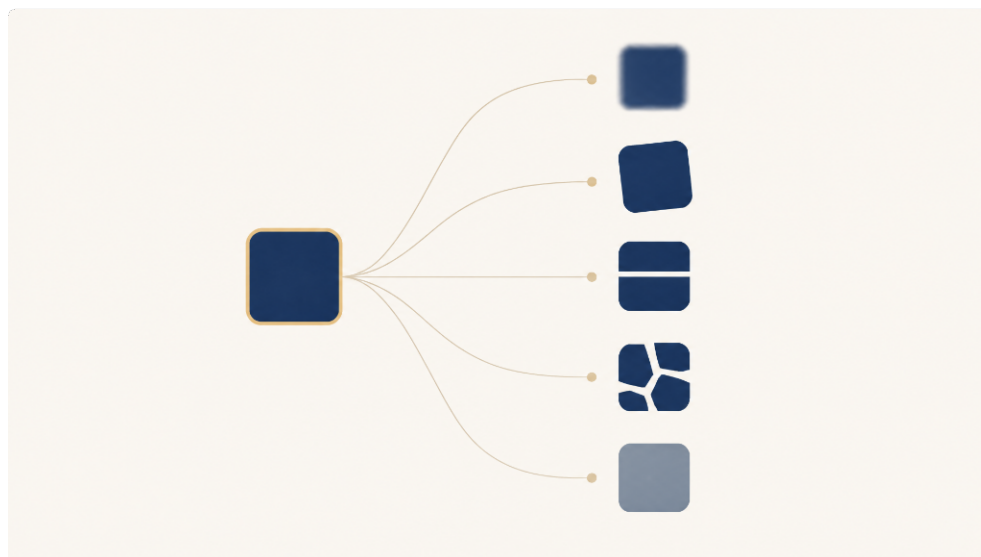
You send what feels like a perfectly clear email.

A few hours later, it's obvious five people interpreted it five different ways.

The message was sent.

The intended meaning wasn't received.

Somehow, clarity got lost along the way.



Nature Abhors a Vacuum

There's an old saying that nature abhors a vacuum.

Organizations do too.

Whenever leaders leave gaps in understanding, people rarely leave those gaps empty.

We fill them in.

Not because we're negative.

Because we're human.

A new leader is hired or someone in leadership quietly leaves. A few unanswered questions quickly become confident assumptions. Before long, rumors begin to spread, and people are drawing conclusions from fragments instead of facts.

When leaders don't provide enough clarity, uncertainty quietly takes its place.

Trust begins to erode.

Alignment starts slipping.

"Creative" hallway conversations replace healthy conversations.

Instead of focusing our energy on serving customers, members, patients, residents, or one another, we spend it trying to interpret silence.

Before long, we're more confident in the stories we created than the actual facts.

Creating Clarity Is an Act of Stewardship

Patrick Lencioni has written extensively about the importance of organizational clarity and communicating that clarity consistently.

We couldn't agree more.

What feels obvious to us as leaders is often brand new to everyone else.

People don't experience our intentions.

They experience our communication.

Every unanswered question creates another opportunity for uncertainty to take root.

Leadership isn't simply about making good decisions.

It's about helping people understand those decisions, why they were made, and what they mean moving forward.

A Different Question

Many leaders ask themselves:

"Did I communicate that?"

A better question might be:

"Did I communicate in a way that people understand what we're doing, why it matters, and what happens next?"

That's a much higher standard and it takes intentional work.

It requires repetition.

Patience.

Asking clarifying questions.

Listening carefully.

Refining the message.

Not because people aren't paying attention.

Because clarity is rarely achieved in a single conversation.

The Opportunity Before Every Leader

Every important communication gives us a choice.

We can communicate from our own perspective.

Or we can genuinely think about our audience. What do they need to understand? How can we make this clearer for them? What format will work best for the specific message? We need to intentionally communicate from the perspective of our audience.

It's our responsibility to meet our audience where they are.

It isn't their responsibility to meet us where we are.

That starts by seeing every important communication through the eyes of the people receiving it.

Communication isn't measured by what we say.

It's measured by what others understand.

The good news is that creating clarity doesn't require perfect speeches or flawless presentations.

It requires leaders who recognize that communication is far more than the transfer of information.

It's one of the primary ways we build trust, strengthen alignment, and help people move forward with confidence.

Because in the absence of clarity, every single one of us makes up stories in our own head.

As leaders, we have both the privilege and the responsibility to create clarity.

Before your next important communication, what does your audience need to understand? What might you need to do differently to create that clarity?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Doug Filter and Jen Huth are executive coaches with Great Dane Group. They work alongside leaders and teams to create clarity, build leadership capacity, and navigate the challenges that come with leading people and organizations.

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