

CHAPTER 1

MATCH YOUR LISTENER'S TENDENCY

Have you ever felt frustrated when someone won't get to the point? Or felt like the person you're talking to just isn't hearing you? Master communicators navigate this challenge of understanding using an ancient technique from Aristotle that you can learn quickly. This chapter will teach you how to connect with your listeners.

You'll Know Your Tendency by the End of the First Paragraph

Inductive Thinkers

To figure out whether someone is an inductive or a deductive thinker, listen for the point. For instance, suppose a coworker says to you that last Sunday he was at a family dinner and his mother-in-law was there, and she said that he should lose some weight. He goes on to say that he found that rude, but that based on her comment he decided to take up jogging (stay with us now—this is all on purpose). So he tells you that he went to the mall to get some sneakers. But when he got there, he couldn't find a parking place, so he had to park on the other side of the mall from the shoe store, and

when he had walked through the whole mall to get to the store, it didn't have sneakers.

Are you still with him, or do you want him to get to the point? Your answer determines your tendency in the moment.

So he keeps going, and he says that he went to another store, where he found these great white sneakers. He knows his mother-in-law is just going to love them. He's planning to go for a jog this afternoon, and he wants to know if you think it's going to rain.

Because he is an inductive thinker, he can't just ask if it's going to rain. He is not trying to annoy you or cause you teeth-grinding, fingers-screeching-down-the-blackboard pain, but he can't ask you this question if he doesn't tell you the important details about his mother-in-law and the process of buying his shoes. He is trying to be helpful because he feels you need to know all the details first.

QUICK TEST

Does this sound like you? If the coworker in the story sounds like you, you most likely need information delivered inductively (details first). If the story irritated you, you probably tend more toward deductive thinking (details second).

It may sound like babble, but these are not just random thoughts. This is an example of someone who is extremely inductive. He is still inductive if he says, "I just got a new pair of sneakers and I don't want to get them dirty; do you know if it's going to rain?" The question about rain is the point, and being able to notice whether it comes first or last is the core competency of mastering the technique. If you are a leader or a manager and you are working with an inductive thinker, you need to communicate the details before you make your point if you want him to get the message.

Deductive Thinkers

If you are working with a deductive thinker, she needs the point first. She still cares about the details of what you have to say, but she will become incredibly impatient if you tell a story or try to ask a question without first clarifying *what you want*.

Take the same example of today's weather. An extremely deductive thinker who does not want to get her new white running shoes dirty and who had the exact same experience with a meddling mother-in-law might simply ask you, "Is it going to rain today?" The most extreme deductive thinkers might not even use a full sentence: They might just say, "Rain?" They want to know about rain, and that is all they'll mention. If your colleague says, "Do you know if it's going to rain today? I just got new sneakers, and I don't want to get them dirty," she is also deductive.

It is easy to feel that deductive thinkers are cold and don't care about the details; however, they are not trying to be curt or brush off the intricacies of what you are trying to say. They care about the nuances of an idea or story just as much as someone who is inductive, so if you are working with a deductive teammate, if she is to be able to process the reasons behind what you are saying, she needs the point first so that she can understand how to process the details.

The First Technique: Match Your Listener's Tendency

How much would you pay to work with the man who studied with Plato for 20 years, expanded every field of human knowledge, and in his spare time coached Alexander the Great (before he conquered the world)? Our understanding of how the best leaders communicate begins with Aristotle. Unfortunately, all we have are his lecture notes. They read like gibberish until you translate his ideas into ways

in which you can communicate differently today. He was the first to recognize that people need information presented in patterns, and that those patterns are distinct. The most important pattern that applies to your work is details.

The Recipe

Listeners are either inductive or deductive, and they respond to the kind of communication that matches their natural tendency. Deductive thinkers want the point first and then the details that support it. Inductive thinkers need to hear the details first before they can consider the point.

Deductive = point first, *details* second

Inductive = *details* first, point second

Neither way of thinking is better than the other, but being able to match what your listener needs is most important if you want him to understand you. The first technique is to

1. Figure out your tendency (whether you are deductive or inductive) in different environments.
2. To determine the tendency of the person with whom you are speaking observe where they put the details.
3. Adjust your communication to match that person's tendency.

The Method

Aristotle did not suggest that one tendency is better than the other: Instead, he realized that different tendencies are more or less effective in different circumstances, and if you want to persuade someone with your argument or help him to understand your ideas, you

need to figure out his pattern of thinking and match it. When you are in the role of leader or manager, if you are to direct your team effectively, the members of your team have to trust you. Matching their tendencies is one way to show that you value them. *When people know that you value them, they will follow you anywhere and do extraordinary things.*

Why They Drive You Crazy

Here's the challenge and why it is so hard for us. People who are deductive swear that this is the right way to be. The same goes for inductive thinkers. However, the truth is:

Master communicators are able to change the way they communicate so that they meet the needs of the person with whom they are speaking, and, most importantly, they are comfortable changing the way they communicate.

Think about that friend or colleague of yours who never stops talking—the one you think is not logical because her points don't seem to connect. If she is inductive, her points do connect for *her*, and everything she is saying is important to her. Also think about that teammate who barely talks, and while you value how concise he can be, you also feel that he doesn't give you enough information. *He* needs you to start with the point you're trying to make and then follow up with the details.

If you're the manager and the person who is inductive is the subordinate, and you don't listen to her, you hurt the relationship. If you're frustrated, you probably send nonverbal signals that imply that you don't care about what she has to say. The skill for a master communicator is to stop and give the inductive person your attention. If you're leading a meeting and the people you're working with are deductive, and you give a long introduction to the initiative you want them to lead, they will stop listening and miss what you need from them. The skill is to open with the point—stated concisely.

It's common for people to feel, "I am who I am, and I don't want to change." This is not about changing who you are as a person; it's about being a stronger communicator. If you are a leader or a manager, *your people will learn from you*. If you practice communicating, they will too. If you build trust with them, they will build trust with their colleagues and clients, and the exponential impact on the effectiveness of their work and your organization will be measured not in soft accolades, but in trusted relationships that make success possible. A leader, regardless of his natural tendency, is fluent in both deductive and inductive communication.

It Happens Every Day

The Colleague Who Pops By

You are the manager. You're sitting in your office, writing an important e-mail to a client or your boss. In comes your chatty subordinate Jerry, who says, "Hi, Bill; did you see that game last night?"

You reply, "Nope."

He says, "Boy, it was amazing," then goes on to talk about it for five minutes, while you barely turn your head toward him and try to hurry the conversation along with a quick "Aha" or "Oh, wow."

Who is inductive and who is deductive? How does Jerry feel at the end of the conversation, given your short responses? If you had given him five minutes of your attention, how much more comfortable would he feel around you? Would that help or hurt trust?

Jerry, your subordinate, is inductive, while you are deductive. You don't have to give him half an hour. It is normal to worry that he will keep coming by every hour, but after five minutes of real conversation, you can say, "Hey, Jerry, I need to get back to work, but I look forward to our three o' clock meeting," and Jerry will appreciate your listening and be more likely to refocus on his own work. *Even more important, because you have a strong relationship and he trusts you, when you need him to be deductive, he will be.*

Innovation Gets Lost

Your teammate Jeff walks into your office and says, “Sarah, we should spend \$50,000 on a trade show.”

He read an article about a company that researches trade shows, and there was a recommendation for an event in Las Vegas that he feels will make a big impact on your bottom line for next quarter.

Now, keep in mind that you, as the manager, were in the middle of finishing your presentation for the board of directors. All you heard was “\$50,000,” and so without looking up you say, “Jeff, that’s insane.”

He walks away from your office, and never mentions the idea again.

Is Jeff inductive or deductive? He immediately got to the point, and because he is so deductive and you were distracted, you got stuck on the “\$50,000.” What if he had a great idea? Whether you are inductive or deductive, because you were busy you’ve sent out a message that you don’t value the work he did to come up with the idea, and depending on the severity of your tone, he may think that you don’t trust him.

As a manager, when Jeff comes to your office, invest thirty seconds and you will save months of damage control needed to repair the relationship. If your relationship is strong enough, he’ll bring up his idea again another time, but you have to build that kind of trust. Stop what you’re doing, turn your body to him, and then ask for some background information. Think of it as an investment. You know you have to get back to your presentation, so after a minute or two say, “This is the kind of thinking that I love to hear. I’m going to need more details and I’m not free right now.” And then set up a time to talk again, or ask him to get on the agenda of a meeting where there’s time to explore his proposal further.

The Meeting Is Over before It Starts

Your executive team has to make an essential recommendation to the board of directors. You have two choices: cut staff or raise capital. You’re the CEO. You’ve asked your chief financial officer to make

the presentation and to hold a meeting to get feedback from the executive team first. The CFO is talking casually with the other execs as you show up late.

The CFO opens up with a title slide with her name, then begins by giving a history of the problem for 15 minutes. Then she spends half an hour on the analytics and the breakout and 20 minutes talking about the possible directions you could go. Finally, she closes without any action statements and turns it over for questions.

These meetings usually go in one of two ways. The group members may make a few comments about adding a slide or putting a little more text on one of the charts, but generally they will all say, “Sounds good; see you at the meeting.” This is dangerous because the executives weren’t listening.

If your CFO gave an inductive presentation like the one we described here, the executives were checking their e-mail and thinking about what they were going to do after work. There are inductive executive teams and boards, and you need to figure out the tendency of your exec team and board so that your presentations can match its needs, but the trend is for them to be deductive. A deductive board would shut this presentation down in less than 60 seconds, and your executives didn’t because the CFO didn’t match their tendency, and they stopped paying attention.

If you’re the CEO and you recognize that the presentation was inductive, the danger is not over because you need to help your CFO come to the conclusion that she should be more deductive. What normally happens is bad tact: *you* cut her off in less than a minute, saying, “What do you need from me? Don’t you realize we’re presenting to the board tomorrow?” Imagine what this does to your relationship with your CFO and her relationship with the other subordinates in the room.

The words to say are, “The thing we need to do in the first 60 seconds is show the board members what we need from them. I know

this board; I know they happen to be deductive,” and then take the next half hour crafting the message. If your CFO is inductive, she will have a difficult time saying, “We need \$500 million.” Instead, she’ll say, “We need to explore growing operations and perhaps moving our headquarters to Europe”—which is still inductive. Because she is an inductive thinker, your CFO has to talk through the details to get to the point. You need to say, “Try your presentation again, starting with the last slide.” It will feel awkward only to the CFO. When she can say, “Over the next hour, I’m going to share with you why we need \$500 million to go to the next level of the business plan,” she’s ready.

Big Jon Platt

Big Jon Platt is one of the most important music publishers in the world. He began his career as a DJ and moved into the business side of music by managing producers, and when the professional who was buying songs from his clients left EMI, he got the call. As head of its Urban division nationally, he had a history of signing musicians like Jay-Z, Kanye West, and Beyoncé, and then in 2007, he became president of Publishing West Coast.

His challenge is communicating effectively with artists, managers, executives, boards, and a staff of 30: people from all over the globe and from completely different worlds. EMI is a British company, but Big Jon lives and works in Los Angeles. He has been a giant on the urban scene for years, but now he is responsible for all musical genres. To be effective, he flows between inductive and deductive communication as easily as he switches from creative development to the executive functions of managing his business.

“I knew the urban field so well that when someone came to me with a question or a comment, within two seconds, I knew how the rest of the conversation was going to go,” says Big Jon. But that changed when he took over the West Coast catalog, he recalls:

With all genres reporting to me, I had to learn to become a good listener again. Even though it's all music, different genres are run differently. I really had to listen to the whole conversation, or the whole question, or the whole problem, and then try to help the person analyze the best way to get past it; or if he's giving me some good news, to make sure I hear it.

My style becomes the style of the person I'm meeting with, but I want people to get straight to the point. That's why I had to become a good listener again. If you don't listen, there's always the risk that you think you understand what someone's saying, but you could be on a totally different planet. I can assume you're coming to me with a problem I've handled ten times before, but if I'm deductive, I could be totally wrong. I could totally miss what you need.

Big Jon changes his tendency based on his listener: "I had to motivate one of my guys, and we had an inductive conversation. I had to go step by step with him: what the job really is, how he was veering off track, and how he could be doing better. Then we had a conversation where we confirmed what we discussed. He never got defensive, and from our conversation, he said, 'I've taken myself out of my shoes and looked at me from a different light, and I look crazy right now.' At that point he wanted to know how he could turn things around. That kept it positive and focused. He was mature and someone who wants to take control of the situation for the better."

Big Jon is always ready to change his tendency: "I have mentors who were clear that when you have the role of president and you have to speak to the board, the board members don't want creativity; they want numbers. You have to start with numbers and show how you're making money for them, and then you can back into the creative."

He runs into the same issues when dealing with artists and managers who want him to buy their work:

The people coming to me looking for a deal are always inductive. I'm a creative guy, but people always send me ten songs. I'll say, "Send me your two best songs." If I want more, I'll ask you for more.

Let's say I'm meeting with a manager who's presenting an artist. He starts with a super glossy bio, but it's all about the music. You spent all this money on this great package, but the music is only halfway decent. You could have put all the effort into the music.

The biggest mistake people make is they don't educate themselves on the person or the company they are meeting with. They do the same meeting for everyone, and that doesn't work.

One-on-One

To listen and speak in the tendency that is not your natural way of thinking is to learn a different psychology; it is to understand a new way of using your mind. Aristotle's recognition of our different tendencies is so profound because it involves learning a new language. At first, it seems completely unfamiliar; but when you can translate and engage in the pattern of thinking that reaches your teammates, they will understand what you need and produce better results.

Using the first technique in one-on-one conversations won't be difficult if both of you need the details in the same order. You'll probably recognize that strong communication is happening and that you feel comfortable; however, you need to pay attention because the other person may switch. Our tendencies are not rigid. Whether it comes from our family, our education, or our mentors, our propensity to be inductive or deductive is learned, and as a conversation changes in topic or intensity, our tendency can change too. People can be deductive listeners and inductive talkers, and the reverse.

The challenge is when the way we process the details doesn't match. You can have a very strong relationship with someone whose natural tendency is opposite to yours, but you have to be intentional.

As a manager who is having one-on-one conversations in a work environment, when the relationship is not strong and you're trying to make it stronger, you have to pay attention to the natural tendency of your teammates. If you don't, you will create an environment where they won't be comfortable, and they may be afraid to give you critical information.

That doesn't mean that if they are inductive and you are deductive, you have to let them go on forever. Find a place to interject and redirect them to the point. Too many managers who think they are being strong leaders by being direct cut off an inductive teammate and say, "What do you want?" If your relationship is strong enough, you can be that direct.

If you're inductive and you're speaking to someone who is deductive, you may have to practice before the meeting because starting with the point will feel so uncomfortable. In the meeting, try not to think out loud until you get to the point in your thought process. It may feel like others are staring at you, but when you think through what you want to say until you get to the point, then start with the point, the deductive person will immediately feel connected to the conversation and, as a result, to you. To prepare, write down the details and then the point you want to make, then circle the point. Start the conversation with what you have circled.

If you're deductive and the person you're meeting with is inductive, write down the point you want to make and all the details, then start with the bullets of your outline. If you're deductive and the other person needs you to be inductive, you have to give more background information first. That may be frustrating because you feel that you shouldn't have to, but the other person needs it. If you have read him right and he is an inductive listener, you have saved hours if not days of the person doing the wrong work because he didn't understand what you needed him to do.

If you're not sure of someone's tendency, read his facial expression and body language. You can tell when someone is confused or

has shut down. If you see that the other person is frustrated or disengaged, ask him, “Does this make sense?” As you’re getting to know him, ask, “Would you like the background info first?” People who are deductive say, “No, just give me the point up front,” as if that’s the only way to communicate. Those who are inductive say, “Well, of course I need the background first,” because to them it is the right way to organize thoughts and present details. The foundation of using Aristotle’s discovery about how we think is recognizing that neither tendency is right or wrong. Once you know which way someone likes receiving details, and you deliver information that way, you’ll strengthen the relationship.

The Meeting Has Inductive and Deductive Thinkers

You’re at a meeting, and it includes both inductive and deductive thinkers. While executives and boards of directors tend to be more deductive, most of us live pretty close to the middle. You can go to most meetings and not get frustrated unless the person who is talking goes too far in one direction or the other. When someone becomes extremely deductive or inductive, your whole body feels it.

In dealing with mixed groups, decide which part of your presentation should be inductive and which should be deductive. Check your content to make sure it is not extreme toward either tendency, because this will always alienate someone. If you are making comments in a meeting, take a reading of the room, and unless you know that the group is definitely leaning toward one tendency, stay close to the center by giving a few details before the point and then following up with a few more details; don’t give all the details first or give the point without any of the details.

When you’re talking about things that are new to a group, you can be more inductive because the members of that group need to understand where your point came from. When your topic is famil-

iar, however, you can be more deductive because the background information is already common knowledge. If you can identify the tendencies of the individuals in the group, when you're speaking inductively, look at the inductive communicators. When you're making a deductive argument, look at those who listen deductively. They will appreciate that you resonate with their pattern of thinking and become more engaged.

Notice the behavior of your listeners—their grunts, body language, and eye contact. If it suggests that you have spoken too far one way or the other, pay attention to that and switch. If you're being too inductive, stop talking, continue to think through your process, and don't start talking until you get to the point. If you are being too deductive, think back and give the background information to your point.

All of us get into trouble when we ignore Aristotle. Your board of directors won't let you. Usually when people are too inductive and the board members want the bottom line, they will get frustrated or angry, or lose interest. You can see this and match their tendency. You can be in just as much trouble in a weekly meeting with your team members when you like the bottom line and they want to know first, "How did you get there?" They need to know the thoughts that led to your conclusion. If you're paying attention to your relationship with the group, you can contribute in the way its members need to receive information.

PRACTICE THE TECHNIQUE

Drill 1: Discovering Their Tendencies

Usually the frustration is higher when you are the listener. The key is to simply recognize the tendencies of your team. At your next meeting:

1. Listen to each person speak.
2. Decide whether she is deductive or inductive.

3. Record your observations.

When we remember that a colleague wants the details in a different order than we do, it minimizes or eliminates frustration because we can change the way we communicate with her.

Drill 2: Mastering the Technique

If you can do this exercise without getting frustrated, you are fluent in both deductive and inductive communication.

1. Think of the most deductive person you know.
2. Have a deductive conversation with her. Write down what you're going to say and how you will say it, putting the point first.
3. See what you notice during the conversation.
4. Do the same thing with an inductive person, putting the details first.

At first, one of these will feel very easy, and the other won't. The conversation doesn't have to be work-related. It could be about your weekend. The key is being intentional about doing it. When you're comfortable communicating in both patterns, if you're in a meeting and a deductive person cuts you off, instead of getting angry, you'll change your tendency. If you're speaking with someone who is going on and on with the details, instead of cutting him off, you'll listen for the point; if you're in a rush, you can let him know that you want to hear the whole story and propose a future time to continue the conversation.

THE TEST

How many times did you get frustrated during conversations today? If you are frustrated, take a note, and later explore whether you were matching the other person's tendency.

Keep track of how many times you get frustrated today, and then do the same thing again in two weeks. Every two weeks keep a record, and you will have specific evidence of the technique's power, or of the work you still need to do.
