

Message Not Received
Why Business Communication Is Broken and How to Fix It
Phil Simon

SYNOPSIS

Message Not Received begins with the premise that most business communication simply doesn't work. Nearly 100 years ago, George Bernard Shaw said that "The biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place." Author Phil Simon thinks this is truer today than ever before. The book chronicles modern-day misuses of language and technology that often result in people and organizations doing a lot of talking, but not really saying much.

The book begins by reminding us of what we already know: that clear, simple communication trumps jargon and technobabble any day. Simon offers tips for spotting these and other "language atrocities," and he suggests alternatives to popular buzzwords that litter much of our business communication. The book drives this point home by citing research about how the quickening pace of information and our diminishing attention spans demand simpler communication methods.

In the second half of the book, the author focuses on the role of technology in business communication. Simon thinks that we critically need to reexamine what channels we use and how we use them. His primary target is email. A self-described "recovering email addict," he believes that while email has a legitimate role to play, too often it promotes vague work expectations, is too private, can be difficult to search, is ill-suited for urgent communication, overwhelms people, can be an inappropriate medium for some messages, and doesn't adequately support collaboration.

So what do we do about it? *Message Not Received* doesn't prescribe any one solution. However, the book does offer many case studies of progressive organizations that are using various social and collaborative tools to foster communication among employees and with customers. Such tools include Jive, Yammer, Slack, SharePoint, Basecamp, Asana and Evernote.

The company profiles conclude with a table that outlines which tools to consider for specific uses, such as collaboration, file transfer, email management, instant messaging, screen sharing and project management. Published in March 2015, the book's featured examples and technologies are—for the moment, at least—relevant and up to date.

Message Not Received outlines the trends and tools that are impacting business communication broadly, while providing very tactical tips to help individuals communicate clearly and concisely in an increasingly noisy and complex business world.

Review by Keith Cucuzza, Bridge Consulting

KEY LEARNINGS

Phil Simon says that even without the perfect culture, tools or leadership support, individuals within organizations can change how they and others communicate.

Here's how Simon suggests—in the kind of colorful, conversational language he uses throughout the book—that you can begin "fighting the good fight" to improve business communication:

1. Ask yourself if you routinely say something as clearly as possible.
2. Think about your audience before peppering your messages with arcane terms and acronyms.
3. Pause and take a deep breath before immediately responding to everyone copied on a pointless e-mail.
4. Realize the utter insanity of relying on e-mail as the default communications tool within your organization. Experiment with new technologies that encourage true collaboration.
5. Refuse to engage in interminable e-mail dialogues, especially when you've expressed your desire to actually speak to someone.
6. Politely point out to others that you don't remotely understand what "leveraging our current value-add use cases going forward to promote strategic alignments and synergies" means.