

Messengers

Who we listen to, who we don't, and why

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This is a book that explores why some messengers and their messages are listened to , accepted and acted upon and why others are not.

When someone communicates an idea, an audience doesn't just make judgements about the coherence and validity of that communicator's message.

They also make a whole range of judgements about the messenger.

The Stanford psychologist Nalini Ambady pioneered work in 2013 that showed that human beings are good at snap – judgements (single glance impressions)

Such judgements are fundamentally linked to our perception of how accomplished someone is at communicating information.

Status is a 'hard messenger' effect and is incredibly powerful. Those perceived to possess high status are regarded as having instrumental value.

Status allows us to answer a vitally important question – ‘is this person worth listening to?’

Research shows that many of us are happy accepting compliments even when they have scant basis in truth.

A messenger's ability to exhibit wealth or status influences how people view and respond to them.

The array of benefits afforded to the high status individual explain why people are often willing to pay a premium for products and luxury items.

Items that signal a person's status are known as 'positional goods because they serve to enhance that person's position in the status hierarchy.

It is also possible to infer someone's status by watching how motivated they are to interact with strangers. Those lower down the socio economic scale often tend to be more sociable. Higher status people tend not to interact because their social needs are already met due to their position in hierarchy.

This does not mean that people in higher social status are less warm by disposition, but because they have a higher status , their needs are already met.

Socio economic position is just one type of status. Some groups and cultures award status to individuals who possess humility and generosity.

Buddhism is a good example

Status apart from degree of importance, attention and respect to individual is also about the messengers influence over resource allocation, conflict resolution and group decision making.

When someone is motivated to make a decision themselves and has access to the appropriate resources, the need for an expert messenger is reduced.

People who have competence are more likely to be confident too. Confidence is the degree of belief that a person holds in their abilities and skills.

Leaders who lack confidence come across as weak, uninspiring and even incompetent.

Those who communicate confidence but do not deliver results lose credibility. So, there is a danger of overconfidence.

In fact the reverse is true, the more successful a person, he or she is more likely to ensure that they do not overstate their claims or results.

When an expert actually shows some doubt about their advise, their credibility actually goes up.

**When people overplay their confidence,
then people turn against them.**

Straight boasting can be very dangerous

**Tesla market cap has exceeded that of GM ,
VW etc. the stock market seems to
overvalue potential much like companies
overvalue potential in managers.**

Competent managers do not need positional power over their audience to be effective. The status assigned to competent managers comes from their superior skills, wisdom and experience.

Hard messengers get their messages accepted by first establishing that they have status.

Dominance is gained when a person asserts himself, sometimes in a self interested way, often at the expense of others.

Dominance is not just a behavioral outcome, it is also a personality trait.

We typically associate dominance with a certain form of character – assertive, aggressive. Men who post photos of themselves in dominant postures often play to this mindset. President Putin’s bare chested pictures on horseback are a good example.

Pride covers two different emotions - there is authentic pride that accompanies achievement. Then there is hubristic pride that comes from a self inflated , arrogant view of oneself.

Authentic pride allows the holder to experience genuine self esteem. Hubristic pride generates an internal view that others can be treated as inferior and results in behavior that is selfish and manipulative.

**There is an auditory aspect to dominance.
we tend to associate high status with lower
, more relaxed sounding voices.**

Margaret Thatcher and Theresa may sought experts to help them acquire and maintain lower pitched, stronger and more stable voices.

Margaret Thatcher hired Laurence Olivier for this role

Those with a dominant disposition tend to be selfish, self obsessed and far less likely to make sacrifices for others. This is true even in their approach for their nearest and dearest ones.

Despite its ubiquity , dominance is perhaps the most under recognized route to status in a modern, western society.

The reluctance on our part to recognize dominance as a model explains why bullying happens, especially in schools.

Messengers who are dominant by disposition may well be looked up to or looked at, however, they are not necessarily liked.

In society, do we really want leaders who exude confidence? In times of conflict and uncertainty, the motivation to seek a dominant leader rises. In calm, surer times, warm, harmonious messengers tend to be valued.

**Who we listen to, who we look up to,
depends on the context.**

It is certain that those deemed to be physically attractive appear to receive attention that goes with being an effective messenger.

We make judgements on attractiveness in less than 200 milliseconds.

**Attractiveness is more than its own reward.
People seen as attractive receive greater
attention in the romantic domain.**

Studies have shown that female hitchhikers get more rides if they are wearing red and waitresses get more tips if they wear red t-shirts with red lipstick.

Dolly Parton sang 'Jolene', a song written because her husband was visiting the bank regularly to see a cashier by that name. Social scientists have seen that Female attractiveness actually gives rise to hostility particularly in other women.

**For men attractiveness is a plus, for women,
it is both a plus and a minus.**

Data from world values survey suggests that having social capital is the best predictor of human happiness.

Warmth is an important messenger trait since it signals care and kindness. Warm messengers seek not to convey dominance but benevolence.

Roughly 50 % of colleagues were willing to help a colleague who sought help, but that number becomes 79 % when the request is preceded by a compliment.

Craig Jenelik, CEO of Costco is the most liked CEO because he is a warm person. Warmth means patience, helping people to grow and succeed and being human.

Financial incentives in a company tend to boost short term results but even out in the long run.

Gratitude increases both liking and performance.

Positivity, social reward and compassion are elements of a warmth equation.

The messenger who apologizes for something outside his/her control, for something unpleasant is perceived as compassionate.

Humility is a double edged sword. When Obama won the Nobel peace prize, he said that his achievements were small compared to the predecessors who had won the Nobel peace prize. This actually endeared him to people.

Warmth is not the only route to connectedness. Taking a risk and letting others into our world can also connect us to an audience. To do that, needs us to signal our vulnerability.

We love seeing raw truth and openness in other people, but we are afraid to let them see it in us.

The impulse to give help when requested is a powerful one. It is a response that is formed early in life like all messenger effects.

Our response to a persons vulnerability is on a continuum. The place in the continuum depends on the context.

Trust is critical to any human relationship. It influences how a messenger relates to others.

The degree to which people trust others directly impacts on their ability to create benefits that ,individually, either would find difficult to generate alone

There are two forms of trust – competence based trust and integrity based trust.

Tiger woods fell from grace after his extra marital affairs became public. A peculiar thing happened- sale of all brands of golf balls including the one Tiger endorsed (Nike) all fell.

The impact of Woods's downfall was estimated to be about \$ 5 billion in the entire system that he endorsed.

Such a drop in a crisis is not uncommon, all banks lost value after the 2008 financial crisis.

Trust is a kind of social risk taking. It involves a few variables- the potential gains and losses of trusting the person, the persons track record on trustworthiness, and the loss if we decide not to trust.

Viewing someone as truthful is not the same as regarding them as trust worthy. Truth is fact based, trust is relationship based.

In some cases (doctors , lawyers etc.) being trustworthy is more important than being truthful

Consistency goes to the heart of being trustworthy. This helps predict how the person might behave in the future.

When a messenger's trustworthiness comes into question, then there are various options available to them. The first is a tactic employed frequently by Donald Trump – outright denial.

Disgruntled customers are more willing to forgive a company that accepts direct responsibility for what has gone wrong rather than lay blame elsewhere.

**Speedy apologies help dispel uncertainty,
rather than deafening silence.**

**charismatic leaders not only inspire people
but also get higher levels of commitment.**

**Charisma involves : self confidence,
expressiveness, energy, optimism about the
future, challenging the status quo and
creativity.**

Charismatic leaders tend to articulate a collective identity and vision.

Another quality associated with charisma is surgency – a temperament typically characterized by a positive outlook, high energy and a strong desire for rewarding experiences.

All research has shown little correlation between intelligence and charisma. In some cases it holds, in many it doesn't.

Charisma much like intelligence is a gift.

Trustworthiness is the most important of all the messenger traits we have listed in the book.