5 Questions with Stop Talking, Start Communicating's Geoffrey Tumlin
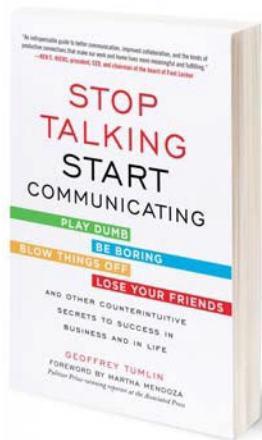
Effective communication throughout any organization important key to its success. But often people forget order to achieve this, you have to do more than just one another. To help organizations and their employees better understanding of the importance of communication. Geoffrey Tumlin, authored *Stop Talking, Start Communicating: Counterintuitive Secrets to Success, Business and in Life* to showcase exactly how to make a change.

Last week, we caught up with Geoff about his book anticipation of next week's Peoplefluent webinar entitled "Stop Talking, Start Communicating". Below are five questions we asked Geoff along with his responses.

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Most people would be surprised a communications book has the phrase "Stop Talking" in the title, as one argue talking is a huge part of communicating. Why is it important for people to stop talking?

Geoff: Too much—not too little—talking is what's causing our communication problems today. The digital communication revolution of the last fifteen years has given us remarkable ways to quickly and easily communicate with each other and we've responded by dramatically increasing the quantity of messages we send and the result is a hyper-communicating environment—overflowing inboxes, buzzing phones and expedient conversations—that we are all too familiar with. But a distracted and overloaded communication environment is notoriously error-prone and often causes us to talk "at" or "past" each other. As a result, we are communicating more, but not better, and our most important work and home relationships are suffering under the strain increasing conversational errors.

In an age where instant gratification is almost expected, how can we encourage people to believe face-to-face exchange might be better than a simple email?

Geoff: I don't promote any specific communication channel, like a face-to-face conversation, over another like email. Different channels are appropriate for different situations and messages. I'm concerned with we're using *all of our communication channels*. Dozens of times each day, we choose quick and expedited ways to communicate across all channels—short emails, quick face-to-face conversations, brief calls or superficial social media posts—rather than more thoughtful and deliberate ways of interacting, like well-written emails, meaningful face-to-face conversations, more leisurely phone calls or thoughtful social media posts. We expect our communication to be convenient and expedient because those traits are the hallmarks of our digital communication devices—it's what these new tools really do well.

Much of our communication *can be* quick and expedient, but not all of it. Many of our communication goals are difficult and time-intensive, such as resolving conflict, persuading, arguing, comforting, bargaining and providing feedback. But we are spending

increasing amounts of time communicating quickly and expeditiously. Then, when we invariably need to do something hard and time-consuming, like negotiate with a client, comfort a grieving colleague or resolve a family conflict, we find that our higher-order (thoughtful and deliberate) communication skills are rusty. We play communication checkers all day and then wonder why, when we need to pull off a chess maneuver, the conversation doesn't go our way. We can't afford to let our higher-order communication skills atrophy from lack of use.

In your book, you highlight many case studies from your experience in the field. Is there a common theme that you've come across that organizations struggle with in terms of corporate communication?

Geoff: Most organizations are tangled in a thicket of messages. To echo a point from above, the problem in companies today isn't that no one's talking; it's that there are too many people involved in too many messages that add too little value to the core work of the organization. As a consequence, people are communicating more than ever, but it's also harder than ever to address the small number of vital issues that require collective consultation and action. In organizations, I'm often the "convener-in-chief" who gets people in a room to talk about what's critical, what's wrong or what's missing. We find that a day of device-free interaction is often profoundly productive.

When you go into an organization to help improve communication, what are some ways that you measure success or that success is measured after you leave?

Geoff: Clients evaluate success in different ways. Sometimes we can continuously survey the organization, which lets us produce both immediate and longitudinal results. At other times, clients prefer less surveying, so we rely on benchmarks, interviews and other qualitative data. Regardless of the measurement techniques used, one question is paramount as our internal gauge of success: did we find and fix the root problem that caused the issue we were hired to solve? We're often hired after a boiling-over incident or an organizational crisis, but the incident itself is seldom the root problem. Managing the incident without solving the root cause doesn't lead to lasting improvement and lasting improvement is what we are working to accomplish.

What are a few words of wisdom, or a phrase you live by that would help organizations start to make the move and "start communicating?"

• The person in front of you is more important than the feeling inside of you.

• What you want to accomplish is more important than what you want to say.

• Good communication = good relationships = good life

Attend Peoplefluent's September 17th Webinar *Stop Talking, Start Communicating* and begin to build and develop your corporate communication tactics. If you want more information before the webinar, download a Free Chapter from Stop Talking, Start Communicating.