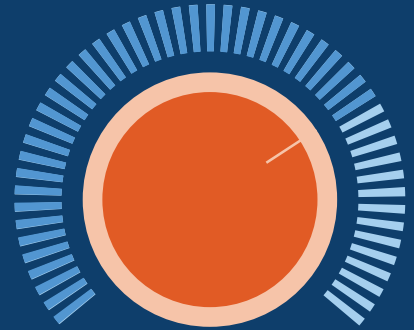




# Amplify HR

How to Silence Poor  
Communication and  
Tune in to Your People



With Thought Leader  
Phil Simon

# Introduction

Thanks to hourly-updating tech and all of its pings, bings, and blurring alerts, the workplace has never been this noisy before.

And our tech isn't the only culprit. Endless emails may buzz back and forth without meaning much of anything, but how is it that face-to-face meetings can spin round and round without actionable plans falling into place?

**As HR professionals, we're simply failing to communicate. Loudly.**

When HR pros drop the informative ball, they fail at their main task: staying intimately connected to their organization's people. Without a finger on the pulse, our employees—all of their progress, problems, and personalities—slip into a blizzard of white noise.

**How can HR turn up the dial on effective communication?**

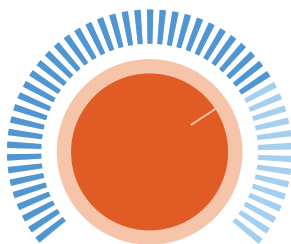
# Introduction

Influential business and thought leader Phil Simon cuts through the jungle of our bustling offices and needless buzzwords in his seventh book *Message Not Received: Why Business Communication Is Broken and How to Fix It*. “Yes, we live in very busy and very noisy times,” he begins. But “in this chaos lies enormous opportunity.”

All of our techno tools aren’t evil in and of themselves: It’s how we use them.

**In this eBook you’ll learn how to:**

- **Use more direct language**
- **Avoid email for task management**
- **Identify your audience**



It’s time to silence office distractions for good and conduct your people in concert—and hey, maybe even rock out.

# A Mini History Lesson

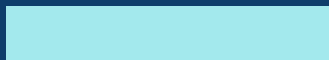
Before tearing into all of our language foibles, Simon starts at the beginning... like, the very, very beginning. He points to Dennis Baron's research in his 2009 book, *A Better Pencil: Readers, Writers, and the Digital Revolution*. Back in BCE days, Plato called foul on writing itself: Words were "mere shadows" of speech. Next up for a historical bruising was Gutenberg's press—a clunky obstruction between the writer and his page.

Typewriters were far too noisy when first introduced, Baron continues. Now, computers are making our thoughts too speedy—and too stupid. All communicative tech faces scorn when first introduced. That is, until we master its use. Simon sums it up to Namely in one of his favorite quotes, this time from historical professor Melvin Kranzberg: "Technology is never good nor bad, nor is it neutral."

**"Business communication is broken," Simon says. And if it is broken—with email perhaps taking the cake—where do we start fixing?**

**“Communication breakdowns are directly responsible for myriad inefficiencies, duplicate efforts, ineffectual campaigns, project failures, largely avoidable gaffes, internal political squabbles, and forgone business opportunities.”**

**Phil Simon**



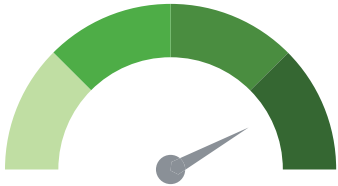
# Turn Down: Email



What's one quick fix for better office communication? Use email less frequently. The medium is "largely asynchronous," as Simon says, which means no conversation at all when a message sits dead in your inbox. There's only one word Simon can muster for our endless email threads, like when five employees attempt to schedule a meeting: "Insanity."

- **Slow down:** "Fight the competitive urge to be the first to respond to a group e-mail or communication," Simon says.
- **Or don't even reply:** Simon's email footer reads plainly: "I abide by a three-email rule. After three, we talk." When you're determined to limit emails, you'll be shocked by how nearly every "Thanks!" and "Sounds good!" can be cut.
- **Just do the work:** Employees will assume you received their message. They don't automatically assume you're inefficient or let things go by the wayside. Be the HR pro who emails back "I did X" instead of "Got your email!"

# Turn Up: Task Management Systems



“Use something other than an email application for task management,” Simon says.

Many office project management solutions—like Smartsheet, Asana, HipChat, Jive, and Yammer—can take conversations out of the inbox and into first gear. Email offers far too many distractions when operating as a to-do list (and if Bob wants to get lunch that badly, he can just pick up the phone).

Then, take your tracking a step further. The best HR pros further lineup their tasks with company-wide benchmarks. Cascading goals in Namely are one way to funnel actions from the large (“Boost profits 25%”) to the individual (“Prepare three new social media campaigns”).

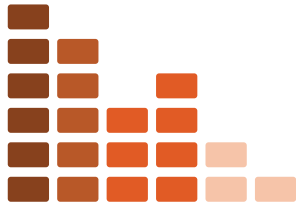
**“ The tsunami of technology permeating our lives... has made simple, effective, and clear communication an extremely valuable currency for nearly everyone. ”**

**Phil Simon**





# Turn Down: Buzzwords



Simon is not only an author. After receiving a master's in labor relations from Cornell University, he spent several years in corporate HR. "I go back to my HR days—17, 18 years ago—and HR people thought they were communicating but they really weren't," he says.

It's not the only guilty department, by any means. "In point of fact," Simon says, "that issue is hardly specific to HR. The problem transcends functions."

But plenty of HR lingo still needs to go. The title changes are empty enough—whether you're a CHRO, CFHRS\*, or HRGHRISRC\*\*. And when you fluff up your prose when communicating to employees, you fail to strongly connect with them.

\*Chief Facing Human Resource Specialist

\*\*Human Resource Generalist in HRIS, Reporting, and Compliance (this one is just around the corner)

# Turn Up: Direct Language



HR personnel will benefit from communicating to their people—and each other—in a manner that’s:

- **Clear:** Substitute buzzwords with what you really mean to say (“deliverable” = design, copy, presentation... “value-add” = profit, advertising, product...)
- **Concise:** Before clicking send, take a moment to cut out any unnecessary words. Then, go back and cut out even more unnecessary words.

## 10 HR Buzzwords to Never Use Again

**the war for talent**

**circle back**

**pipeline**

**seat at the table**

**deliverable**

**please advise**

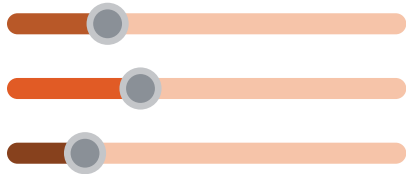
**ideate**

**engagement**

**skills gap**

**talent mobility**

# Turn Down: Assumptions



“I think it’s very dangerous to assume that everyone knows what you know,” Simon says. If we don’t properly explain certain HR functions, the information we leave out only causes confusion and further explanations down the line. We assume that a young employee knows the ins and outs of payroll like we do or that an older employee knows how to Dropbox an important file. Instead, HR pros should:

- **Burst the HR info bubble:** We spend our days fixing up tax credits and reporting on competencies, but employees don’t. Slip on their shoes and walk a bit before asking them to fill out that next form. They’ll do it happily if they understand why.
- **Explain technology when clarification is necessary:** If an employee needs to join you in a HipChat room or complete a performance review in your HR system, double-check that they know what’s up. As Simon points out, “What good is all this technology and data if we don’t understand it and can’t use it?”

**“ People are riddles wrapped in  
enigmas wrapped in onions. ”**

**Phil Simon**



**“ If you can’t explain it to  
a six-year-old, you don’t  
understand it yourself. ”**

**Albert Einstein**



# Turn Up: Audience



Too often, we forget the most important person in our interactions: our audience. “I felt like most HR people thought of themselves as HR people who happened to work as a business, as opposed to business people who just happened to work in HR,” Simon says.

It always goes back to the people—and we should connect with them as colleagues, not capital. That way, communication creates action rather than noise. Before messaging:

- **Pick the right medium:** You’d never send a millennial an acceptance letter via snail mail and wait two weeks for a response. While you also might not text an employee a W2, consider which medium connects with your audience best.
- **Keep up the culture:** “If you look at the companies that are doing really amazing things, like Facebook and Google and Amazon and Apple, the tech’s phenomenal,” Simon says. “But the way they handle people is pretty good too.” Behind every screen and tech-infused task is a person. Encourage a company culture of active communication and transparency to really ensure your messages get across.

# Conclusion

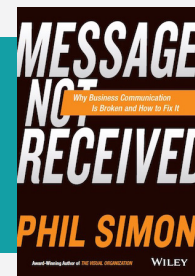
“Technology in and of itself doesn’t mean a whole lot. It’s what we do with it. It’s how we choose to interact with it,” Simon says.

We probably can’t banish email for good (there are way too many hilarious goat GIFs out there). But if we communicate with our people better, we can certainly make it less evil.

**By being more direct, avoiding task management over email, and keeping audience in mind, we can silence office distractions and foster a company culture that truly sings.**

For more, check out Phil Simon’s full book:

**Message Not Received: Why Business Communication is Broken and How to Fix It,**  
out March 2015.



Read more of his musings on [his blog](#).



Use an HR Software that  
listens to your people—  
and lets them chime in.

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