

## **Creative Writing, Authentic Communication**

There is certainly a time and place for direct, decisive communication. The problem is that exclusively using this type of language can create unintentional barriers between you and those you seek to communicate with. Communication, whether written or verbal, is one of the most critical elements to develop as a leader. This doesn't mean just following the basic etiquette rules of professional tone, being personal, and checking spelling or grammar on emails.

Communication is an essential tool for any leader because it builds trust, encourages collaboration, and allows you to influence others. Communication is a two-way street: despite the prominence of the dramatic leadership speech inspiring a room of people to come together and take action in movies and films, the reality is that trust and communication are built through every interaction you have with others. It's not just choosing the right words, but engaging in active listening, adapting your communication style to the needs of your audience, and building relationships.

Will a grammatical mistake in your email end your career? Most likely not. But failing to understand the importance of communication as a leader could absolutely create significant roadblocks for you. In a world full of meetings, emails, facilitated training, video conferencing, text messages, and conversing, communication is extremely important.

The benefit of developing your creativity in communication is that it taps into your most authentic self, creating connections and inviting collaboration. Very few people are inspired by those who only communicate in "corporate-speak." People aren't looking for eloquence and carefully crafted word choices, they are looking for authenticity. No one can build trust with you if you don't let them know who you are. And while clear and concise communication is essential, so is showing an investment in the people you are communicating with.

There are many ways to help build your strength in communication. One way is through creative writing exercises. Storytelling is a powerful tool for communicators to use but knowing what kind of story to tell – and how to tell it – is a skill to be developed. Narrative exercises are one way to develop your storytelling and communication skills, and journaling is another. However, another, less practiced way to bolster your communication skills is to use creative thinking to break your mind free of its established patterns and start to see things in new and interesting ways. Art, in all its forms, is a wonderful way to tap into your subconscious creative skills and poetry is one way that can be done.

### **Exercise Your Brain**

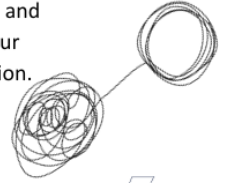
*(Audible record scratching sound)* Poetry? In a leadership development book? Already, I can see you turning the pages to skip to another section but give it a chance. Poetry is a unique writing form that embraces the creative use of language and can stimulate your senses while subverting the expected and ordinary.

Research supports that the use of poetry in self-development can help increase not only the capacity for self-expression but also provide a vehicle for a better understanding of the self. (Olson-McBride & Page, 2012) Our everyday language is already filled with metaphors and idioms to express emotions and emphasize ideas. This type of colorful language is a type of poetry, and one you already use naturally! Have you ever had an extremely busy day, one where you were ‘juggling a lot of things?’ Or maybe a day where you have run around like a “force of nature,” busy “putting out fires” and solving problems so at the end of the day, you “felt like Superman”? These metaphors all convey a very clear image and relatable emotional state. Poetic language, like metaphors, requires us to exercise *conceptual expansion*, which allows us to create meaning from the unusual or novel. Quite literally, this causes our brain to reinforce neurological pathways and enhance our ability to conceive and respond to unfamiliar

metaphors (Riddell, 2016) and by extension, novel or challenging situations. If you have heard the phrase of a leader being able to “think around corners,” it's because they have exercised this ability.

## Reflection

Practice your creative thinking! Think of a few metaphors (or similes) and write them out here. If you need inspiration, talk a walk through your office, think about your day or use the icons on this page for inspiration. Come back to this page in a few days and see what inspires you.



## Music and Leadership

Just as metaphors, similes, and figurative language are such a natural part of the way we communicate we often don't stop to consider them elements of poetry. Often, we forget about the close relationship that poetry has with music. Music and poetry have a long complimentary history together, and while that history has been rocky (consider the controversy of Bob Dylan winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2017), it is enduring.

Where poetry is a form of rhythmic language, music is a series of sounds combined to create a beautiful form. Both poetry and music are expressions of emotions and ideas, and our oldest examples of each are married together: in ancient Greece, poems were performed with the lyre. The oldest

recognized collection of poems from China, the Shijing, is a collection of songs. Many African tribes have long cultural histories of drums, filled shells, and gourds accompanied by spoken words. Though it is difficult to know with certainty when language developed for humans, prehistoric instruments, including bone flutes dating back to at least 40,000 BCE and possibly even as early as 300,000 BCE, have been found. (Massey, 1996) Combined with the evidence of poetry existing in prehistoric times through hunting poems (Finnegan, 2012), it is not unreasonable that they were born at the same or at least near the same point in time.

As common as music is in our everyday lives, you may be surprised at how it can influence you as a leader. Music can act as a tool for shifting perspectives and behaviors both conscious and unconscious. Imagine that your internal self-talk functions as a playlist. What does it sound like? For many, their “internal playlist” can become stuck on a loop of negative self-talk or fears, especially in new or stressful situations. It can be difficult to just “talk” yourself out of this negative loop, and it can have a profound influence on how we feel, manage our emotions, and interact with the world around us. Music has the unique ability to impact that deep part of us. And it’s probably something you have already experienced, knowingly or not!

Let’s say you want to hype yourself up for an intense workout: you might do some motivating self-talk, or you might put on an energetic song that motivates you. It’s a rainy day outside, and you aren’t feeling inspired to do much: maybe you put on some happy, poppy music to help lighten your mood. Or, maybe you embrace the feeling of the day and look for a more subdued and quietly introspective playlist. This influence of music on our emotions and minds is everywhere: Video game developers intentionally use music designed to help concentration without creating distraction. If you ever wonder how powerful of an impact music can have on our emotions, just think about the impact of music in movies. Can you imagine Rocky III without *Eye of the Tiger (Survivor)*? What if you took *All Star*,

by Smashmouth from the opening scene of Shrek and put it into The Matrix? If you want to go down a YouTube rabbit hole, you can find some amazing recuts of famous movies with alternative soundtracks.

Setting aside the emotional and mental impact music has, music can literally create change (learning) in our brains. The cerebral cortex is responsible for *sensing* things happening around us, like hearing music and lyrics. It is also responsible for *integrating* what is happening into thoughts, as when a person creates internal thoughts and images based on what they are hearing. Finally, the cerebral cortex motivates us to *take action* based on our experiences, such as being pumped up for a great gym session or crying during an emotional movie scene. (Hall, 2008)

Music, like poetry and anything that demands we be vulnerable with ourselves and others, can be both a very personal thing and a bridge to building a relationship. If you want a fun exercise to get to know your team better, ask them each to take out a post-it note and write out the rest of the song lyric from the first word you tell them. The word is: **stop**.

What did everyone write down? Stop...

- Right now, thank you very much, I need somebody with the human touch (Stop, Spice Girls)
- Hey, what's that sound, everybody look what's going down (Stop Hey What's That Sound, Buffalo Springfield)
- In the name of love, before you break my heart (Stop! In the Name of Love, The Supremes)
- Collaborate and listen, Ice is back with a brand-new vision (Ice Ice Baby, Vanilla Ice)
- Don't (stop) believing, hold on to that feeling, streetlights, people (Don't Stop Believin, Journey)
- Don't (stop) til you get enough (Don't Stop til you get enough, Michael Jackson)
- Hammertime! (Hammertime, M.C. Hammer)
- Something else?

# Reflection

Choose a song you like. Either write a new verse or edit/re-write an existing verse to make the song about you, leadership, or another self-development related topic from this book or your own experience.



# Reflection

Music can impact our moods, thoughts and perspective. Choose a song that is meaningful to you and try to listen to the song “beneath the words”. You can make your interpretation of this “hidden song” as accurate as possible by considering a wide array of sensory information: *How* is the artist saying the lyrics? What *body language or visuals* does the song inspire? What are the *emotions*, both surface level and deeper? What is *not* being said? *Who* is saying it? *Why* is this song meaningful? What kind of *impact* does the song have? Is there a *message*? Try to create as full a picture as possible.

Walzer Nr. 3.

The image displays a musical score for 'Walzer Nr. 3' by Franz Schubert. It consists of six systems of music, each with a piano (p) part on the left and a violin (Vcln) part on the right. The piano part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs), while the violin part is in a single treble clef. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The tempo is marked 'Andante'.



# Reflection

Choose a song you like. Either write a new verse or edit/re-write an existing verse to make the song about you, leadership, or another self-development related topic from this book or your own experience.

