

MESSAGE NOT RECEIVED

*How New Technologies and Simpler Language
Can Fix Your Business Communications*

PHIL SIMON

Award-Winning Author of THE VISUAL ORGANIZATION

WILEY

Additional praise for *Message Not Received: Why Business Communication Is Broken and How to Fix It*

“The message comes through loud and clear in Phil Simon’s smart new book: Today’s workplace is drowning in information overload, bad communication, and missed opportunities. Simon shows us the path forward with his savvy and practical advice.”

—Dorie Clark

Adjunct Professor,
Duke University Fuqua School of Business;
Author of *Reinventing You*

“In a world where disjointed and disorganized communication is the norm, *Message Not Received* arrives at the perfect time. Phil Simon provides tremendous insights and practical approaches to improve our communication both in and out of the office. If you want to make sure your words are actually heard (not just delivered), then you need to read this book.”

—Mike Vardy

Productivity Strategist;
Founder of Productivityist

“In today’s business world, communication is more important and easily accessible than ever before—so why are we making it so complicated? In *Message Not Received*, Phil Simon closely examines why keeping it simple amounts to clear and efficient communication. I highly recommend that everyone in business take Simon’s direction.”

—Larry Weber

Chairman & CEO of Racepoint Global;
Author of *The Digital Marketer*

“Look behind any business failure and you’ll find the lack of communication as a root cause. Phil Simon’s latest book, *Message Not Received*, examines how and why the latest technologies that are intended to radically improve business communication too often obstruct it instead. Simon’s book provides thorough, effective strategies for enabling effective organizational collaboration and communication to ensure business messages are indeed received. If you want to improve your organization’s communication skills, you owe it to yourself to read this book.”

—Robert Charette

President, ITABHI Corporation

“An essential resource for business clarity. Read *Message Not Received* to learn how to strip out the jargon and quit confusing people with buzzwords.”

—Anita Campbell

Founder and CEO of Small Business Trends

“A refreshingly relevant critique of modern business communication.”

—Michael Schrenk

Online Intelligence Consultant;
Author of *Webbots, Spiders, and Screen Scrapers*

Message Not Received

**WHY BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IS
BROKEN AND HOW TO FIX IT**

Phil Simon

WILEY

Cover design: Luke Fletcher

Copyright © 2015 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750—8400, fax (978) 646—8600, or on the Web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748—6011, fax (201) 748—6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services or for technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762—2974, outside the United States at (317) 572—3993 or fax (317) 572—4002.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Simon, Phil.

Message not received: why business communication is broken and how to fix it/Phil Simon.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-119-01703-5 (hardback); ISBN: 978-1-119-04812-1 (ePDF);

ISBN: 978-1-119-04821-3 (ePub)

1. Business communication. 2. Business communication—Technological

innovations.

I. Title.

HF5718.S565 2015

651.7—dc23

2014038167

OTHER BOOKS BY PHIL SIMON

The Visual Organization: Data Visualization, Big Data, and the Quest for Better Decisions

Too Big to Ignore: The Business Case for Big Data

The Age of the Platform: How Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google Have Redefined Business

The New Small: How a New Breed of Small Businesses Is Harnessing the Power of Emerging Technologies

The Next Wave of Technologies: Opportunities in Chaos

Why New Systems Fail: An Insider's Guide to Successful IT Projects

*To Marillion:
Thank you for showing me a better way of life.*

*The real problem is not whether machines think but
whether men do.*

—B. F. Skinner

*We become what we behold. We shape our tools and then
our tools shape us.*

—Marshall McLuhan

CONTENTS

[Preface](#)

[The Wrong Way to Announce a New Product Launch](#)

[The Good News about Bad Business Communication](#)

[Notes](#)

[Part I Worlds Are Colliding](#)

[Introduction: The Intersection of Business, Language, Communication, and Technology](#)

[Subject: The Other Scourge of Business Communication](#)

[Technology and the Cardinal Importance of Business Communication](#)

[What's the Big Whoop?](#)

[From Pencils to WhatsApp: A Little History Lesson](#)

[Book Overview and Outline](#)

[My Communication Bona Fides](#)

[Next](#)

[Notes](#)

[1 Technology Is Eating the World](#)

[Whoops](#)

[Accelerating Technological Change](#)

[The Rise of the Machines](#)

[Trailing the Goldfish: Our Declining Attention Spans](#)

[A Communications Revolution](#)

[The Age of the Entrepreneur](#)

[Disruption Is Cool](#)

[SEO and the *Really* Long Tail](#)

[The Sliding Scale of Search](#)

[Google and the Never-Ending Jargon Train](#)

[Marketing Madness](#)

[Mobile Mania](#)

[BYOD](#)

[The Rise of the Tech Celebrity](#)

[A New Body Politic](#)

[Other Trends](#)

[Next](#)

[Notes](#)

[2 The Increasingly Overwhelmed Employee](#)

[*Mad Men* No More](#)

[Abundant Leisure: Keynes Was Wrong](#)

[Drowning in Data](#)

[Demonizing the Tech Companies](#)

[The Limits of Technology's Tentacles](#)

[A Different Kind of Workplace](#)

[Is Being Overwhelmed Even a Choice Anymore?](#)

[Next](#)

[Notes](#)

[Part II Didn't You Get That Memo?](#)

[3 What We Say](#)

[Jargon: The Cause of So Much Noise](#)

[Beyond Jargon: Other Communication and Language Atrocities](#)

[Next](#)

[Appendix to Chapter 3](#)

Notes

4 How We Say It

A Communications Dynasty: Explaining E-Mail's Impressive Reign

E-Mail Nation

How We're Working Isn't Working

Next

Notes

5 Why Bad Communication Is Bad Business

One Size Does Not Misfit All

Message Not Received

Decreased Clarity, Credibility, and Trust

Lost Sales

Severed Relationships and Burnt Bridges

Poor Execution and Strategic Blunders

Lower Productivity

Inefficiency, Waste, and Severed Relationships

Increased Risk of Project Failure

Other Long-Term Employee Issues

Net Effect: A Vicious Cycle

Next

Notes

Part III Message Received

6 Don't Call It a *Paradigm*

Language

E-Mail

Selecting a Communications Medium

Handling the Fallout

[Next](#)

[Notes](#)

[7 Words and Context](#)

[A Trip Down Memory Lane](#)

[The World of Words](#)

[Communication Context, Awareness, and Technique](#)

[Next](#)

[Notes](#)

[8 Life Beyond E-Mail](#)

[Communication and Collaboration Circa 2004](#)

[The Benefits of Old Tools](#)

[E-Mail Detox](#)

[If Not E-Mail, Then What?](#)

[True Communication and Collaboration in Action](#)

[Slaying the E-Mail Dragon: Klick Health](#)

[Keep Calm and Jive On](#)

[The Internal Social Network](#)

[New Tools: No Guarantees](#)

[Next](#)

[Notes](#)

[Part IV What Now?](#)

[Coda](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Thank You](#)

[Selected Bibliography](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Index](#)

List of Tables

[Chapter 1](#)

[**Table 1.1**](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[**Table 3.1**](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[**Table 4.1**](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[**Table 7.1**](#)

[**Table 7.2**](#)

[**Table 7.3**](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[**Table 8.1**](#)

List of Illustrations

[Chapter 1](#)

[**Figure 1.1** Justine Sacco's Infamous Tweet](#)

[**Figure 1.2** Penetration Rates of Consumer Technologies \(1876–Present\).](#)

[**Figure 1.3** Technology Adoption: Years Until Used by One-Quarter of American Population](#)

[**Figure 1.4** Traffic as a Function of Google Search Result Rank](#)

Figure 1.5 Cumulative Traffic as a Function of Google Search Result Rank

Chapter 2

Figure 2.1 Drowning, Not Browsing

Figure 2.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Chapter 4

Figure 4.1 Network Effect

Figure 4.2 Metcalf's Law in Action

Figure 4.3 Why and How Consumers Like and Subscribe

Chapter 8

Figure 8.1 Generic Microsoft Project Gantt Chart

Figure 8.2 Genome Weekly 360 in the Project 360 Module

Figure 8.3 Klick Daily Chatter

Figure 8.4 Genome's Goals Dashboard

Figure 8.5 Klick Activity Over the Past Year

Figure 8.6 The Garage

Figure 8.7 Pit Stops at The Garage

Figure 8.8 PR 20/20 Yammer Marketing Webinar Group

Figure 8.9 Yammer Conversation with Clickable Hashtag

Preface

What we got here is . . . failure to communicate.

—Captain, Road Prison 36, *Cool Hand Luke*

On February 4, 2014, Microsoft concluded its extensive search to replace its retiring Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the easily excitable Steve Ballmer. On that day, the company named Satya Nadella as only the third CEO in its storied history. Given Microsoft's stature and reach, one could argue that Nadella represented the most significant executive appointment since Tim Cook succeeded Steve Jobs as Apple's head honcho on August 24, 2011.

Running a 50,000-employee corporation as powerful and culturally significant as Apple cannot be considered easy. In the whole scheme of things, though, few, if any, CEOs have inherited a company in better shape than Tim Cook did. He took over an extremely healthy organization with a record-setting hoard of cash,^a a reportedly strong pipeline, a vibrant developer community, a favorable public image, and largely positive coverage from Wall Street.

The 46-year-old Nadella was not nearly as lucky. He had then and—has now—no small chore ahead of him. Many industry types, critics, ex-Microsoft employees, and activist investors have argued for years that the iconic tech company needs a drastic makeover. Ballmer's exit was just the first of many notable moves that it would need to make to remain relevant.

Long a tech powerhouse, Microsoft now finds itself at a crossroads, a potential victim of *The Innovator's Dilemma*, Clayton Christensen's classic business text about disruptive innovation. Christensen astutely observed that very

successful organizations have historically become complacent. They have tended to ignore the emerging trends and technologies that ultimately annihilated their businesses.

You might be thinking that that could *never* happen to a company as large, successful, and ubiquitous as Microsoft. It is too big to fail.

Think again.

Polaroid, Kmart, Eastman Kodak, Blockbuster Video, Tower Records, and Research in Motion (recently rebranded as Blackberry) were once economic juggernauts. They are now punch lines to jokes, historical footnotes, and the subjects of MBA case studies of what *not* to do. Briefly stated, each company failed to react to new consumer tastes, business realities, and technological changes until its song was over.

Now, Microsoft hasn't fallen as far as those companies did, and maybe it never will. Still, only a wild-eyed optimist can ignore the warning signs. Many of its recent high-profile product launches (e.g., Vista, Zune, Surface, and Soapbox) have performed much worse than anticipated, sometimes to embarrassing degrees.^b Other than Xbox, the company hasn't had a true hit in a long time. The halcyon days of Windows and Office have long past, although each remains a multibillion-dollar franchise. Many questioned the wisdom of Microsoft's \$7.2 billion Nokia purchase in September 2013. More than ever, there is cause to worry in Redmond, Washington.

A few chilling statistics will illustrate the point. In 2000, more than 90 percent of all devices connected to the Internet via some version of Windows. Thanks to the explosion of mobile devices and Microsoft's missteps, that number currently hovers around a shocking 20 percent—

and continues to fall.¹ As of this writing, research firm International Data Corporation (IDC) reports that only 3 percent of mobile phones in the United States run a mobile version of Windows, putting Microsoft only marginally ahead of moribund Blackberry. Android dominates with a market share exceeding 80 percent, followed by iOS with roughly 12 percent.² It's not hard to find industry experts who believe that Microsoft has fallen and it won't be able to get up.

Nadella is quite familiar with Microsoft's culture and its challenges. He joined the software giant way back in 1992. As the new captain of a massive ship, he knows that steering it in a new direction will be much easier said than done. Forget any perceived or real hard technological challenges for a moment. Standing in Nadella's way are considerable "squishy" obstacles like Microsoft's legendary internal politics, bureaucracy, and organizational silos. Effecting his vision will require infusing a new way of thinking and working into Microsoft. Nadella will have to eliminate significant cultural and institutional impediments and, not surprisingly, make major personnel changes. To this end, the company will be parting ways with more than 18,000 employees. The reported 14 percent workforce reduction will represent Microsoft's biggest layoff to date.

On July 17, 2014, Nadella articulated his long-term vision for the company and broad steps on how to achieve it in the way that most CEOs do today: via a corporate memorandum. In a memo titled "Starting to Evolve Our Organization and Culture," Nadell begins inauspiciously:

Last week in my e-mail to you I synthesized our strategic direction as a productivity and platform company.³

It only goes downhill from there. He continues:

Microsoft has a unique ability to harmonize the world's devices, apps, docs, data and social networks in digital work and life experiences so that people are at the center and are empowered to do more and achieve more with what is becoming an increasingly scarce commodity—time!"^d

Keep reading Nadella's memo and you'll find plenty of gems straight out of *Dilbert* and *Office Space*: regular *synergies*, *integration synergies* (evidently there's a difference between the two), *strategic alignment*, and others.

A few disclaimers are in order here. In my fourth book, *The Age of the Platform*, I was critical of Microsoft's tactics and decisions over the past decade. Truth be told, though, I am certainly not anti-Microsoft.^e In fact, I concur with much of Nadella's overall vision for the company—at least from the interviews he's given and the articles I've read. I also can't think of a painless way to announce that 18,000 people will soon be looking for work through no fault of their own. And, to be fair, Microsoft claims that it will grant generous severance packages.

I certainly don't know how Microsoft employees felt about their new CEO's memo. For all I know, the majority of "Softies" honestly found it to be positive, bold, clear, effective, and even necessary given the current state of the company. I strongly suspect, however, that that was the minority view. I'd also bet that many employees felt a sense of déjà vu (i.e., that they had seen this movie before). Nadella's vision hit employee screens nearly one year to the day that his predecessor sent his own terribly worded memo. In "One Microsoft" (sent on July 11, 2013), Steve Ballmer announced a major reorganization that included this 42-word dizzying sentence:

Today's announcement will enable us to execute even better on our strategy to deliver a family of devices and services that best empower people for the activities they value most and the enterprise extensions and services that are most valuable to business.^f

Just as Ballmer's message failed as an effective internal communications vehicle, so did Nadella's—a view shared by many. The media widely lampooned it as yet another example of the same old corporate blathering we've seen for decades. Shaun Nichols of *The Register* called it “coma-inducing.” One could make the case that, because of the timing, Nadella's memo did more damage than his predecessor's did a year earlier. Sure, at that point, Ballmer was the face of Microsoft, serving as its CEO from January 2000 to February 2014. Still, most people knew that Ballmer would be departing soon; the only question during the last few years of his tenure surrounded his eventual replacement. In theory, Nadella may have had a clean(er) slate with many Microsoft employees—or at least he did until he sent that eerily redolent and vacuous message.

The Wrong Way to Announce a New Product Launch

That's enough skewering of Microsoft's executive leadership. Let's move to another recent instance of truly awful corporate communications. The target this time: Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC). The company describes itself on its website as:

a global leader of next-generation information technology (IT) services and solutions. The company's mission is to enable superior returns on clients' technology investments through best-in-class industry solutions, domain expertise, and global scale. CSC has approximately 79,000 employees and reported revenue of \$13 billion for the 12 months ended March 28, 2014.⁹

A few days before I signed the contract to write the book you are now reading, the following press release came across the wire:

For Immediate Release: CSC Launches Next-Generation Big Data Platform as a Service

FALLS CHURCH, Va., June 26, 2014—CSC (NYSE: CSC), a global leader in next-generation IT services and solutions, has added new security, compliance, data infrastructure technologies, and cloud deployment options to its open source Big Data Platform as a Service (BDPaaS) offering, which enables enterprise and public sector clients to get up and running in 30 days or less across a variety of cloud and dedicated architectures.³

There's more to this press release, but let's stop right here.

Does that 61-word, one-sentence monstrosity make any sense at all to you? If your mind started wandering halfway through, don't fret. I'm in the same boat. After all, the jargon-laden monsoon contains *Big Data*, *platform*, *open source*, *infrastructure*, *cloud*, and *architectures*. Honorable mention goes to *next-generation*, *solutions*, and *deployment*. And let's not forget CSC's *pièce de résistance*: the horribly constructed acronym *BDPaaS*. Cramming all of these oft-bastardized technology terms into a single sentence is quite the semantic achievement. The word *cacophony* comes to mind.

Before you continue reading, take a deep breath. It's about to get worse—much worse.

There. You've been warned.

CSC's press release continues with a tsunami of dense sentences and awkward jargon:

The CSC BDPaaS has been engineered to support an “as-a-Service” on several cloud infrastructures including Amazon, CSC Cloud Solutions, RedHat OpenStack and VMware VSphere private clouds. This allows flexible deployment models within the customer’s datacenter as well as trusted third party datacenters including CSC’s. With the CSC BDPaaS, CSC customers are also able to leverage the ServiceMesh Agility Platform™, which provides cloud management, governance, and security across public, private and hybrid clouds.

CSC BDPaaS offers batch analytics, fine-grained and interactive analytics, and real-time streaming analytics. Along with a suite of improved next-generation reference architectures for IBM, SAP, Oracle, and Teradata, it is the only “as a service” offering that seamlessly integrates with Hadoop, Ad-Hoc Query and Streaming analytics to support high volumes, high velocities and any type of data.

“CSC is uniquely positioned to support predictive and prescriptive analytics for actionable insights from internal and external data to better manage customer intelligence, product innovation, risks and operational efficiencies,” said Jim Kaskade, vice president and general manager, Big Data & Analytics, CSC. “Clients can minimize up-front costs and leverage existing technology investments without sacrificing time-to-market mandates. We’re helping clients unlock the power and potential of Big Data with greater speed, efficiency, and confidence.”

Full disclosure: I have no axe to grind here, but I cannot claim to be a completely uninterested party with respect to CSC. For nearly two years in the mid-2000s, I worked for the company. I implemented enterprise applications for its healthcare clients.

I have spent the duration of my professional career (nearly 20 years as of this point) at the nexus of business, technology, and data. As such, I am very familiar with most of the individual terms in the CSC press release, *and I still don't fully understand what this new product allegedly does.*

This begs the question, what was CSC thinking here? Admittedly, some of the terms in the press release are gaining in popularity. By no means, though, has every chief executive heard of cloud computing, Big Data, and Hadoop, never mind gems like *improved next-generation reference architectures*. Why toss them into one big tech bouillabaisse?

At the risk of piling on, it wouldn't be a proper technology press release if CSC didn't mention how it was "uniquely positioned" to do *exactly* what it purports to do. I challenge you to find a similar announcement these days that does *not* contain this two-word staple. (As an aside, I believe that word *unique* is a superlative. Something can't be *very* unique, *rather* unique, or *really* unique. A person or thing is either *unique* or it isn't. Period. Not every linguist shares this view, as Ammon Shea points out in *Bad English: A History of Linguistic Aggravation*.)

Lessons Learned

Comparing and contrasting the miscommunications of multibillion-dollar tech companies like Microsoft and CSC

can teach us a great deal. The two messages exhibit both significant similarities and differences. Let's first address the latter.

The primary intended audience for each message is very different. Nadella wrote his memo mainly for Microsoft's current—and soon to be former—employees, although he's very mindful that it's impossible to keep messages like these private today. Chief executives carefully craft these communications with full knowledge that they will end up on the Web for all to read, often minutes afterward.

Microsoft's primary goal surely wasn't publicity.

By contrast, CSC made its announcement chiefly to the outside world (hence the formal press release). BDPaaS is anything but a \$1.99 iOS app or game; even the company's wealthiest executives aren't about to purchase its new product for their own personal use. Business is war, and companies are engaged in the same arms race for customers and profits. At a high level, CSC's marketing and PR strategies could have taken one of two forms: simplicity or complexity. The company clearly doubled down on the latter. It is betting that its best chance for victory comes from creating and promulgating the most arcane, intricate-sounding terms possible. Ideally, from CSC's standpoint, current and prospective clients will do the following after reading its press release:

- Get really excited and/or intrigued.
- Click on a few links to learn more about BDPaaS.
- Call a sales rep.
- Schedule an in-person demo.
- Sit in amazement at what BDPaaS can do.
- Ask for pricing information.

- Eventually write a big check.

Was complexity the right bet? It's too early to say, but BDPaaS hasn't exactly taken the world by storm. Several times over the course of researching and writing this book (most recently on December 6, 2014), I searched Google for "CSC BDPaaS customers" and "CSC BDPaaS case studies." Beyond retreads of its press release, I retrieved zero meaningful results. What's more, the company's dedicated product Web page lacked a single BDPaaS success story.^{[h](#)} I would wager that CSC would have seen far greater success in announcing its new service if it had chosen a simpler, more coherent path.

Let's now turn to the significant parallels between these two companies' messages. First, announcements like these are well-coordinated events. They represent the antitheses of an employee's ill-advised, alcohol-induced, and stream-of-consciousness tweets. (Chapter 1 begins by introducing Justine Sacco, the current queen of the dumb random tweet.) I assure you that Nadella didn't pen his memo late at night and hit the send button by his lonesome. Other high-ranking Microsoft employees developed it with or even for him. Ultimately, everyone involved signed off on its language.

By the same token, more than a handful of CSC's nearly 80,000 employees work in its public relations department. If CSC outsourced the BDPaaS release, it's highly unlikely that its PR firm operated with carte blanche. For such a critical corporate announcement, a team of people provides input. There are usually arguments over versions, terms, content, length, and even the specific words used. I have no doubt that some of CSC's most senior executives at the company ultimately signed off on its unfortunate press release. At best, the BDPaaS announcement is unclear; at worst, it's downright bewildering and counterproductive.

Second, consider the result of each message. Both fail despite the meticulous planning, editing, and consensus-building that happened behind the scenes. Because each message employed nearly impenetrable language, it's unlikely that either was fully received. A simpler, more straightforward approach would have been far more effective in each case. Less would have been more. Put differently, the problem isn't *what* Microsoft and CSC announced; it's *how* each company announced it.

Third, and most germane to this book, these messages are anything but isolated occurrences. Far from it. Lamentably, similar communications have become commonplace in many professional settings, and not only from some of the biggest technology vendors. Increasingly, confusing messages seem to be becoming the norm in the business world. Referring to Nadella's memo, Lee Hutchinson of Arts Technica echoes this sentiment: "This, sadly, is not a Microsoft-specific issue; it's standard all across not just the tech industry but essentially every large American company."⁴

The Good News about Bad Business Communication

I see Hutchinson and raise him. Pervasive technobabble is *not* confined to billion-dollar corporations and the people who work for them. Troll around the Web for a few minutes. You'll find no shortage of much smaller companies that describe their products and services in oblique manners. And this isn't just a sales or marketing problem. Ask many knowledge workers what they do, and you may very well need a site like AcronymFinder or AcronymSearch to translate. Myriad e-mails, internal corporate memos, press releases, and blog posts bastardize

business and technology terms, not to mention seemingly a good deal of marketing copy on the Web. You might not even have to surf the Web. Think about your last few company meetings and the messages piling up in your inbox. I'll bet that you can find an example or two of poor communication.

What are the effects of this incessant noise? In a nutshell, they're not positive. For now, suffice it to say that intended audiences either completely tune out or don't (fully) receive the message, much less understand it.

As a general rule, the quality and clarity of business communication have deteriorated considerably over the past 10 years. Many people have lost the ability to communicate clearly (read: without business jargon). And, by relying far too much on one medium (e-mail), we muddy our messages even further.

Yes, we live in very busy and noisy times. Ours is an era marked by unprecedented technological change.

Fortunately, there is good news on two levels. First, in this chaos lies enormous opportunity. The demand for simple and clear communication far exceeds its supply. Many of us have forgotten that good things are more likely to happen when others actually understand our messages. (For example, imagine that you are a salesperson and your competitors speak technobabble. You are the one who speaks plain English.)

Second, we all can learn how to communicate better. Fret not; it is well within our grasp. It just requires a fundamental shift in what we say and how we say it.

Phil Simon
February 2015
Henderson, Nevada