



# HOW DO YOU GET REAL ENGAGEMENT?

BY GABRIELLE DOLAN

We are in a time of unprecedented change, often asking our employees and customers to follow us into uncharted waters. Alongside the uncertainty of change, we are also faced with the rise of technology and new corporate jargon and acronyms entering the business vocabulary on an ongoing basis. The end result is that employees and customers feel more and more disengaged when they do not readily understand the technology, let alone the words and phrases that come along with it.

## BUILDING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH REAL COMMUNICATION

One of the ways companies and individuals can build engagement with their employees and customers is to focus on authentic communication. This requires using real words and avoiding corporate jargon and acronyms that can confuse and disengage people. Sharing well-constructed stories is by far the most beneficial method to ensure your audience connect emotionally with your message.

Many leaders avoid sharing stories because they believe they need to be long. This is not the case. Take, for example, Alan Joyce who regularly inserts a story into his letter from the CEO in the Qantas magazine.

In a recent edition, Joyce wrote about how he spends a lot of time talking to passengers. These conversations often cover how certain Qantas employees have gone above and beyond expectations to help customers. He then shared three very succinct stories to illustrate his point and bring his message alive:

*'Like the cabin crew member who, without being asked, paid special attention to a passenger with a broken wrist, right down to opening a bag of pretzels before handing them to her. Or the two engineers in Alice Springs, who had finished for the night but headed back to the airport, just in case, as soon as they*

*heard that one of our international flights was diverting there because of a sick passenger. And the off-duty airport manager who, after disembarking a flight, noticed that a fellow passenger, waiting for his luggage, appeared to be distressed. When he learned that the passenger had misplaced his laptop on board, he took him back to the aircraft to help locate it.'*

This is a great example of how you can use stories to communicate your point, minus the corporate jargon.

We often see people using jargon as an avoidance technique. Company executives may refer to job losses as 'downsizing' or 'rightsizing'. In December 2018, General Motors took this to a whole new level when they referred to the closure of five plants in the United States and Canada – with a loss of up to 14,000 jobs – as being '*unallocated*'. Instead of saying words like 'sack', 'closure' or 'job losses', they referred to these factories and people as 'unallocated'.

CEO Mary Barra used the term three times when speaking to market analysts. For example, '*Market conditions require that five North American assembly and propulsion plants will be unallocated product by the end of 2019*'.

Research conducted in 2011 at New York University concluded that there was a lower level of trust when vague words were being used (such as, '*An*

*apology would be needed if my words have caused offence*') and a higher level when more concrete words were used (such as, '*I am sorry*'). What's more, we learn from past experience that people don't use 'real' words when they have something to hide or they are not being completely authentic. Therefore, the more you use jargon, the more people distrust you and disengage from your message.

If real engagement is important to you as a company or as an individual leader, then think about how you can be more authentic in your communication.

### THREE PRACTICAL WAYS TO BUILD ENGAGEMENT THROUGH REAL COMMUNICATION:

- Avoid using jargon that can disengage and confuse people, ultimately leading to distrust or the belief that you have something to hide.
- Use true and succinct stories that help your audience connect and engage with your message.
- Be clear on the message you want to communicate. Avoid unnecessary details that distract from your audience engaging with what you are saying in both a visual and emotional sense.



GABRIELLE DOLAN

Gabrielle Dolan is a best-selling author and international speaker on business storytelling and authentic leadership. She is also the founder of Jargon Free Fridays. Her latest book, *Real Communication: How to be you and lead true*, is published by Wiley. Find out more at [gabrielledolan.com](http://gabrielledolan.com).