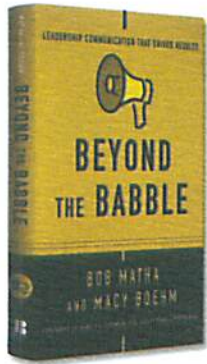


# Knocking Down the Tower of Babble

Review by Elizabeth Corcoran



## Beyond the Babble: Leadership Communication That Drives Results

By Bob Matha and Macy Boehm

Jossey-Bass © 2008, 215 pages, \$27.95  
(ISBN 978-0-470-20048-3)

### Is This Thing On?

Business is built on meetings. Meetings to update staff, presentations to impart strategy, conferences to brainstorm new approaches. Leaders spend countless hours communicating with employees, yet all this communication often amounts to little more than shouting into the wind. Leaders speak and employees glaze over, nod their heads, say they understand, then go back to the old way of doing things, or worse, actively subvert the new initiative, leaving leadership scratching their heads and wondering what went wrong. After all, leaders are smart, capable people. So why is it so hard to communicate effectively?

According to Bob Matha and Macy Boehm, authors of *Beyond the Babble: Leadership Communication That Drives Results*, the problem is that “many business leaders — especially those at the top of the mountain — believe communication comes to them naturally. They figure they must be good communicators because they are very smart, hold positions of responsibility and everybody nods when they talk. We deny none of this, but we have news for you. Just because leaders are smart doesn’t mean they communicate well.... Moreover just because a leader sounds good and has an impressive looking presentation doesn’t mean he or she communicates well. In the end, it’s not what you say, but what your audience hears — and, we argue, what your audience does — that counts.”

### An Anti-Babble Strategy

In *Beyond the Babble*, Matha and Boehm provide practical advice for eliminating double-talk, empty slogans, complicated lists of priorities, and slick, empty tricks that stifle real communication and only waste time and resources. They advocate “On Strategy” Communication: a three-step process to ensure that leadership’s messages

are not only “inescapable,” but that strategy is “the topic of conversation from the meeting room to the watercooler to the assembly line.”

The basis of “On Strategy” Communication is the “Action Equation” of *Know + Feel = Do*. Simply put, the idea behind business communication that drives results is that “what people know, plus what they feel, inspires them to take the right actions to execute strategy.” Building upon this equation, the authors delineate a communication system that begins with leadership figuring out what employees will need to do in order to successfully implement new strategy. Once the “Do” part of the equation is determined, effective communication is a matter of working backward to address what employees need to know and feel in order to take the desired action. Matha and Boehm maintain that if leadership puts hard work into figuring out their “Action Equation,” the result will be a babble-free approach to communication.

### How Do You Know, Feel and Do?

Each chapter of *Beyond the Babble* focuses on a component of building babble-free communication, from determining what employees need to know, feel and do in order to achieve results to the steps necessary for implementing the new system. Some essential babble-busting tips include instructions on how to ensure that all members of leadership are aligned in their thinking and communication and how to generate focused and sustained conversations about strategy among employees. Always, along the way, the authors provide simple solutions for dealing with complex issues, including how to excavate the source of employee resistance to new strategy.

At times, Matha and Boehm’s writing style can seem a little dry, which can be problematic for a book seeking to energize business communication. In addition, all their talk about using “On Strategy” communication, the “Action Equation” and the “Behavior Chain” to determine why employees feel the way they do can begin to seem like babble itself. It is when the authors move away from the terminology and into solutions that *Beyond the Babble*’s value becomes

apparent. Matha and Boehm’s commitment is evidenced in the resources they provide within their text and their no-nonsense view of leadership’s role in communication.

### The Buzz

<b>Notability:</b>	★★★★★
<b>Readability:</b>	★★★★★
<b>Takeaways:</b>	★★★★★
<b>Innovation:</b>	★★★★★
<b>Shelf Life:</b>	★★★★★