

Who do you think you're talking to?

By Louise Ralph

Have you ever spoken to a person who doesn't understand your language and found yourself talking louder, rather than simplifying what you are saying?

Have you raised your voice at your children because they're not listening, when you should increase the relevance of the message, not the volume?

Have you tried to get your message across to stakeholders and been frustrated because information or consequences that are obvious to you are ignored – and other agendas take priority?

Your message may seem clear and obvious to you, but people are not computers – what you put in doesn't always get processed in quite the way you expect it to.

People filter messages through their own preconceptions and agendas.

We give lip service to “the audience” but often ignore how busy and overloaded with information they are, and what is important to them.

Here are some simple questions to help you make your information more relevant to your audience:

- What will my audience already know about this subject?
- What does my audience believe about this subject?
- If they agree with the view I'm presenting, why do they need to pay attention?
- What style and tone do I adopt so my audience knows I'm taking them in to account?
- How can I present this subject in a clear, simple way?
- What do I want them to do with this information – what is my take-home message?

And finally, avoid potentially unfamiliar phrases, words, acronyms, and scientific jargon. Douglas Adams, author of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy trilogy, wrote about information that goes in to the brain and, finding nothing to attach itself to, leaves immediately.

...so will your audience – unless you think about who you're talking to.