The red flags of interpersonal communication to watch out for

There are two main types of human communication: interpersonal and mass communication. Interpersonal communication refers to communication between one person and another (or a few others) and mass communication is the relaying of information between individuals or entities to large groups of people using mass media (TV, internet, etc.).

Interpersonal communication can further be broken down into written, oral and non-verbal communication.

Can you be a good mass communicator if you aren't a good interpersonal communicator? That's the question I have been thinking about lately as I see people who work in communications jobs (PR, advertising, design, etc.) who seem to have issues communicating one-to-one. I believe the better your interpersonal communication skills are, the better you are able to do mass communication.

Here are some red flags that I have been noticing:

Passive-aggressive/indirect communication. Not saying what you mean or being underhanded is not effective communication.

Jargon-laden communication. Often people think that they will impress others by using jargon. Or worse, they assume that everyone understands what they are saying. In either case, by using jargon, people are failing to communicate simply and therefore are being ineffective.

One-way communication. This is a big one. It may be evidenced by constantly interrupting the other person or not listening to what he/she is saying or displaying a lack of curiosity by

not asking questions. Some people carry on monologues and don’t seem to be aware of or care about what others think. By not caring about or adjusting to your audience, you are not being an effective communicator.

Not being “human.” People who don’t acknowledge others or are incapable of social niceties (greeting people, asking about their weekend, etc.) are also communicating that they are not interested. Lack of interest in the person you are communicating with is a recipe for failed interactions.

If you come across this behavior in a communications professional (e.g., PR practitioner, a writer or an advertising executive) you should be wary. If someone is incapable of effective interpersonal communication, why should you trust that he or she can communicate on a larger scale?

In big media news, CNN announced it will cancel Piers Morgan Live after only three years. I’m not surprised. Last week, I watched an entire episode for the first time, and what struck me was that Piers tended to interrupt his guests many times. He continually interjected his thoughts and didn’t allow the guests to finish talking. It was highly annoying to watch, and I am sure, highly annoying for the guests too. Piers seems to be a master at one-way communication. Unfortunately, that doesn’t make for effective (or interesting) TV. What a contrast from his predecessor Larry King, who was known for showing an interest in his guests.

What red flags do you notice in interpersonal communication? Do you think there is a correlation between being good at interpersonal communication and succeeding at mass communication?