



Introduction: When you are a leader, you constantly communicate because what you do, say, feel and think matters. There are two essential parts in all forms of communication: the content of your message and the audience. Leaders need to be constantly mindful of both parts. You have to be aware of what you are communicating (content) and whom you are communicating (audience). This includes both direct and indirect communication.

Good communication is both about building trust and strong relationships with people and being clear and precise with your message. The metaphor of a traffic light can help us decide what to say and to whom. The green light is content appropriate for everyone. The yellow light is cautionary and situational as a message might need to be reworked and presented differently or limited to a select or target group. The red light is a warning for you to stop and ask: is what I'm about to communicate appropriately for these people in this situation.

Inner Circle: Red	
Audience: This is your circle of trust and your closest audience. You know them, and they know you. It is a place you are comfortable asking questions, being confused, expressing your feelings, and being your total, unguarded, vulnerable self. It is a place where your life story is known, honored, and understood, and it is a place where you understand the life stories of others in this circle.	Content: At this level, your conversation topics might make others uncomfortable. Your jokes may sound inappropriate, yet within this circle, they make sense. You can freely discuss race, religion, personal attributes, and sexual orientation while exploring them at an intimate and deep level.
Middle Circle: Yellow	
Audience: This is most likely the group you are leading. This is where communication and topics of conversation can get fuzzy as you are in the process of building trust and creating relationships. The chance of you knowing everyone's story is slim. Because of this, it is necessary to be aware of what you communicate in both the small pockets of this group and in front of the entire group. You are modeling the way for the group.	Content: Conversation topics and jokes can be tricky in this area. Staying with content that relates directly to the group's task and joking about things held in common within the group is a safer choice. For instance, current events and pop culture are things most of us are aware of through media. Conversations and jokes about these things are in the public square. Making a quip about an irritating commercial or imitating a character from a movie to get a laugh is generally safe.
Outer Circle: Green	
Audience: This is a broad audience of people of all ages, like school assembly or athletic competition. You are in the spotlight, so it is up to you to promote a positive image.	Content: There are just some words that should not be said and jokes that should not be made in public. What you say represents both your character and the institution or group you are describing. Sticking to jokes about the universal commonalities of all people and messages that a number of eyes have screened is the best bet. It is also a great venue to joke about yourself.