

The Value of Communicating In Person

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on 2 John

John ends this letter by saying that he wants to continue the conversation in person. “Although I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink; instead I hope to come to you and talk with you face to face” (2 John 1:12). Perhaps he realizes that whatever else he has to communicate could be misunderstood if presented in the impersonal medium of writing a letter. This gives us a valuable insight about sensitive communications—some things are better said in person, even if distance makes it difficult to see one another face to face.

In twenty-first-century workplaces we find even more complex challenges to personal communication. Remote communication choices today include video conferencing, telephone, texting, letter, e-mail, social media, and many other variations. But effective communication still requires matching the medium to the nature of the message. E-mail might be the most effective medium for placing an order, for example, but probably not for communicating a performance review. The more complicated or emotionally challenging the message, the more immediate and personal the medium needs to be. Pat Gelsinger, former senior vice president at Intel Corporation, says the following:

I have a personal rule. If I go back and forth with somebody in email more than four or five times on the same topic, I stop. No more. We get on the phone, or we get together

face to face. I have learned that if you don't resolve something quickly, by the time you get together one of you is mad at the other person. You think they are incompetent since they could not understand the most straightforward thing that you were describing. But it is because of the medium, and it is important to account for this.

The wrong medium for a particular communication can easily lead to misunderstanding, which is failure to transmit the truth. And the wrong medium can also get in the way of showing love. So choosing the right medium for communication is an essential aspect of communicating truth and showing love to people with whom we work. We need to communicate with respect and compassion, even in difficult conversations, and especially when we communicate with people we don't like very much. Sometimes this means meeting face to face, even if it is inconvenient or uncomfortable.