Speaking with Authority: How to Handle Tough Conversations

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MEET YOUR COMMUNICATION COACH

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As a communication expert, she is passionate about developing your communication power skills. From public speaking, to professional storytelling, to writing and editing services, and diversity, equity, inclusion workshops.

Contact her at Stevie@summit-communication.com today at to set-up your first consultation!
WHAT IS OUR GOAL TODAY?
When have you dealt with a difficult conversation? Was it resolved? How was it handled? If so, how?
Difficult Conversations

• What makes a difficult situation/conversation challenging?
• Is you or the other person(s) who make the conversation/situation challenging?
• Is it a conflict over goal/value/task?
• Was it the location the conflict took place?

• We can unpack difficult conversations and how we respond to understanding our communication competence.
Communication Competence

One strategy to understand how we respond to difficult or challenging situations/communicative interactions is to examine our communication competence.

Communication competence is understood as the knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge in various contexts (Cooley & Roach, 1984).

1. Knowledge
2. Skills
3. Motivation/Context
Characteristics of Communication Competence

Communication competence reminds us how in every interaction we are engaging in effective and appropriate communication patterns. More specifically:

1. **Knowledge**—refers to the cognitive elements of competence (including how to do something and understanding how things are done).
2. **Skills**—refers to the individual factors that influence our ability to do anything.
3. **Motivation/Contexts**—Ability to adapt to various situations.
Characteristics of Communication Competence

*Communication Competence* is a widely researched construct dating back to the 1980’s. Originally, it was conceptualized by James McCroskey (1988) as a way to understand interpersonal communication interactions.

Today it is researched across public speaking, leadership, group, interpersonal, and intercultural communication interactions as well as across a wide variety of contexts.

If you would like to self-assess your own communication competence, you **can**!
What does this mean for us?
Difficult or Challenging Situations

During difficult or challenging situations, we....

Fight

Communicate

Flight

Our body engages in a physical and physiological response!!
We must understand how we each have areas where we have deficiencies and strengths.

As we seek to become a more mindful communicator, our competence increases!
  ○ Eg., the ability to paraphrase; respond with active non-verbal communication; follow-up with clarifying questions.

We remain tentative and aware of the complexity of communication/contexts—we check our egos :)
  ○ Why? Because we understand the harm of passive-aggressive communication; embarrassing communication etc.
So, let’s figure out where to start...
4 Basic components of the Communication Competence Model (Morreale, Spitzberg and Barge, 2007)
So, what should we do...
We Must Understand Our Power

Power or the potential capacity to influence the behavior of some or others (Baraclough and Stewart, 1992).

1. Coercive Power—expectations of being punished.
2. Reward Power—perceptions of being provided a reward due to compliance.
3. Legitimate Power—or “assigned power” refers to the perceptions you have the right to make certain demands/requests.
4. Expert Power—perception of how knowledgeable you are in a specific area.
5. Referent Power—the foundation of identification with you; built on the relationship between one or more persons. The stronger the identification, the stronger your referent power is...

Remember: Power and communication are closely related. How we communicate matters and matters greatly.
We Must Understand Our Power

Power requires communication. Frequently we perform power through verbal communication—but non-verbal is important, too. The bases of power also do not happen separate from one another; instead, they occur in tandem with one another.

When we understand power as a communication behavior, then we can also engage in compliance gaining behaviors or behavior alteration techniques to gain influence. Remember we are seeking to gain influence through pro-social behaviors 😊

Behavior Alteration Techniques can communicate the following...

- Reward
- Self-esteem
- Guilt
- Positive relationships
- Punishment
- Immediate satisfaction
We each have the power to influence the conversation.

- Set-up the ethical standards/expectations
  - Context/situation specific.
  - E.g., Agenda, decorum/behaviors, “set the ground rules”
- Create the environment you want with intention.
  - Set-up procedural and behavioral expectations.
- Model the ethical standards
  - Avoid dishonesty.
  - Avoid name-calling.
  - Avoid argumentativeness. You want to stick to “I” language.
  - Ask for space or time to cool down.

Tip: Be proactive.
Negotiating Power

As we think about power as communicative, we are reminded of how it is constructed relationally. In this way, we must consider some caveats with power and our negotiations.

1. Identity is constituted in communication.
2. Power is fluid and complex.
3. Culture is central to communication.
4. Language is central to learning and communication. All interactions communicate an idea, behavior, or value.
5. Reflexivity is key in communication interactions.
6. Dialogue is central to constructing power.

Can you think of a time when your power was challenged?

Communicating is a praxis = doing.
**Misbehaviors**

What do I do when one or more people misbehave?

*First, remember you do not need to intervene with every problem. Some problems, will resolves themselves. But if they don’t...*

1. Eye contact—The feeling of being watched...
2. Gesture—Motioning to quiet down...
3. Physical Closeness—Using proxemics as way to garner attention...
4. Asking for responses—Compels attention...

Tip: Demonstrate “withitness”
Sometimes, misbehaviors will lead to a crisis situation...

1. Provide only the necessary information.
2. Model appropriate responses/behaviors.
3. Dispel rumors or gossip.
4. Ask for support from a colleague.
5. Ask for time to respond. Do not feel compelled to solve the situation in the moment—“putting pressure” is an argumentative strategy.
Credibility

Credibility has three dimensions: Competence, character, and caring.

As we begin to understand competence and power as communication constructs, it is clear how credibility would be related, too. Credibility is generally perceived as:

Intelligence
Honesty
Trustworthiness
Moral
Ethical
Genuine
And not self-centered!
Building Credibility

Behaviors that Enhance Credibility

• Demonstrate concern
• Show concern about your own performance
• Solicit feedback
• Attempt to build positive relationships
• Pay attention to how you non-verbally communicate
• Be strategic in your nonverbal messages
• Have a tidy workspace

Avoid the Following Behaviors

• Arrive late
• Be unprepared or disorganized
• Speak in a sarcastic or disrespectful tone

Tip: Protect your credibility with everything you got!
The Importance of *Clarity*

Being able to communicate clearly is the difference between knowing content as an expert and the capacity to transfer knowledge (Hurt, Scott, & Mcroskey, 1978).

Someone who demonstrates *clarity* can...

1. Communicate procedures, expectations, and standards.
2. Provide appropriate feedback and explanations.
3. Explain practical solutions, tasks, among other management issues.

High levels of clarity reduces uncertainty in communication interactions and because of the interactional nature, there tends to be less behavioral issues or challenges.

Effective *clarity* is linked to improved relationships in learning environments, positive climates.
Recommendations

- Begin with understanding your own competence.
- Conflict is complex—remember, it’s like running a marathon!
- Power is communicated and through understanding it, we can influence a communication interaction.
- Be proactive and forward thinking about how you handle misbehaviors.

Understanding communication competence can positively impact all communication interactions!
Thank you for your time and attention today. Today we covered the following topics:

- Examined Difficult Conversations
- Communication Competence
- Influence of Power
- Recommendations for the Future

I hope you found this workshop useful in preparing for your future presentation.
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