

*Become a Better Leader
in Every Area of Life*



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Communication Tools for Leaders

Become a Better Leader in Every Area of Life

by Jesse Lahey

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Become a Better Leader in Every Area of Life

A few years ago, I spoke to a group of people about how to have a great marriage. No, I don't have a Ph.D. in "marriageology." But I have been studying the topic since before I married Erin nearly 20 years ago. And most people who know us agree that we're still enjoying our life together. Based on my studies and practical experience, I was able to provide marriage tips that were helpful enough to prompt several men and women in the audience to rush up afterwards to thank me.

There was only one only problem: Erin was in the audience, too.

As you might expect, it doesn't exactly inspire romantic feelings in a woman – at least, not in the woman I know best – to think that her husband believes he has figured out a formula for living happily with her. Even after nearly two decades of sharing a bed, Erin wants me to be *crazy* for her, to pursue her, to have my world rocked by her – not to apply five time-tested, surefire daily steps to keep your wife from nagging you. (No, that's not what my tips were about, but that's only a slight exaggeration to how Erin interpreted them.)

As good as my tips were, there is of course so much more to unlocking my wife's heart ... and so much more to a relationship as complex as a marriage.

Tools, Not Formulas

As with my relationship with my wife, most relationships are too complex to manage with a simple five-step formula. Each person is unique, so applying the same five steps to two different people can produce quite different results.

Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else.
~Margaret Mead

That's why this book does not provide a specific formula, or "the eight definitive steps to effective leadership communication." Instead, this book is a toolbox, containing eight of the communication tools that a leader is most likely to need in multiple areas of life – whether in business, nonprofit service, family life, ministry, or community volunteering.

With this book, you will learn the types of situations in which each communication tool can be used effectively. I'll teach you why the tool will help you be a better leader, when to use it, and how to use it to make a difference that matters.

Although all eight tools are ready for you to use at any moment, there is a purpose to the order in which I've described them in this book:

Use this tool before you begin a key engagement with an employee, customer, family member, listening audience, or anyone else you care about:

 **Tool 1** The Big-Little Outcome Scope

Use these tools to help you understand your audience before you try to make yourself understood.

 **Tool 2** Empathetic Thinking

 **Tool 3** Authentic Listening

 **Tool 4** Learning Questions

Use this tool to choose the messages you want to communicate:

 **Tool 5** The 1-3-3 Message Map

Use these tools to ensure your messages have the impact you want:

 **Tool 6** The “I” Power Pronoun

 **Tool 7** The “We” Power Pronoun

 **Tool 8** Stories That Stick

A Core Discipline of Leadership

Communication is a core leadership discipline. You can’t achieve your potential as a leader without excelling at communication, because a leader must inspire trust, passion, and action.

- Would you want to be an employee of a boss who makes you feel like an expendable cog in a wheel?
- Would you continue reading the Facebook posts of someone who rants every day about the world’s problems, but ignores or attacks anyone who offers a differing opinion?
- Would you want to be a teenage child of a self-centered parent who doesn’t have your best interest at heart?
- Would you want to attend a church where the senior pastor seems more interested in money and building campaigns than in serving people?
- Would you re-elect a president or governor who was out of touch with the average citizen?
- Would you buy a car, computer, or smartphone from a company that gives mixed-signals about whether they will

continue providing technical and warranty support for that product?

In each of these cases, the leader seems like a jerk, but could simply be mis-communicating!

There are well-intentioned bosses, parents, pastors, politicians, CEOs, and other leaders who have failed primarily because they did not communicate effectively.

Worse Than You Think

Most leaders think they communicate quite well. After all, they've been doing it their entire lives.

They've been speaking since before they were one year old; reading since age four or five; writing since soon after that. Unlike just about every other discipline leaders have had to master, they've been communicating their whole lives. It seemed to be no big deal. Just as a fish is unaware of the water it swims in, leaders often are unaware of their own communication abilities. Or lack thereof.

I have found that many leaders suffer career-defining blunders because they didn't take communication nearly as seriously as they take most other elements of their jobs. Effective leaders see communication as a critical professional aptitude and work hard at getting it right.

The Power of Communication: Skills to Build Trust, Inspire Loyalty, and Lead Effectively, by Helio Fred Garcia, 2012.

But consider this: I have been running ever since I was two or three years old. In my mid-30s, after I started competing in triathlons, I learned I was not running correctly. For one thing, my stride was too long, so every time my heel struck the ground, it slowed me down and made me waste energy. Learning a more efficient running technique helped me to achieve much better performance, increase my enjoyment, and reduce my risk of injury.

Similarly, most leaders will find their work easier and more impactful if they learn to communicate more effectively. All eight tools in this book will be helpful in just about any leadership role you may find yourself in.

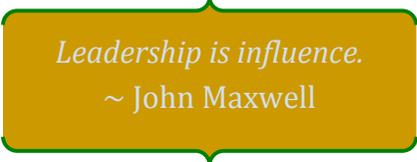
Consider this: Serious athletes periodically take time to “get back to the basics.” A basketball player will pause from practicing fancier moves in order to practice free throws or simple lay-ups.

In the same way, even the most successful and experienced leaders regularly need to “get back to the basics” to be sure they still communicate effectively with everyone they need to engage with. You don’t want to get rusty on an important skill, or discover too late that the world has adopted new communication principles or technologies. Here is an extreme example: Imagine a CEO who called women “girls” and whose primary mode of communication was faxing command-and-control memos to every department; entire generations of employees would be turned off. With today’s rapid pace of change, communication competencies can become similarly obsolete in less than five years.

The eight tools in this book are some of the foundational (and most powerful) communication tools that today’s leaders should master.

A Leader Influences People

Does the word "influence" bother you? For some people, the thought that leaders communicate in order to influence people sounds like manipulation. Who wants to be manipulated to do something contrary to their wishes or best interests?



Leadership is influence.
~ John Maxwell

But we look to our leaders to help accomplish things we couldn’t do all by ourselves. Leading has to do with choosing direction, making sure the right work is getting done, planning for

meaningful work, pursuing the right impact, inspiring and lifting people up, and getting people the resources they need.

A football team needs a head coach and other coaching staff, so the players can each do their appropriate part, play after play, to move the ball toward the end zone. A carmaker needs a CEO and other leaders so that thousands of cars can be built, each with the gas pedal and brakes in the right places. Things like that don't happen, with consistency over the long term, unless someone is influencing people to work together, to stick with it, to learn and improve, and to see value in what they are accomplishing together.

There is no need for a leader unless something needs to change: value needs to be created, a problem needs to be avoided, a solution needs to be discovered and implemented.

A leader influences people, but it's even more important for a leader to *cultivate* people.

And there is no need to communicate as a leader unless it is to change a situation through people ... to influence people to come together to bring about a change. And if the leader is not consistently working for mutually beneficial changes, then at some point he probably will no longer be their leader.

By definition, a leader influences people.

A Leader Cultivates People

Not convinced that, as a leader, you should be influencing people? Still bothered by the word "influence"? Frankly, so am I. So many people throughout history have misused their influence that it's hard not to equate "influence" with "manipulating other people to think or do what you want rather than what they want."

Yes, a leader influences people, but it's even more important for a leader to *cultivate* people.

Think about it: Whether you are engaging with an employee, customer, family member, or friend, aren't you always cultivating the relationship or person toward some purpose? For example, you may be cultivating:

- Your relationship
- The best interests of both parties
- Future opportunities and capabilities for both of you
- The enjoyment and memory of being together
- The momentum of the team toward a shared purpose.

Even if you think you're simply having a good time with a friend, or getting something done with an employee, why not take a breath and think about how you can be intentional as a leader? For example, best-selling author Michael Hyatt convinced me that when getting together with family or friends, it's a worthwhile goal to create a "perfect moment" with them (see www.engagingleader.com/perfect-moment). Michael's goal in these occasions is not to change the people; his goal is to cultivate the moment – and ultimately the relationship.

A client expressed frustration that his staff was competently getting their work done, but they didn't seem to be growing to the next level – as a result, *he* felt stuck, because he couldn't delegate higher-level work to them. After I asked him a few questions, he came to the realization that he had been an effective *driver*, but not an effective *cultivator*. He had been influencing them to achieve assigned work effectively and efficiently, but it hadn't really been his goal to cultivate them to be leaders, strategic thinkers, and trusted decision-makers.

How can you use your influence to cultivate the relationships and people you care about toward a higher purpose?

Communication Is a Powerful Discipline

With great power, comes great responsibility.
~ Benjamin "Uncle Ben" Parker, Spider-Man (2002)

If communication is a tool for cultivating and influencing, then communication is power ... the power to make a difference in people's lives, for better or worse.

Unfortunately, the history of the world is full of leaders who use their power of communication for selfish reasons. For example, Adolf Hitler had a magnetic charisma but used it to make himself a dictator at the expense of the lives and freedom of millions of innocent people. Even saintly Abraham Lincoln used his incredible power of empathy for some arguably self-centered purposes, such as predicting (accurately) what his political opponents would do – several steps ahead of time, as in a game of chess.

But studying and practicing communication *principles* – not just communication *skills* such as public speaking – will help you be a genuine leader who is making a positive difference. The full communication discipline goes deeper than mere skills, and it can help you leave the world a better place than you found it.

When I first read Stephen Covey's book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* in my early 20s, I excitedly told a friend about it. At that time, Jonathan was working on his doctorate in philosophy, and to someone more accustomed to reading Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, the title of Covey's book sounded superficial and manipulative. "Is that just one of those 'dress for success' books?" Jonathan asked.

As any reader of *7 Habits* knows, the book is anything but superficial and manipulative. For example, Habit 5 is “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” If you make a habit out of trying to understand other people, before trying to get others to understand you, are you manipulating people? Absolutely not – you are probably becoming a better person, someone who cares about the well-being of others, a leader who puts the needs of others over your own needs.

The communication discipline is not about becoming a smooth-talking con artist.

In the same way, to study and practice the communication discipline is not about becoming a smooth-talking con artist. It’s about becoming an engaging leader who

accepts appropriate influence from other people, and directs appropriate influence over other people, toward a mutually worthwhile purpose. I discussed more about this in the very first episode of the Engaging Leader podcast, when I explained the communication application of Covey’s book (see “The 7 Habits of Highly Engaging Leaders” at www.EngagingLeader.com/1).

When you use empathetic thinking (tool #2) and other tools from this book, you will become a better person – not only a more powerful leader, but also a more service-oriented leader.

Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant.
~ Jesus

Effective Communication Is a Must

In the 21st century, leadership relies more on communication than ever before.

In the days before the telegraph, a leader's interpersonal communication influenced only those in his inner circle. There was a ripple effect, where something said to an aide would be repeated to someone else. News took weeks or even months to reach followers living in other states or countries. When George Washington declared that the United States would be neutral in the French Revolution, history records that the immediate reaction

from many American citizens was outrage and disappointment ... but “immediate” is relative – in 1789, “immediate” meant within weeks or months; in today’s world of Twitter and YouTube, “immediate” means hours or even minutes.

Today, you are communicating nearly constantly, whether or not you know it.

Frequency makes an impact. As you know if you have studied social media, one of the biggest factors in whether you attract and engage blog, Facebook, or Twitter followers is the frequency with which you post. Although it is possible to post too often, generally the biggest cause of disappointing results is not posting enough.

Even silence makes an impact, for better or worse. Silence may cause people to think you aren’t doing or thinking anything worthwhile. Maybe they think you are hiding something. Or that you are too good for them. For whatever reason, when you finally do say something, fewer people will pay attention, because the rest have moved on to engage with someone else.

That’s not to say that a leader has to be *talking* all the time. Leadership and communication both require intentionality – planning ahead and making choices based on a defined purpose.

“We have but two ears and one mouth, so that we may listen twice as much as we speak.”

~ Thomas Edison

When can silence be effective? One occasion is when you should be listening. For example, if you are having lunch with several friends, you shouldn’t do all the talking. You should spend the majority of the time listening, thinking about what your friends are saying, being open to letting what they say influence you. And some of the time, a smaller proportion of the time, you should be talking so that your friends know what is currently important to

you, what is going on in your life, what is happening inside your head and your heart. “We have but two ears and one mouth,” Thomas Edison said, “so that we may listen twice as much as we speak.”

This book will help you use your two ears and one mouth effectively. These eight tools will help you be more intentional in your communications, whether you are talking, writing, or being silent.

Tool 1 The Big-Little Outcome Scope

If you don't know where you're going, you'll wind up somewhere else. ~ Yogi Berra

Too often, we waste opportunities to positively influence others. Or worse, we negatively influence them because we send unfocused or confusing messages.

During a recent team meeting, I complained about a problem: Our staff had not been consistently keeping one of our project-management tools updated. But I failed to clearly communicate what needed to be done differently and why it was important to our long-term purpose. As a result, I left some team members with the impression that I had become a red-tape Nazi, more interested in administrative processes than in creating results that matter.

It's better to practice Habit #2 from Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*: **Begin with the end in mind**. In leadership and communication, the "end" is an outcome – something that will change as the result of your words and/or actions.

In our team meeting, I was just venting my frustration without thinking about the outcome I wanted. Before opening my mouth, I should have been clear in my own mind that I wanted our staff to either keep our tool up-to-date or propose an alternate solution that met our clients' need to stay informed.

One Big Outcome

It's usually tempting to have several goals for any given communication. But according to Franklin Covey's *The Four*

Disciplines of Execution, it's best to set no more than 1-3 goals at a time, because research shows:

- If you aim for 1-3 goals, you'll achieve 1-3.
- If you aim for 4-10 goals, you'll achieve 1.
- If you aim for 11-20 goals, you'll achieve 0.

I find it marvelously clarifying to force myself to identify a single *must-have* outcome for any communication or engagement. I call it my Big Outcome, and usually it's something I'd like people to *think* or *do* differently. Then, I identify up to three "little" objectives that will help produce that outcome.



We say no to good ideas every day. We do this to make great ideas happen. ~ Tim Cook, CEO of Apple

My consulting firm, Aspendale Communications, recently hosted three people from a long-time client for a three-day meeting. We were partnering with them on several projects, and we hoped the meeting would produce several decisions that would move the projects forward.

As my team and I were planning the agenda, however, I realized that half of our project team had been working with the client for only a few months and had never met them face-to-face. Although I personally had been working with the client for 15 years, they actually felt unsure about the current makeup of our team.

I realized that if we accomplished nothing else during the three-day meeting, we had one *must-have* outcome: a solid start to *trusted friendships* between everyone on the client team and everyone on the Aspendale team. Based on this clear outcome, we scrapped our initial decision-focused agenda and created an agenda made up of collaborative, creative, and team-building activities.

On the day that our client guests arrived, they were clearly distracted by two recent developments. For them, those two issues were now bigger priorities than any of the projects we were currently focused on. Although we kept the collaborative, creative, and team-building structure of our agenda, we shifted the specific topics to address the new priorities.

As a result, during those three days, we didn't accomplish any tasks for the projects that were the original reason for scheduling the three-day meeting in the first place. However, our guests were so ecstatic at what we accomplished during the meeting that they sent us thank-you notes with phrases like "great time with great people!"

If you aim for 1-3 goals, you'll achieve 1-3.

We had achieved our "trusted friendships" outcome.

Three Little Objectives

Let's assume you have defined one Big Outcome for a communication or engagement, whether it's a meeting, written piece, or a speech. That outcome is *what* you'd like a person(s) to think or do differently.

The next step is to determine *how* you or your communication will create that outcome. Define the *how* in one or more objectives. I call them Little Objectives in order to remain clear that they must support the Big Outcome.

Here are two hints for defining effective objectives.

First, it's helpful to think about the challenges or objections you will need to overcome with your audience to accomplish your Big Outcome. For example, Erin was invited to make a one-hour presentation at an organic-gardening conference; her topic was how to grow an organic orchard. One obvious challenge was to hold the audience's attention for a full hour, especially since they had already sat through two earlier one-hour presentations. A second challenge is that conventional wisdom among gardeners –

even organic gardeners – is that fruit trees won't produce healthy fruit without lots of chemicals and tedious work. So, two of Erin's objectives were to *excite* the audience and to *create confidence* that they could successfully and enjoyably grow an organic orchard.

Second, it's best to state your objectives as action verbs. You may not be an actor, but every leader can learn a thing or two from actors about how to influence an audience.

Here's one thing every actor learns at some point in acting class: You take a scene in a script and you break it into beats. A beat usually describes one clear line of action in the script, a through-line if you will. We know that a beat ends and a new beat begins when there is a major shift or change in the conversation. Within each beat the actor, of course, speaks the lines from the script. More importantly, though, the actor picks an objective for the beat.

The objective is the actor's secret little mantra, if you will. It is never stated out loud, but it is vivid in the actor's mind. Actors know that the moment they find a clear objective for a beat, it gives everything they say a strong purpose. It charges the words with energy. It lifts the scene to a higher level of intensity. There are three golden rules that actors know about an objective:

1. The objective needs to be an action verb.
2. It needs to describe the impact I seek to have on another person.
3. It needs to be visceral for me [stimulate the heck out of me!].

Infectious: How to Connect Deeply and Unleash the Energetic Leader Within, by Achim Nowaky. 2013.

So to achieve your Big Outcome, identify the challenges or objections, and define action-word objectives that will overcome them. For any communication or engagement, I recommend no more than three Little Objectives – for example, “catch their attention, make them laugh, and pique their interest for more information.” Remember: If you aim for 1-3 goals, you’ll achieve 1-3. Also, sticking to no more than three will make it easier for you to keep in mind the Little Objectives once the communication is underway.

Examples of Using the Big-Little Outcome Scope

I’m a volunteer for a local non-profit that serves mothers and fathers in need. My role is providing classes and coaching about effective parenting.

I recently started a series of coaching sessions with a 40-year-old father. Going into the first session, I knew that Ed (not his real name) felt he had failed to be a good father to his five older children from a previous marriage, and he wanted mentoring so he could be a better dad for David, his six-month-old son with his current wife Tanya.

Based on that limited information, I could not identify anything specifically related to parenting that I thought Ed should think or do as a result of our first meeting. So I targeted a Big Outcome that I thought would be a *building block* for future outcomes: I wanted Ed to think or say that he enjoyed our time together and believes he can learn valuable insights from me.

Then I thought about the challenges I would face in achieving the Big Outcome. I was concerned that Ed could be apprehensive about me; he may perceive me as an authority on parenting, or a “perfect parent” who would be judgmental of his past failures. Also, I knew he was a blue-collar manual laborer; he could view a white-collar professional like me as out-of-touch with his issues. And as every counselor or coach knows, a common challenge is that clients may forget whatever lessons you may try to teach during any given session.

To overcome those challenges and achieve the Big Outcome, I identified three objectives for the first session:

- 1 **Make** a friend (build rapport with Ed).
- 2 **Listen** to identify one take-away lesson that Ed agrees is helpful.
- 3 **Reinforce** the take-away with a story that Ed will remember.

Did I achieve the Big Outcome for that first session? Yes, and here is how I know: During our second session, without any prompting, Ed commented on how helpful it was to talk with me about being a good dad, and he related that he had shared my story with Tanya.

Another example of using the Big-Little Outcome Scope is Erin's presentation on organic orchards, which I mentioned earlier. To find out how she applied this tool and whether she was successful, listen to me interview her on the podcast at www.EngagingLeader.com/27.

Be sure you positively identify your target before you pull the trigger. ~ Tom Flynn, author

Scope Worksheet

To identify your targeted outcomes for an interaction, ask yourself the questions using the following worksheet.

Is this interaction a building block for this person/audience? Or is it a one-time or infrequent interaction (such as a speech to a group that you only communicate to once a year)?

Building block

One-time or infrequent

If it's a building block: 1) What previous outcome(s) do you need to be consistent with and build upon? 2) What future outcome(s) do you want to build toward, in support of your ultimate purpose or vision?

1. _____

2. _____

If it's a one-time or infrequent interaction: How can you best use this single opportunity to make a difference that truly matters?

Big Outcome: What is the #1 most important thing you want the person or audience to DO or SAY differently as a result of this interaction with you?

What challenges will you face in getting the person or audience to do or say that? What objections will they think of?

Little Objectives: Define no more than three action-verb objectives to overcome those challenges/objectives and support your Big Outcome.

1. _____

2. _____

Lessons for Leaders

- Begin with the end in mind.
- Before any communication or engagement, create a clear understanding in your mind of the one big outcome you desire. What do you want people to *do* or *say* differently?
- Then identify 1-3 action-verb little objectives that will produce the outcome you want.

Tool 2 Empathetic Thinking

If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person's point of view and see things from his angle as well as your own. ~Henry Ford

One of my favorite definitions of empathy comes from biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin when she describes Abraham Lincoln's powerful empathy: "putting himself in the place of another, to experience what they were feeling, to understand their motives and desires."

When Lincoln engaged with people, most of them recognized he was sincerely trying to understand them and was willing to change his position based on what he learned from them. For example, when General Benjamin Butler threatened that he would resign if Lincoln took any action he could not support, Lincoln wrote to him,

"When you see me doing anything that for the good of the country ought not to be done, come and tell me so, and why you think so, and then perhaps you won't have any chance to resign your commission."

Empathy used to sound to me like a weak word associated with touchy-feely concepts – a "soft skill." But in recent years, I have come to understand that empathetic thinking is a powerful leadership action.

When you enter into any interaction with the goal to truly understand other people and even be influenced by them, six powerful things happen:

- **It puts you into “Seek First to Understand” mode**, so you can better understand your audience, so you can make decisions that better impact them, and so you know better how to communicate with them.
- **Most people never listen, so people will notice the difference if you do.** How often do you really feel listened to? When it happens, doesn't the attentive listener capture your attention and your loyalty? When you become an authentic listener and really engage in what others are saying, it will make a big impression on them.
- **It allows people to connect emotionally, so they can actually listen to your logic.** If people feel unheard or not understood, they can't disengage with their feelings enough to embrace your logic. You have to meet their feelings with emotion. Once that emotional connection is made, and they feel their feelings have been validated, you can then move the audience to a conclusion with logic. Consider the official acknowledgements in the aftermath of a tragic incident that must be handled and moved forward in some way. Public officials begin by saying, “Our hearts go out to the family of those killed in the fire.” In his book *The Power of Communication*, Fred Garcia points out these officials must acknowledge and validate the feelings that people are experiencing before there will be public support for their logical conclusions or plans.
- **Empathy kicks you out of self-absorption.** Most of us naturally are inclined to be absorbed with our own experiences and feelings. Relating with empathy involves recognizing and treating others as equals, and to validate that they are people, too, fully experiencing events in their own way.
- **Your empathetic thinking makes your audience more receptive to being influenced by you.** Mirror neurons cause your audience to have the same brain activity based on your actions, thoughts, and feelings. As a

leader, when you are truly seeking to fully understand your audience — and are willing to be influenced by their point of view — they are more likely to seek to understand you and be open to your influence. (See my “Pickle Juice” video at www.EngagingLeader.com/mirror for an explanation of this important concept.)

- **Empathy moves you toward mutual respect and involvement.** If you are genuinely seeking to understand a person, you can't help but fully recognize them as a valuable and whole person. Research psychologist David Burnham says this leads to actions that demonstrate emotional intelligence, which leads to higher levels of employee engagement and morale.

8 Key Skills of Empathy

We are not thinking machines. We are feeling machines who think. ~Richard Restak, George Washington University neurology professor

As leaders, we need to make emotional connections with our target audience if we hope to influence their thoughts and actions. One very important way to connect positively with people is by thinking empathetically.

Juan was planning to present recommendations to his CEO and two other senior leaders about the company's medical benefits program. He had invited three people (two of whom were external consultants) to help make the presentation. While having multiple advisors can be wise, I was concerned that Juan would appear weak by needing so many advisors for the presentation. Also, too

many voices would make it difficult to achieve the meeting's objectives in the allotted time.

Rather than simply pointing out the danger of inviting all three advisors, I asked him to help me understand the thinking behind his meeting plans. Why did he want to include each person? How would each one help him achieve his objectives? When he was able to completely express his thoughts, and I was able to fully understand his thoughts and feelings, it was easy to reach the mutual decision to bring only one advisor – the program's medical director.

Understanding the thoughts and feelings of another person may sound tough if you don't consider yourself an empathetic person.

The good news is that empathy doesn't have to be something you're born with. It involves skills that you can develop through intentionality and practice.

Here are eight key empathy skills you can practice to improve your ability to connect with others:

- 1 **Curiosity:** Take the time to be curious about what other people think. Try to fully understand their point of view.
- 2 **Authentic Listening:** Most people don't truly listen. Stop planning what you are going to say, and focus on really hearing their thoughts and feelings. We'll talk more about this in Tool 3.
- 3 **Repeating and Paraphrasing:** Try to tell them what you heard them say, in your own words, so they can correct any misinterpretation or confirm that you heard them correctly.
- 4 **Imagination:** Think about what it would be like to be in their shoes. What if you woke up one morning and found you had switched places in life with them?

- 5 **Open-Mindedness:** Allow yourself to be influenced by their thoughts and feelings. Almost no one does this, but it is key if you want to inspire people to be open to your own influence.
- 6 **Vulnerability:** Respectfully share your reactions and feelings about what the other person is saying, with the intent to confirm that you are fully understanding them.
- 7 **Self-Awareness:** Understand how your emotions or feelings may be affecting your thoughts and reactions.
- 8 **Sensitivity to Others' Emotions:** Develop your “emotional radar” to pick up on what people are feeling by watching their body language and facial expressions, and listening not only to their words, but to any “between the lines” meaning in the event they are not being direct and transparent.

While some of these empathy skills may not come naturally to you, the more you practice the better you will become – and the more easily you will be able to connect with and influence people.

Lessons for Leaders

- Empathy is putting yourself in the place of someone else, to imagine yourself experiencing what they are feeling, and to understand their motives and desires.
- Empathy may sound like a weak word associated with touchy-feely concepts – a “soft skill.” But empathetic thinking is a powerful leadership action.
- When you try to fully understand a person or audience – and are willing to be influenced by their point of view – they are more likely to seek to understand you and to be open to your influence.



Authentic Listening

When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.
~ Ernest Hemingway

Know what it's like to have someone not really listen to you? My wife Erin gets that treatment from me a little too often.

"I've been thinking about what kind of car to get," she says. "It'll be time to replace mine within a year or so."

"Hmm," I reply.

"Durability is imperative. Anything less than four stars for durability is an automatic no-go."

"Uh-huh."

"Cargo room is a second must-have. If I can't throw bikes or lumber in back, it just won't work."

"OK."

"And third, it has to have a spacious back seat, for when we're out alone together and have time to kill."

"We have time to kill right now," I reply. (Like many guys, my radar never fails to pick up any hint of sex.)

"Hmm," she says.

Set Yourself Apart as a Leader

Most people (especially those in positions of leadership) don't listen. When you give full attention to what people have to say, you set yourself apart as an engaging leader.

As a leader, we naturally want people to listen to us and be influenced by us. Paradoxically, people resist listening to us unless they feel that we are truly listening to them and are open to their influence. This resistance may either take an active form, such as stating directly that they are opposed to your position. Or the resistance may be passive, such as appearing to listen while actually thinking about other topics, or agreeing to your position with no intention to putting it into action. But make no mistake: if someone is resisting your influence for no apparent reason, the secret reason is likely that they feel you don't fully understand their perspective.

Entire books and workshops are devoted to teaching a set of skills called “active listening.” It’s called *active* to emphasize that effective listening requires effort, concentration, and action. But to increase your leadership influence, the skills are much less important than your intention.

What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others. ~ Confucius

Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. ~ Jesus

If your intentions are false, no amount of careful wording or good posture will help. If your intentions are good, even clumsy language won't hinder you. Listening is only powerful and effective if it is authentic. Authenticity means that you are listening because you are curious and because you care, not just because you are supposed to.

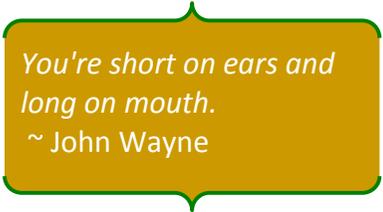
Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most, by Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen, 2010.

Because authenticity is more important than the active skills, I focus on authentic listening rather than active listening.

How to Listen Authentically

Authentic listening begins with the proper attitude and intentions. Your attitude should be one of genuine caring, curiosity, and openness to being influenced by the person you are with. Your intentions should be to fully understand the speaker, encourage her to fully express herself about this topic, and validate her thoughts and feelings. These five tips will help:

- *Be truly present.* Focus all your attention on the person you are with at this moment. Look at him in the eyes. Care enough to genuinely listen.
- *Concentrate on what the speaker is saying.* Pay attention to her facial gestures and body language, to better understand the thoughts and emotions that may be driving what she is saying.
- *Ask questions to learn more.* Be curious about what he thinks and why he thinks that way. Is there new information or a perspective that you should consider?
- *Occasionally repeat back what you've heard, but in your own words.* Repeating and paraphrasing gives her a chance to confirm that you understood her correctly and completely, and often it will prompt her to divulge further information. Try to fully understand her position and her thoughts and feelings about that position.
- *Think about what it would be like to be in the speaker's shoes.* Can you understand why he feels or thinks the way he does? If his thoughts or feelings don't seem reasonable to you, then you may not yet have enough information – or you may not yet be regarding him as your equal.
- *Validate the speaker's thoughts and feelings.* As you come to fully understand her position, thoughts, and feelings,



You're short on ears and long on mouth.
~ John Wayne

acknowledge the feelings that seem reasonable to you. For example, "I can appreciate how that would have felt frustrating."

- *If appropriate, also validate the speaker's competence.* As leaders, we are wired to move things forward, so we often are quick to suggest a solution or idea. But the speaker may just want someone to allow him to process his own thoughts and ideas out loud. Furthermore, it's powerful when you cultivate leadership and creativity in others. Often, you can be most helpful by simply acknowledging his ability to capably solve the problem.

How NOT to Listen Authentically

Keep in mind that to influence others, you need to avoid sparking their resistance. Here are five actions to avoid for more authentic listening:

Don't multitask.

Don't try to do other things during the conversation, such as reading your email or getting caught up on Facebook. Don't think about the upcoming meeting that you want to prepare for.

You may think you are good at multi-tasking, but science has shown that in reality you are only doing one thing at a time. You hope you are fooling someone into thinking that you are paying attention to what they are saying, but in reality you are fooling them into having a low perception of you: A co-worker may perceive your distraction as a sign that you are in over your head; your spouse or child may think you don't really care about them.

You hope you are fooling someone into thinking that you are paying attention to what they are saying, but in reality you are fooling them into having a low perception of you.

Don't offer a solution without being asked.

Often, my wife will tell me about a problem – *not* to find a solution from me, but so she can 1) get confirmation that her frustration or other feelings are valid, and 2) process her thoughts out loud.

Although I'm naturally wired to immediately start suggesting solutions, I have learned to get confirmation that she wants my ideas before I start tossing them out there. This is a common communication challenge between husbands and wives, but it can come up in any area of life, so don't offer a solution unless you are asked. (Unfortunately, I have to keep re-learning this lesson. Just this afternoon, Erin told me about a problem with one of our kids. "Simple," I said. "Just don't let him use the computer until he does what you asked him to do." She responded politely, but I'll bet she felt like kicking me for telling her something she already knew.)

Arguing with a person immediately puts them on the defensive, so they won't listen to your points.

Don't argue or contradict.

Throughout my teen years and into my early 20s, I loved to argue because I was so good at it. Then I read *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie –

and I realized that even if I won an argument, I still lost.

A key memory supported this conclusion: One night while in college, I stayed up very late with a friend having a calm, rational discussion about a very controversial topic. At the time, I was well-versed on scientific, historical, and moral points on this topic. After a few hours, my friend threw in the towel. "Everything you said makes sense, and I don't have any logical arguments against your points," she said. "But this is what I believe, and I'm not going to change my mind." Her mind said I was right, but her heart refused to agree with me, so what was the use of arguing?

Most of time, arguing with a person immediately puts him on the defensive, so he won't listen to your point of view. Even if he is

willing to have an honest debate, as my friend was, arguing may engage his mind but usually closes off his heart. Authentic listening, on the other hand, encourages both open-mindedness and open-heartedness from both you and the speaker.

Don't be defensive.

When you invite someone to talk while you listen, you may hear criticisms and even unfair accusations. But keep in mind that your intent is to understand the person's thoughts and feelings. If you can get him to fully reveal himself and be transparent, that can be helpful to you even if you don't like what you are hearing – after all, most people won't share that kind of information directly with you, so this is a rare opportunity to learn. And if you seek to fully understand the person, he is more likely to seek to fully understand you, and may even extend an open-minded invitation to you to explain your side of the story behind an unfair accusation. But during authentic listening, your goal is just to fully understand and even empathize with why they feel that way about you.

Don't ask leading questions.

Leading questions are asked not with the intent of learning and listening, but to get the conversation around to what YOU want to say. See Tool 7 to learn how to ask learning questions rather than leading questions.

Trust yourself to come up with the right words when it's your turn to speak.

"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand," said Stephen Covey. "They listen with the intent to reply." While the other person is talking, focus on listening to her – not on worrying about what you will say next. When it is your turn to speak, it's perfectly acceptable to pause for a few seconds to think about what you want to say. If you really do get stuck, often the best thing to say is simply a paraphrase of what you think you heard

her say, to confirm you heard her correctly and that she has fully expressed herself on that issue.

Keep in mind that some people may be bothered by pauses or moments of silence. If you are thinking about something, they may get nervous as you pause to reflect on what you want to say. They may assume you are angry, you didn't like what they said, you don't think what they said is worthy of a reply, or you are being condescending to them. For those people, you may want to say something like, "Okay, I'm thinking about this..."

LUV and the Drive-Thru Lane

If all this seems like too much to remember about how to authentically listen, you may find it helpful to simply remember LUV: Listen, Understand, Validate. As best-selling author Gary Smalley points out, those three steps will take you a long way toward fully understanding people, encouraging them to fully express themselves about the topic, and validating their thoughts and feelings.

The typical fast food drive-thru lane provides a model Smalley suggests is even easier to remember. "Welcome to McDonald's," they say. "Can I take your order?" This communicates respect and a genuine desire to listen. Then they repeat your order to make sure they got it right. Finally, they acknowledge the order ("OK, that will be \$5.25") in a tone that indicates they aren't doubting whether it's a good order!

Example of Authentic Listening

"Bob is driving me crazy!"

"Did Bob do something that bothers you?"

"He keeps interrupting me when I'm in the middle of my work."

"Bob makes unscheduled visits to your office several times a day?"

"Yeah, at least five times a day he pokes his head in and asks me a question, or he calls me. I lose my train of thought about what

I'm working on, and it takes me a while to get my head back into things. I'll bet it costs me 15 minutes every time he does it!"

"That would be frustrating to feel like you're losing more than an hour of productivity every day."

"I'm just beside myself. I feel like I'm helping him do his job, or just entertaining him when he's bored, but meanwhile it's putting my own job at risk."

"Are you hoping I'll suggest some ideas for solutions?"

"Not really. I just wanted to vent."

"Well, I can see why it would make you feel annoyed and even nervous about your own productivity. You're really good at working with people, so I'm sure you'll figure out how to work this out with Bob."

Lessons for Leaders

- Most people don't listen. Set yourself apart as a leader who truly listens.
- As a leader, we naturally want people to listen to us and be influenced by us. Paradoxically, people resist unless they feel that we are truly listening to them and are open to their influence.
- Proper attitude and intentions are far more important than any specific listening skills.
- Your attitude should be one of genuine caring, curiosity, and openness to being influenced by the other person.
- Your intentions should be to fully understand the speaker, encourage her to fully express herself about this topic, and validate her thoughts and feelings.

Tool 4

Learning Questions

I never learn anything by talking. I only learn things when I ask questions. ~ Lou Holtz

Are you familiar with the Socratic method? Socrates didn't use rhetoric to persuade people to accept his point of view. Instead, he asked questions that stimulated critical thinking and led people to reach a conclusion on their own. And presto! People took ownership for their conclusion, rather than feeling they were simply out-debated by a skillful speaker.

Let's face it: As a leader, it feels easier to simply state your position ("Most people would never buy broccoli-flavored ice cream"). Asking questions requires more patience and creativity from a leader ("What does the data show about what new flavors our customers would most prefer?").

And there's another challenge: our natural tendency to ask "leading questions."

Beware of Leading Questions

Imagine you are a witness on stand in a courtroom. The opposing attorney is trying to manipulate you into saying something you don't really believe.

"Where were you at 8pm on October 15?"

"I was in my kitchen doing the dishes."

"What did you see through the window over your sink?"

"I saw Mr. Burns talking with Ms. Stapleton on her front porch."

“Were they arguing?”

“It’s possible. I couldn’t hear what they were saying.”

“Was Ms. Stapleton upset?”

“Well, she threw her arms in the air a few times, and she rushed into the house and slammed the door behind her.”

“Isn’t it true that you hoped they were arguing — that you wanted Ms. Stapleton to be upset, because you have feelings for her and planned to knock on her door as soon as Mr. Burns left?”

Finally, your attorney appeals to the judge. “Objection, your honor! He’s leading the witness!”

Love is the answer, but while you are waiting for the answer, sex raises some pretty good questions. ~ Woody Allen

A leading question is one that drives the answerer toward your own point of view. Even though you are a leader, asking a question is usually not a good time to “lead.”

If you ask leading questions designed to push your point of view (“Do you know anyone who gags whenever they taste broccoli?”), sooner or later people will catch on to what you are trying to do. They will view you as manipulative and perhaps even dishonest, because you use questions as a sneaky tactic to promote your position rather than being up front about it.

Three Ways to Get Magical Answers

Instead of asking a leading question, try asking a *learning* question. According to executive coach Tom Henschel, a learning question reflects something you want to know that you don’t know already. “This requires you to approach the conversation as a learner, with curiosity rather than judgment,” says Tom. “You can’t approach it to prove your position or to point out what’s gone wrong.”

You may indeed have a position, but your purpose in asking a learning question is not to manipulate people to come to that position. Instead, you are asking with the end goal of arriving at the best answer, which may not be the answer you initially hoped for.

A prudent question is one-half of wisdom.
~ Francis Bacon

There are three characteristics of learning questions that you should strive for:

- **Ask questions that are open-ended.** A learning question should encourage interaction and broad thinking (“What do you envision is the best-case scenario?”). Close-ended questions that ask for a yes/no (“Are we all willing to accept that risk?”) or similarly brief answer (“When can you complete that step?”) are best saved for when you are requesting specific data or drawing a discussion to a close.
- **Start with Who, What, How, or Tell me.** Questions like “What do you think we should do? How does that sound to you? Who is our target audience?” and inviting statements like “Tell me more about that” encourage discussion and critical thinking. Conversely, “Why” questions tend to put people on the defensive (“Why did you do that?”); try a different phrase that still encourages discussion (“That’s a possibility. How did you come up with that?”)
- **Be open to a different answer than you expected.** If you ask a question without being genuinely curious, then most likely your purpose is leading rather than learning. When you ask a genuine question, you are open to the possibility of changing your position or pursuing an additional position based on what you learn.

Asking learning questions is a great way to engage your team to identify the best solutions — and together, to be accountable as a group for the success of those solutions. But it isn't easy. It requires creativity, curiosity, and openness to new ideas.

Sometimes it feels so much easier to simply say, "Let's do it my way now."

And sometimes, that is what is appropriate for a leader to do.

But more often, great leadership recognizes that the "magic" is in the team, not the leader. And asking learning questions is a powerful way of cultivating brilliant ideas and results in your team. Creating the magic that comes from engagement is worth the extra time and effort.

The language of leaders is stories. The language of coaches is questions.

~ Dave Stachowiak,
CoachingForLeaders.com

Lessons for Leaders

- Asking learning questions is a powerful way of cultivating brilliant ideas and results in your team.
- Asking questions allows people to take ownership for the answers, rather than feeling they were simply out-debated by a skillful speaker.
- A learning question reflects something you want to know that you don't know already.
- To learn, ask questions that are open-ended; start with Who, What, How, or Tell me; and be open to a different answer than you expected.



The 1-3-3 Message Map

I know you believe you understand what I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.

~ Robert McCloskey

One of the things that will hurt your credibility as a leader is sending muddled or confusing messages.

We've all been guilty of this at one time or another. You're put on the spot to speak to a group without having a chance to prepare a speech, so you start rambling. Or perhaps you over-prepare for a speech, and cram in 23 points with various sub-points. Or you send out a long email, and no one is really sure what the priorities are.

The 1-3-3 Message Map is a handy tool to make sure you maintain the presence of a leader and that your communication has the impact you want.

- 1: Identify the one core idea or outcome of your communication.
- 3: Crystalize no more than three key messages that support the core.
- 3: For each key message, identify up to three supporting elements, such as logical points, stories, facts, or exercises.

How the 1-3-3 Message Map Works

To illustrate how to use the 1-3-3 Message Map, here is the map I completed to plan this chapter:

1 core idea/outcome: The 1-3-3 Message Map is a handy tool for creating leadership presence and impact.

3 Key Messages	3 Supporting Elements
Clear	1 Confidence 2 Brevity 3 Consistency
Memorable	1 Friends, Romans, _____ 2 Huey, Louie, _____ 3 The good, The bad, the _____
Quick	1 Organize your thoughts on the spot 2 In your head or on paper 3 _____

My core idea for the chapter is that the 1-3-3 Message Map is a handy tool for creating leadership presence and impact.

My key messages are that the 1-3-3 Message Map helps you be clear, it makes your communication easy for you and your listeners to remember, and it's quick.

Here is how my supporting elements build the case for each of those three messages:

You need a 1-3-3 Message Map to help you be clear, because it demonstrates organized thought that makes you look confident. It helps you stay brief and to the point, which further makes you look confident. And by organizing your thoughts before you open your mouth, you have the opportunity to compare your messages with past communications, so you can stay consistent.

The 1-3-3 Message Map is memorable. That makes it less likely that you'll forget your points when you stand up to speak. And more likely that listeners or readers will remember what you said the next day. The "Rule of 3" is a well-known principle that says people can remember things better when grouped in 3s.

There's three kinds of people in this world: those who can count and those who can't.

~ Billy C. Wirtz

For example, if I say, "Friends, Romans ..." you likely will automatically fill in the blank with *Countrymen*. The same with Huey, Louie, and ... *Dewey*. Or The Good, The Bad, and ... *The Ugly*.

And finally, the 1-3-3 Message Map is quick. If you are at a meeting and suddenly asked to say something, it's a great tool for organizing your thoughts on the spot. It's so simple that you can just map your messages in your head, or scratch them on a piece of notepaper.

Notice that I left the third supporting item blank, to point out that you don't have to provide all three messages or all three supporting elements for each message. It's just that you generally shouldn't exceed the 1-3-3 guideline, or else you will start to lose these benefits.

Your Turn

Following is a blank template for the 1-3-3 Message Map. The next time you need to speak during a meeting or conference call, or to create a written communication, use this map to create leadership presence and impact.

1 core idea/outcome:

3 Key Messages	3 Supporting Elements
1.	1. 2. 3.
2.	1. 2. 3.
3.	1. 2. 3.

Remember, you can just map your messages in your head or on a piece of note paper. But if you'd find it helpful to download a template of the 1-3-3 Message Map as a Word document or PowerPoint slide, visit www.EngagingLeader.com/map.

Lessons for Leaders

To maintain the presence of a leader and communicate with impact, avoid sending muddled or confusing messages.

Organize your communication with the 1-3-3 Message Map:

- 1 core idea or outcome
- 3 or fewer key messages
- 3 or fewer supporting elements per message.



The "I" Power Pronoun

I now wish to make the personal acknowledgment that you were right, and I was wrong. ~ Abraham Lincoln, letter to Ulysses Grant

Pronouns Are Revealing

In my mid-20s, while in Chicago on business for a few days, I had lunch with my former boss at the global consulting firm I had left a couple years earlier. For me, it was a chance to catch up with someone I genuinely liked. For her, it was also a chance to lure me back to the firm – but what she didn't know was I had just been promoted at the company where I now worked, so I wasn't interested in a job offer.

"You've come a long way," Laurie commented after listening to me talk about my recent projects. "You aren't the young greenhorn you used to be."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "I'm doing essentially the same work as when I was on your team."

"It's the way you talk about the work and the people. For example, you said 'my graphic designer' and 'my client,' rather than 'the graphic designer' and 'the client.' You have more authority now, don't you?"

The pronouns we use reveal a lot about our authority, accountability, and relationships with others. And words like *I, my, we, us, our, you, your, they, them, and their* not only show where we think we stand, they also tell our listeners or readers where we think *they* stand.

By the way, this story illustrates a point in my ongoing development as a leader, but as you'll learn in the next chapter, the pronoun "my" revealed that I still had room for maturing as a leader of a team.

"I" = Personal Ownership

Like most couples, Erin and I have some personal differences – one of which involves comfortable room temperatures. She likes a room to be warm, while I prefer cool.

Earlier in our marriage, we also had a difference in how we managed the thermostat. My approach was to pick a thermostat setting and leave it alone, day after day. If one morning the house felt too cold to me, I would drink hot coffee and possibly even change into warmer clothing.

Erin's approach was different. If she felt too cold, she would immediately turn up our house's thermostat a few degrees. Hours later, I would finally realize that I'd been sweating profusely and could no longer strip off more layers of clothing without causing a scene. I would check the thermostat and discover that the heat wasn't simply my imagination ... the house was in fact on its way to "sauna" status.

"Of course I turned up the heat," Erin would respond when I asked about it. "It was too cold in here."

"That's so unfair!" I would reply. "You talk as if your perception of hot/cold is the only perspective that matters."

Think about the difference between these two statements that Erin could have made:

- 1 **"It's too cold in here."** This sounds like an objective fact: The temperature is lower than what should feel comfortable to a normal human being. Regardless of how the rest of the family feels, I will make a unilateral decision to increase the house's temperature.
- 2 **"I feel too cold."** This sounds like an honest statement that acknowledges a subjective perception of relative

value; the temperature is lower than what feels comfortable to my body right now. However, the actual temperature may be no different than it was yesterday afternoon, when I felt fine. And regardless of how I feel right now, the rest of the family may feel fine. But this is the way I feel; I own this feeling.

Can you see why I felt offended by statement #1? Can you see why statement #2 was more likely to provoke a mutually beneficial conversation, rather than an argument?

Now, think about the difference between these two statements that I could have made:

- 1 **"You talk as if your perception of hot/cold is the only perspective that matters."** This statement is pushing blame onto the other person, and it sounds like I'm stating an objective fact.
- 2 **"I felt angry when you said that, because I got the impression that your perception of hot/cold is the only perspective that matters."** This statement is expressing feeling and reactions. I take ownership of my feelings and reactions, which may or may not accurately reflect the situation you want to create.

Can you see why statement #1 is likely to only prolong the disagreement, by pushing Erin to take the defensive? Can you see why statement #2 is a healthier starting point for a mutually beneficial discussion?

Anatomy of the "I" Power Pronoun

Although you don't need to rigidly follow this formula, an effective use of the "I" Power Pronoun usually looks something like this:

I feel _____ (*specific feeling*)
when _____ (*specific words/action that caused the feeling*)
because I _____ (*result*)

Beware: You are cheating if you say, "I felt you were saying that your perception is the only perspective that matters." Notice that statement does not state a specific feeling. As a result, if you talk this way you are still likely to put your listener or reader on the defensive because you will come across as blaming them.

The "I" Power Pronoun is about ownership. As leaders, we can use it to openly and honestly share our feelings and reactions, while acknowledging that they are subjective – and therefore, we take full ownership for them. This allows the listener or reader to consider without defensiveness, and to work with us toward a mutual solution.

Another important way the "I" Power Pronoun provides a helpful sense of ownership involves mistakes.

Whose Fault Is It?

I'm not a big fan of assigning blame for a mistake or problem. I'd much rather focus on fixing the problem or finding a solution.

As a leader, whenever a problem occurs on my team, I can usually drill down deep enough to find that I was responsible at some level.

For example, we produce a quarterly employee newsletter for a certain client, and one quarter a mistake was discovered after the newsletter had been printed – one of the article headlines did not match the table of contents. This mistake would have been easily caught if only our proofreader would have followed our standard proofreading checklist, which includes comparing every headline with the table of contents.

It would have been easy to blame the proofreader. Or I could have blamed the project manager, who assigned the task to the proofreader without reminding him to use the checklist. Instead, I realized the mistake was ultimately my fault. As the leader, I should have been more consistent in reminding our team that quality, while not as "sexy" as creativity, is just as vital to the

credibility and impact of our communications. So I used the “I” Power Pronoun to acknowledge my contribution toward the mistake and then moved our team toward improving our processes to avoid future mistakes. (Note: This is not to say that I don’t hold people accountable. The typo ultimately was my fault for not making sure that everyone was aware of our standard proofreading process and the importance of using it. So I will do a better job of that going forward. But I don’t have patience for repeat mistakes. I try to see every mistake or failure as an opportunity to learn lessons, but I expect people on my team to learn the lessons and not repeat the mistakes.)

Sometimes it can be emotionally difficult to admit you’re wrong. For example, you may discover you’re wrong after you were belligerently insisting that you were right; in other words, you were a jerk about it! Also, it can be hardest to apologize to the people we care about the most.

My wife Erin and I have discovered a private code that helps in those difficult moments with each other. In those occasions (which I wish I could say are very rare) when it’s difficult for me to admit I was wrong, I can quote this line from the oh-so-highbrow movie *Happy Gilmore*:

*I'm stupid. You're smart. I was wrong. You were right.
You're the best. I'm the worst. You're very good-looking.
I'm not attractive.*

This is a private signal between us that I’m trying to make up with her, but that I’m uncomfortable and need her to cut me some slack. It almost never fails to make us both laugh, and to move us beyond a painful moment.

Similarly, it may help make difficult apologies easier if you can find a way to approach it that signals humility, and when appropriate, lightens the tension with humor. Just make sure your listener clearly understands that you take ownership for the blame; to accomplish that, you’ll probably need to use the “I” Power Pronoun.

The Best Time for “You”

Pronouns are about ownership. We’ve talked about the importance of using “I” language to show the leader’s ownership of feelings and mistakes. But are there times when “you” is appropriate?

The honor is all yours; for I believe none of us went farther than to acquiesce.
~ Abraham Lincoln, letter to William Tecumseh Sherman

Yes, and probably the best time to think and speak in terms of "you" is when assigning credit for

a success.

And when giving recognition to a person or team for a win, it is important to be very concrete and clear about what they did that the rest of us can learn from. As with mistakes or failures, a success usually provides lessons to learn: How can we duplicate or build on this success? “The client was so thrilled with the newsletter that he sent copies to a dozen people,” I recently told the project team. “You guys did a great job of *listening* to his input and finding a *creative* way to put more of his team’s personality into it.”

A good leader is a person who takes a little more than his share of the blame and a little less than his share of the credit. ~ John Maxwell

Lessons for Leaders

- Leaders should take ownership of their own feelings and their team's mistakes.
- Use the “I” Power Pronoun to share feelings and reactions that you own and to ask for a person's help in dealing with a problem in a non-blaming way: I feel *(specific feeling)* when *(specific words/action that caused the feeling)*, because I *(result)*.
- Also think first in terms of “I” whenever someone needs to accept blame. Save “you” for opportunities to share credit for success.

Tool 7

The “We” Power Pronoun

A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.

~ Lao Tzu

“We” or “Us” = Mutual Ownership

In his book, *Locked in the Cabinet*, former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich describes what he calls his “Pronoun Test.”

I ask front-line workers to tell me about the company, and I listen for the pronouns. If the answers I get back describe the company as “they” and “them,” I know it’s one kind of place; if the answers feature “we” and “us,” I know I’m in a new world.

It doesn’t matter much what’s said. Even a statement like “They aim for high quality here” gives the game away. The company still flunks. Workers don’t have a personal stake. Employees still regard the company as they—perhaps benevolent, perhaps evil, but unambiguously on the other side of a psychological divide. Most places flunk.

[When they are] using first-person pronouns, and feeling responsible for the company’s future, these workers are making the company work. Technically, they don’t own the company. But in a broader sense, they do, because they make the important day-to-day decisions and they do well when the company does well.

When I shared this story on Engaging Leader podcast episode 14, one listener told me that it made him realize a key difference between his full-time career in a family construction business and his part-time job in the military. “I realized that in the military, I’ve been talking about what ‘they’ do and what ‘they’ decide, because

I'm just a little pawn in a big game," Cesar says. "But in our construction company, I talk about what 'we' do and what 'we' decide, because I have a say and what I do makes a big impact."

Research and consulting psychologist David Burnham has a version of the pronoun "we" test especially for leaders. Rather than analyzing the employees' words for *we* and *us* in

"I talk about what 'we' do and what 'we' decide, because I have a say and what I do makes a big impact."

contrast to *they* and *them*, Burnham analyzes the leader's words for *we* and *us* in contrast to *I* and *me*. "When a leader speaks in terms of *I* and *me* and *my*, it's evidence of an imperial stage of leadership," says Burnham, "That stage of leadership was effective in the industrial age, but is no longer the most effective."

For example, when a leader talks about "the strategic plan I'm working on" and how proud she is of "my latest initiative," it's clear that she views herself as the central hub of talent, insight, and power.

When a leader speaks instead in terms of *we* and *us*, or when she mentions specific people as equals, it's evidence of the mutual respect and involvement that is a hallmark of effective 21st century leadership. For example, when she says she's excited "about the work Brian and Judy have been doing," it's clear that she recognizes others as equals – as valuable and whole human beings.

In these statements by actual CEOs, notice the use of *we*, *us*, and *our*:

- We keep moving forward, opening up new doors and doing new things, because we're curious. And curiosity keeps leading us down new paths. ~ *Walt Disney*
- We just wanted to build the best thing we could build. ~ *Steve Jobs*

- There are no rules here; we're just trying to accomplish something. ~ *Thomas Edison*
- We started with one of the easiest places to organize: websites. ~ *Melissa Mayer*
- The Model T car was a pioneer. There was no conscious public need of motor cars when we first made it. ~ *Henry Ford*
- When you give everyone a voice and give people power, the system usually ends up in a really good place. So, what we view our role as, is giving people that power. ~ *Mark Zuckerberg*
- For us, purpose is not something you can shut down. ~ *Indra K. Nooyi*

Perhaps a reason they reached such an amazing level of influence is their humility and their respect for others.

One of the most surprising things to me is how often celebrity leaders use “we”

language. Julia Child was a household name for the cooking show in which she was the only performer; yet her entertaining account of the show’s early success (in the introduction to *The French Chef Cookbook*) is filled with statements like, “we were now an actual and official enterprise” and “we let the gaffes lie where they fell.”

Money guru Dave Ramsey tells people, “That’s what we teach around here.”

“People often ask me, ‘What is the secret of success of the show?’ or ‘How have we lasted 25 years?’” says Oprah Winfrey. “I non-jokingly say, ‘My team and Jesus.’”

You may think that if anyone had a reason to take full credit, surely authoritative personalities such as Julia and Oprah can. But perhaps a reason they reached such an amazing level of influence is their humility and their respect for others – they recognize they

didn't get there on their own; they had a team of talented people who helped them achieve and sustain their success.

As a leader, you need people to see your team as "we" and "us" - you don't want your team flunking the pronoun test, you want them to feel ownership. The first and most important step in making that happen is for you yourself to start thinking and talking "we" and "us." Your mutual respect and involvement will lead to their ownership, passion, and engagement.

Lessons for Leaders

- Leaders need the people on their team to own the team's purpose, vision, and successful outcomes.
- Look for opportunities to involve people as your equals in developing plans and making decisions.
- Use *we*, *us*, and *our* when talking about plans, decisions, purpose, and vision.

Tool 8

Stories That Stick

Having a story today is really what separates companies.

People don't just wear our shoes, they tell our story.

~ Blake Mycoskie, CEO of Tom's Shoes

Data with a Soul

Recently, I read a book that was full of important principles that I wanted to learn about. But a few chapters into the book, I became concerned that I wouldn't be able to remember any of the principles. In fact, I wondered if I'd ever reach the end of the book, because it put me to sleep – literally. One day, I tried two different times to finish reading Chapter 9; I was unsuccessful, but Chapter 9 did help me kick off a great nap in the afternoon and get a full night of sleep later.

The problem is the book is too dry. It's nearly all data – very little in it is memorable or entertaining. What's missing? Stories that have a soul.

As a leader, you need to be able to communicate vision, purpose, values, and more in a way that causes people to pay attention and remember. And telling stories is one of the best ways to do that. But as demonstrated by the book I mentioned, some leaders don't know how to use a story to bring a concept to life.

For example, one of the important principles in the book was this: "To create more engaged employees, leaders need to capture

Maybe stories are just data with a soul.

~ Brené Brown,
research professor
at the University of
Houston

hearts as well as minds." To illustrate this point, the book presents this "case study":

The CEO of [a certain company] realized he needed to communicate a message of significance, soon after joining the company. "The business had lost its way," he says. "We were internally focused and too siloed; everyone had their own process and way of doing things.... We didn't have a strong focus on our customers or the external market."

That's the whole case study. That is not only boring, it doesn't give me much clarity about the "how" or "why" of capturing hearts as well as minds. The authors tried to tell a story, but there aren't enough details to make it concrete. We know a little about what the CEO was thinking, but we don't know the specifics of what he or anyone did before, during, or after the change.

Stories are the single most powerful weapon in a leader's arsenal.

~ Howard Gardner,
Harvard University

To use a story to teach or reinforce a concept, be sure the story not only *instructs*, but also *entertains*. It's the entertainment part of this equation that motivates people to pay attention, remember, and take action ... in other words, it makes the story stick.

Who would you say has had the most influence over people in the last several decades? Politicians? Teachers? CEOs? I suggest that Hollywood and the rest of the entertainment industry have had the most significant impact on a greater number of people. It's not my intent to present a definitive study here, but let me just share a few interesting bits of information:

- After *Jaws* hit theaters in 1975, shark hunting increased dramatically, to the point that their populations may never recover.

- After the 1986 *movie* *Top Gun*, Navy aviator recruitment skyrocketed by as much as 500%.
- After *The Karate Kid*, the number of kids taking martial arts more than doubled.
- By 2004, the popularity of the CSI television shows had prompted a huge increase in applications to university forensic science programs.
- As a result of the 2007 movie *Sicko*, 43% of people were more likely to report that they think health-care reform is needed.
- In a 2008 *TIME* magazine poll of 1,002 registered voters, about 30% of respondents said a movie had changed their mind about an issue.

For links to the sources for this information, see these articles:

- <http://www.cracked.com/blog/5-ways-you-dont-realize-movies-are-controlling-your-brain/#ixzz2K9A37RO7>
- <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1720100,00.html>

When these storytellers, artists, and musicians cast a vision, sound the alarm on a problem, or establish priorities, they guide the public imagination and frame the future.

Think about it: The biggest leadership impact happens when people are being entertained.

Forest AND Trees

"Thou shalt not" is soon forgotten, but "Once upon a time" lasts forever. ~ Philip Pullman, author

How do you make your story entertain? You can include devices like *humor* or *surprise*, but the most basic thing to include is *details*. By "details," we mean specific people doing specific things – the soul behind the data.

Another way to look at this is to make sure your story includes both the *forest* and the *trees*. "Don't hover over the forest telling us about the landscape," explains executive coach Tom Henschel. "Bring us down onto the forest floor so we can enter the landscape. Give us the leaves and roots and dirt. Details of what people *did*, *said* and *felt* pull us into the story."

As leaders, many of us are comfortable with the big picture or broad concepts ... looking at the forest as a whole. But we forget that for other people, even other leaders, to understand and care about this forest, they need to get to know some of the trees that make up the forest.

So details are the basic necessity for making a story entertaining. Just make sure the specifics that you share have a purpose – they should connect and lead us to the story's outcome or instructional point.

When I wanted to tell you about how leaders can use stories to cause people to pay attention and remember, I told you about falling asleep twice while reading chapter 9. But I *didn't* tell you what I ate for dinner between those events, because that detail didn't contribute to the story's outcome or point. Include only *relevant* details.

So, to make your idea stick, tell a story that not only instructs but also entertains. And the most basic way to entertain is to include relevant details ... tell us about the trees, not just the forest.

Next, let's look at a more advanced model for creating powerful stories that stick.

The SUCCES model

A more developed model for telling stories that stick is presented in the book *Made to Stick*, by Dan and Chip Heath. The model is based on the word SUCCES, but with only one S.

To make your message stick, tell a Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, and Emotional Story:

- **Simple** means to focus on a single core message. Your purpose is to make people CLEAR about your core message.
- **Unexpected** means something happens, such as surprise or humor, to make people NOTICE.
- **Concrete** is to share details about specific people doing specific things, just like I talked about earlier regarding the forest and the trees. Concrete details help people UNDERSTAND.
- **Credible** is to make people BELIEVE your message, such as with a personal testimony.
- **Emotional** is to make people CARE. One way to do this is by creating empathy for specific individuals.
- **Stories** provide the inspiration and example that engages people to ACT.

I encourage you to read *Made to Stick* to fully understand and apply this powerful formula. It's not vital that you include every

single one of these components in every story you tell. But the more of them that you do a good job with, the more your message will stick.

Not long ago, I spoke to a group of nurses and nurse practitioners who operate wellness clinics for the employees of a company with about 4,000 employees.

We learn best—and change—from hearing stories that strike a chord within us... Those in leadership positions who fail to grasp or use the power of stories risk failure for their companies and for themselves.

~ John Kotter, Harvard University

These health coaches were doing a great job treating the employees who walked into their clinics. But due to their heavy workload and the reactive nature of clinical services, they were inconsistent about reaching out and following up with employees whom they had previously diagnosed as having a risk of heart attack, stroke, or diabetes. To help ensure the follow-ups occurred more consistently, the company wanted to give them a new form, with the expectation that they completed a form for every employee, every quarter.

We could have explained the new process to the health coaches. We could have told them why it was important. But I doubt if we would have seen consistent improvement in the follow-ups. The health coaches already “knew” the importance, but they were simply too busy to complete yet more paperwork.

So instead, I told them a story.

I began by showing them one man's actual health assessment from two years earlier. His name was hidden, but you could see his age, body weight, cholesterol, and so forth. I pointed out his

Heart Age, which is a scientific estimate of how healthy the heart and cardiovascular system is. His Heart Age was older than his real age, which meant that there was a good chance he would die earlier than normal. I shared about how that worried his wife and kids.

Then I told them how one of the company's nurses had persisted in following up with him to encourage specific actions regarding his health. At first, it seemed to him that she was nagging, like a mother hen. But after a long time, he didn't view it as nagging; he felt that she really cared about him. It took two years of following up, but he started to engage with her, and make his health a bigger priority. Her consistent follow-ups had made a difference in his behaviors.

Finally, I showed a picture of his latest health assessment. I pointed out the improved measurements. I show that his Heart Age was now eight years YOUNGER than his real age. Not only did the experts estimate that he wouldn't die young, he had a good chance of living eight years longer than most guys. I talked about how excited his wife was to find out that he was now healthy, strong, and planning to be an active part of the family for decades to come.

And then I explained the reason I knew the guy's wife was so excited: I am that guy, and the wife in the story is my wife Erin.

Although my story wouldn't win a Pulitzer, it did stick with the health coaches. They gladly made a commitment to follow up every quarter, and they were happy to receive the new form and other tools from the company that would make the follow-ups more feasible with their large population.

You could clearly present the facts, figures, and logical rationale for your position – but often, people still won't change. **To truly engage people, present data with a soul – tell a story that sticks.**

Lessons for Leaders

- To make your idea stick, tell a story that not only instructs but also entertains.
- The most basic way to entertain is to include relevant details ... tell us about the trees, not just the forest.
- For a powerful formula that makes messages, tell a Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, and Emotional Story.

Conclusion: We Need Your Best to Be Our Best

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.

~ John Quincy Adams

David hired me to help communicate and reinforce his long-term vision and business strategy with his 1,200 employees. About a year into our relationship, he invited me to participate in a week-long strategic planning meeting with the key leaders on his team. On one of those days, during a lunch break, I ran up to my hotel room to complete a task that someone was waiting for me to email to them. I returned to the meeting a little late, about 10 minutes after it had resumed.

To me, missing 10 minutes of the meeting didn't seem like a big deal. I was not facilitating or presenting anything during that portion of the meeting, and I didn't miss much content. And hey, I had a good excuse.

Later, as David and I were chatting privately, he gently pointed out to me that people on his team looked up to me as a leader. And when I arrived late, it sent a signal that what they were doing in that meeting was not really that important.

David helped me realize that I had an inaccurate view of *my role* and of *the time*.

We are all leaders...

In my formal role, I did not have any authority over anyone in that room, so I didn't view myself as their leader. But because they viewed me as a trusted advisor, I nonetheless was a leader with influence among them.

... all of the time.

I had viewed that moment, when I slipped into the meeting

late, as an insignificant time because I wasn't saying anything or taking an overt leadership action. But in that simple moment, I was influencing them.

Whether you realize it or not, every time you interact with others, you are communicating and leading. Even if you say nothing, and have completely blank facial expressions and body language, your silence is communicating something about who you are, whether you place any value on the topic or event that is taking place, and whether the people you are with are important to you.

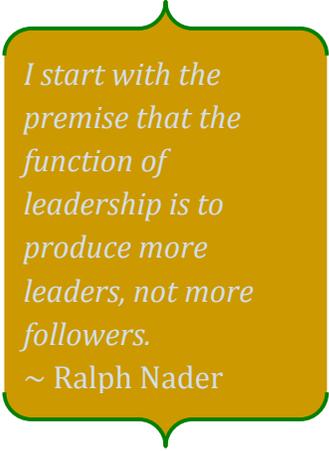
The people you care about need your cultivating influence to be all they could be. Your kids need you to believe in them, teach them self-discipline, and help them discover their passion. Your employees need you to energize and equip them to discover how their work can change the world for the better. Your

customers, friends, and followers need you to listen and inspire them to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more.

At nearly every moment, you are influencing others – which ultimately affects all of us – through what you say or don't say, and what you do or don't do.

We need your best leadership to be our best.

I hope the eight tools I've shared in this book help you become more intentional and effective at engaging the people you care about.



I start with the premise that the function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.

~ Ralph Nader

About the Author



Jesse Lahey is a consultant, speaker, and author specializing in leadership and workforce communications. For over 20 years, he has helped leaders and organizations communicate, engage, and lead with greater impact.

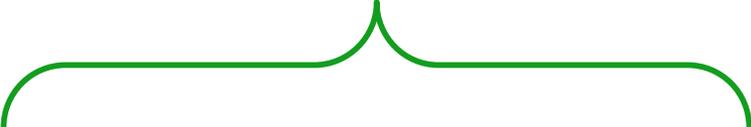
Jesse is Chief Engagement Officer (CEO) of Aspendale Communications, a team of consultants who help employers enhance the wellbeing and performance of their people. Their work focuses on helping clients attract and retain top talent, engage employees, and deliver superior business results.

Jesse is the host of three podcasts, heard by thousands of people around the world:

- Engaging Leader
- Workforce Health Engagement
- Game Changer: Gamification to Engage Employees

Prior to founding Aspendale Communications in 2004, Jesse was a partner at a human resources consulting firm that he joined in 1996. Jesse's experience also includes serving as a communication specialist with a global management consulting firm and as the HR communication leader at a Fortune 500 manufacturer with nearly 20,000 employees worldwide. Jesse has been certified since 2001 as a Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) by the Human Resource Certification Institute (HRCI).

Jesse has been married to Erin Lahey since 1994. They have four children and live in the woods of Michigan's Ausable River Valley.



Interested in connecting more?

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