



Just Don't Make Me Speak!

Tell me if this sounds familiar to you:

"Sure, I'll help. Tell me what you need. Just don't make me speak!"

Whether the comment above resulted from seeking volunteers or divvying up work among staff, there are many who would take on just about ANY job on the to-do list as long as it does NOT involve public speaking.

Scrape gum from the underside of chairs at the middle school...sure!

Tackle 20 years' worth of back filing for the company...no problem!

Give opening remarks at the next conference...um, I'm going to be sick that day!

Communicating, especially speaking before groups, can leave even the best of us quaking in our boots on occasion. However, effective and comfortable communication -- in whatever form -- can be a learned skill...if you're willing to put in the time and effort involved.

So, keep reading this edition of **EA Insights**. This month we cover tips for developing your communication muscle so that, when the next speaking assignment is up for grabs, you're ready, willing, and able to raise your hand.

All the best,

June

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Say What? 2 Planning Tips for Better Communication

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How are you at communicating?

Whether you have no clue, you're basically fine, or you are well aware of some problem spots, we all have room to grow. After all, good communication is a muscle that must be regularly exercised.

But, how do you progress in the area of communication? In many respects, the process can be boiled down to a simple equation:

**BUILD ON YOUR EXPERIENCE +
REGULARLY ASSESS YOUR SKILLS +
CAPITALIZE ON YOUR STRENGTHS +
IMPROVE ON YOUR WEAK AREAS =
COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY**

What does this mean? Well, the last two parts of the equation are fairly clear. So, let's take a few moments on the first two segments.

Tip 1: BUILD ON YOUR EXPERIENCE

If you're like many people, you don't invest a lot of time in thinking about your communication experiences. They just...happen. However, if you are serious about becoming an increasingly successful communicator, it's essential that you "build on your experience".

Don't waste any communication experience. After you've interacted with an individual or group, step back, and informally evaluate what just happened.

- What went well?
- Where did things go off-course?
- What do you take away from the exchange?
- Do you fully understand the next steps (and do others)?
- Is there follow-up that you could do, now that you're seeing a bit more clearly and have the value of hindsight, that would help clarify the messages or better focus folks on the outcomes?

In other words, use each interaction as a learning tool for your improvement. Also, look back at what actually transpired in each experience so you can take any additional steps needed to accomplish the goals you had for that interaction.

In This Issue

[Say What? 2 Planning Tips for Better Communication](#)

[Quotes](#)

Quick Links

[EA Home Page](#)

[About Us](#)

[Solutions for Businesses](#)

[Solutions for Professionals](#)

[News](#)

[Contact Us](#)



Quotes

"We don't always have an accurate view of our own potential. I think most people who are frightened of public speaking and can't imagine they might feel different as a result of training. Don't assume you know how much potential you have. Sometimes the only way to know what you can do is to test yourself."
~Scott Adams

"The ABC's are attitude, behavior and communication skills."
~Gerald Chertavian

"If you're not comfortable with public speaking -- and nobody starts out comfortable; you have to learn how to be comfortable -- practice. I cannot overstate the importance of practicing. Get some close friends or family members to help evaluate you, or somebody at work that you trust."
~Hillary Clinton

"I do a lot of public speaking and presentations and I'll always start with a self-deprecating joke to make everybody feel comfortable with my size because there can be hang-ups and anxieties."
~Warwick Davis

"To succeed, you will soon learn, as I did, the importance of a solid foundation in the basics of education -- literacy, both verbal and numerical, and communication skills."
~Alan Greenspan

"Intelligence, knowledge or experience are important and might get you a job, but strong communication skills are what will get you promoted."
~Mireille Guiliano

"Communication -- the human connection -- is the key to personal and career success."
~Paul J. Meyer

So, building on every experience is a part of informal, ongoing communication growth.

Tip 2: REGULARLY ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

The point of this tip is to stop periodically and take stock of your skills. For instance, every 6-to-12 months, sit down and assess yourself overall as a communicator. Based on your findings, create a formal development plan focused on communication-related growth for the next period.

Self-assessment helps you to understand where you're strong and to identify opportunities that could help you use, and even improve upon, those strengths. Looking within also helps you to see where your weaknesses lie and gives you the chance to figure out how best to grapple with them.

Here's a self- assessment format that might be helpful. It's based on the Johari Window model.

(1) Open/Free Area	(2) Blind Spot
(3) Hidden Area	(4) Unknown Area

Q1 (Open/Free Area): In this quadrant place information that both you and others know about how you communicate. So, perhaps it's common knowledge in your office that you're the best person to communicate about the XYZ project. Jot that down in Q1.

Or, perhaps you, and everyone else, know that you're NOT great at communication when under stress. That too goes in Q1. This first area is the location for topics that are public knowledge. Then, as you assess your skills, think each of the items in Q1. Do your best to determine WHY you're the consistently strong at certain types of communication or issues. Think about WHY you're ineffective when dealing with others. What is it about your approach in those situations that works or that doesn't? What do you do that's different from what others do? The answers to these questions will give you hints about future action items.

Q2 (Blind Spot): There are some things that you don't realize about yourself, although everyone else does. These are blind spots. Don't move on too quickly; everyone's got at least one entry for this box. Perhaps you're unaware that you touch your ear when someone asks you a question and you're unsure of the answer. (*Blind spot*) Perhaps, you don't realize that your voice goes up at the end of each sentence, making it seem as if you're asking a question when, in fact, you're making a statement. (*Blind spot*) It is helpful here to touch base with someone you trust and who can be candid with you about your communication tendencies. Watching play-backs of yourself also can be revealing. Note, though, that *discovering* your blind spots is one thing, but the information uncovered only becomes useful for growth when you begin *grappling* with it.

Q3 (Hidden Area): We each have areas that we intentionally hide from the world. This is what goes in Quadrant 3. Perhaps deep down you feel shy in groups. Nobody knows this because you've managed to cover it up in some way -- such as, by avoiding group settings at all costs or coming in late so you don't have to make small talk. Be honest. You probably try to ignore these areas. The rationale is that, if you leave them alone, they'll disappear; nobody will notice. Well, people may not grasp what's at the *core* of what's going on, but they very well may be reacting to how you communicate as a *result* of what's going on. And, your communication (and people's reactions to it) contributes not only to your level of effectiveness as a communicator but also to your success generally. So, shine a light on your hidden areas, and add them to Q3!

Q4 (Unknown Area): These are the areas that are surprises to you...AND to everyone around you. (Distinguish this quadrant from the blind spot that only *you* fail to see.) The unveiling of the unknown communication traits may come about unexpectedly through opportunity or as you invest in some in-depth reflection. Perhaps, you never thought about public speaking (and nobody ever saw you as gifted in that area). Then, one day your boss wasn't at an event; someone saw you, and you're called on to say a few words. Much to your surprise, it felt good, and afterward several people gave you kudos for how well you spoke. Now, that you're taking time to reflect, you're recognizing what, hmm...this public speaking-thing is one of those unknown areas. Uncovering an unknown area allows you to begin searching out ways to continue developing your newly found interest. It can be a jump start that permits you to unearth new opportunities for how to integrate this area into your work and/or life.

That's the process:

- Look at your experiences.
- Honestly assess your skills.
- Seek to capitalize on your strengths.
- Find ways to improve in your weak areas.
- Putting all of these components together, and both developing and carrying out a plan for working on them continually, you'll begin to see your communication skills improving.

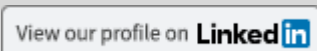
So, are you ready to grow as a communicator? For you, trying it on your own may work well; if so, get going! For others, having neutral, third-party support as you do your thinking would make all the difference to your progress. Why not reach out to us at **Executive Advantage**. We are ready to help you to assess, plan, and implement your communication-improvement efforts. [Contact us today](#).

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About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about **Executive Advantage**, contact us [online](#) or at (301) 280-5950.



"I think it's very important to have a feedback loop, where you're constantly thinking about what you've done and how you could be doing it better. I think that's the single best piece of advice: constantly think about how you could be doing things better and questioning yourself."
~Elon Musk

"A lot of people think that public speaking means that you are standing at a podium giving a speech, but public speaking comes in lots of different formats."
~Dana Perino

"I majored in sociology and never took a single music-related course, much less any kind of class in public speaking -- no confidence for it, none -- yet I still had a passion for it that burned inside me."
~Regis Philbin

"Take advantage of every opportunity to practice your communication skills so that when important occasions arise, you will have the gift, the style, the sharpness, the clarity, and the emotions to affect other people."
~Jim Rohn

"I used to be incredibly afraid of public speaking. I started with five people, then I'd speak to 10 people. I made it up to 75 people, up to 100, and now I can speak to a very large group, and it feels similar to speaking to you one-on-one."
~Robin S. Sharma

"I have a fear of public speaking. It's very hard work. Words are not my skill, and because they're not my skill, I have to work doubly hard."
~Kerry Stokes

"I think people underrate the importance of investing in your communication skills as a way to progress in your career."
~Julie Sweet

"Communication is a skill that you can learn. It's like riding a bicycle or typing. If you're willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life."
~Brian Tracy