



# Communication Tips & Strategies

Tip #1 - August 2021



Listening is the number one hardest (and most influential) soft skill that leaders can develop.

Why? We feel more valuable if we're able to fix people's problems that they come to us. So we are constantly thinking and listening to reply, and that really gets in the way of good communication.



## Insights from Leaders

### What gets in the way of strong, effective communication?

- We lack the courage to be honest
- We don't have that psychological safety to be able to really dialogue
- We have expectations
- Ineffective listening
- Norms, culture
- We are going too fast to slow down

### Benefits of slowing down and listening first

- Quick assessment of what the other person is ready to do
- Gather some inspiring stories from other people, um, and, and that can really help you.
- More things get done correctly and less crises
- We can be inspired to achieve more ambitious results, have better outcomes.
- Seeing it first through the other person's eyes positions the listener to elaborate on and celebrate all the brilliant things the other person said

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## Strategies for Healthy Communication

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### Avoid Setting up a power struggle

When you dichotomize a topic, you set yourself up for a power struggle. Suggest a topic and pull the other person into the conversation. For example, "Hey, there's a lot of noise and reaction around X right now. What are your thoughts about it?"

When you get the other person talking first, you can meet them where they are versus pushing your position and inadvertently dichotomize the conversation and start a power struggle.

That ability shift from pushing your idea to pulling people into the conversation is a way for you to maintain power without creating a power struggle. When we get people talking first, we can match their rhythm and join the pace of their thinking.

If you feel like you're pushing a boulder, you are



One of my mantras is, "If you feel like you're pushing a boulder, you are." Dig deep for that self-awareness as to when you are pushing a boulder and stop yourself. Frustrations and broken relationships come out of pushing boulders.



## How do you know when you are pushing a boulder?

You are pushing a boulder if:

- You are leading the question so that they come up with your answer versus getting them talking because I'm just curious about their perspective and where they're coming from.
- You feel yourself getting more and more frustrated.
- You find yourself judging their lack of progress towards your shared goal.

## Careful – this tip could come across as manipulative

Let's be honest – this tip about getting the other person talking first is about you advancing your agenda. When we apply this tip from a collaborative standpoint, genuinely wanting to work in tandem with the other person, the tip is a game changer.

When we implement this tip as a way to get the other person to do it our way, it's manipulative. Here are some considerations to see if you might come across as manipulative:

- You ask questions you know the answer to.
- You ask questions that have a right or wrong answer.
- The other person doesn't have a chance to share their perspective. You believe your agenda is the right way to do things.
- You are doing most of the talking.

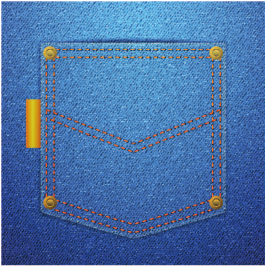


## The importance of valuing a conversation versus validating it

Helping people feel heard is valuing their conversation. Valuing the conversation is not the same as validating their perspective. Without feeling heard, people are way less likely to let go of their perspective and become open to seeing things differently.

The irony is that leaders are not overly inclined to listen to employees when their perspectives are getting in the way of that leader's vision, mission and purpose. Without understanding perspective, it is exponentially harder to meet people where they are and help them get "unstuck".

# Back pocket question tips



Frame the question around positive statements and observations. Sometimes you can start being vulnerable yourself saying, “I’ve really been thinking about you. I think your experience related to \_\_\_\_\_ is a hot mess. Tell me about your experience.” Calling out the mess is like calling out an elephant. If you name it, you’re giving the other person permission to discuss it. Your ability to be vulnerable first helps the other person engage in the conversation.

We have all been there – you leave a conversation saying, “Oh! I wish I would have said that.” Then back pocket questions are your saving grace. Back pocket questions are generic questions that fit most situations. You can memorize them and that saves you the stress of thinking on your feet in the moment.

- Tell me about your experience.
- What is helping you succeed?
- What do you see happening here?
- What factors influence where we are at?
- Share two insights from today.
- What has surprised you about X?

## Improve your skills with self-coaching questions

Self-coaching is a powerful skill that we can leverage. Here are some self-coaching questions for you to help yourself dive deeper into your triggers and what drives your behaviors:

- Where are you inclined to talk more?
- Where are you inclined to shut off and just how other people are communicating well or not?
- What do I want to say?
- What's the right way to set up

## Application Case #2: Assessing Need

I have moved more towards that open-ended concept where you are really just gathering a patient’s mindset on their different disease processes and things that are happening with them. It helps me understand where they’re at now.

**Insights :** By listening first, you are leading the patient into their investment about their care. This also positions you to assess their readiness and how much they are going to invest in their care. Patients are more compliant and more cooperative because there has been this human connection around you listening first.

## Application Case #1: I want a raise

You want to ask your boss for a raise. Your rationale includes several points: My role has changed. I need more money. I deserve more money. I’ve got a degree that’s been added since I was hired. I have great professionalism and maybe a raise or a job title or a new opportunity. Imagine you are going to your boss to share these salient points.

**Insights:** The challenge with a hard pitch in this conversation is that you have no idea what your boss is thinking. Maybe your boss already has a raise in mind, so it is insulting to him/her. Maybe your boss thinks you are a lazy worker, so your pitch only digs your hole bigger.

Be transparent, “I wanted to discuss my career path with you, where I am and where you think I could go.”

## Application Case #3: Implied Questions

You are talking with the patient as a chaplain. You get asked, “How do you feel about same sex marriage?”

**Insights:** What we end up initially talking about is usually not the real conversation that needs to happen. In this case maybe it is navigating privacy in the hospital, or sense of feeling valued. By assuming you maybe making the conversation unintentionally adversarial.