

## CHAPTER 19:

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# YOUR TURN TO SPEAK

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*“Everything should be made as simple as possible  
but not simpler.” – Albert Einstein*

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*While working at one of my telecommunications employers, we had a significant incident with our billing systems. Because my team were responsible for billing, I was heavily involved in fixing the issue, and it was severe enough for the main Board to be updated on progress.*

*The Technical Director sent out an update copying the Board Directors, suggesting that the issue was resolved and back to normal.*

*I was horrified. We were not even close to resolution.*

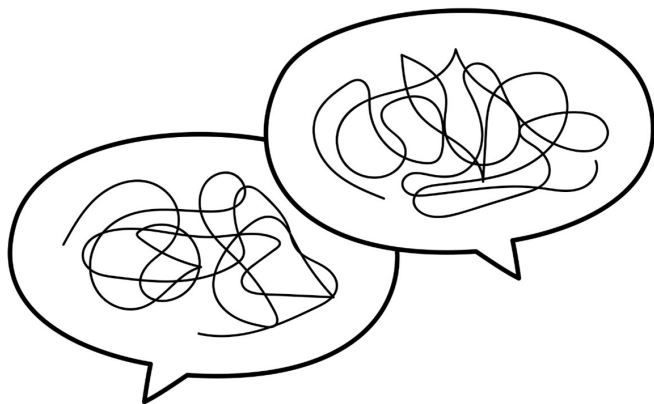
*I emailed my response, copying in all the recipients of the technical update. In the email, I made a joking reference about the level of spin used. Even as I was typing, it made me giggle. Perfect for defusing the tension.*

*The Technical Director didn't see the smile on my face or hear the giggle that went with it.*

*All he saw were words on a page attacking his integrity. He was furious.*

*It nearly cost me my job.*

*I was called in by my boss, who was very frustrated with me. I had to go to the main Board and formally apologise for the email to keep my job.*



When it's our turn to share our ideas, proposals and perspectives with others, we should think carefully about the words, tone and communication channel we use.

This starts with balancing brevity and clarity, finding the fewest possible words to convey our message without diluting it.

Every individual needs different amounts of detail to understand a point, form a perspective and make a decision.

Some need lots of detail, while others just need to grasp the high-level point we are trying to make. It's our responsibility to understand our audience and continually adapt our use of language, pace and detail level to keep them engaged and interested.

The words we use have real power, so we must be precise in our language. This means ensuring our communications are as unambiguous as possible.

We should always be on guard to ensure that we:

- use terminology our audience understands.
- speak the truth always.

- explain what we mean when we use statements that are open to interpretation, e.g. the specific meaning of ‘good service’ will be different for everyone.
- don’t turn particular events, situations and behaviours into generalisations, e.g. ‘Dave made a calculation error’ does not necessarily mean ‘Dave is shit at maths’.
- Don’t speak on behalf of others unless we are a spokesperson for others. In other words, not using ‘we’ or ‘us’ when we mean ‘I’ or ‘me’.

We can use stories and metaphors to communicate complex ideas in a relatable and non-threatening way. As a species, we have always relayed experiences, ideas and information using stories and metaphors.

They have the power to bypass internal resistance from our rational minds and create effortless internal shifts in perspectives and understanding.

We should choose a suitable medium for our message and for our audience.

A perfumed letter delivered by post and a brick thrown through a window might both have ‘I love you’ written on them. It’s only the delivery mechanism that separates the meaning...

We communicate using a combination of tools; our body and facial movement, shifts in the tonality of our voice and words.

Actual words account for around 7% of our overall communication, with tone accounting for 38% and body / facial movements a whopping 55%.<sup>28</sup>

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28 These percentages vary in different contexts but are a useful rough guide.

When on the phone, the ratios shift to 83% tonality and 17% words.

Written communication is 100% the words on the page.

Now it's easy to see how my joke got missed. We've all had situations where we misrepresented our intention and got surprising responses from others.

Sending emails, texts, and social media posts may be efficient, but efficiency is rarely the most significant goal of powerful communication.

The goal is to communicate effectively to get the response and commitment we need to move our outcomes forward.

We should always be asking ourselves, 'Why am I Typing?', particularly if the purpose of our communication is to influence or persuade others.<sup>29</sup>

*About a week before I left the same company, I gave the Board a presentation on a significant program I led for the company.*

*I prepared a presentation with about thirty slides and, at the allotted time, walked into what looked like the half-interested, half-asleep group of directors that was a typical Board meeting. Plugging my laptop into the overhead projection system, I turned to the Board, clicked to bring up my slides and... nothing!!*

*Frantic fiddling did not fix the problem, so I made a decision. I spoke directly to the Board from my heart.<sup>30</sup>*

*I told them the story of a phone call and its journey through our systems to a customer bill before outlining why I thought that they needed more collective responsibility*

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29 Email for confirmation, not for persuasion.

30 I had a week until my departure and, in my mind, there was nothing to lose.

*for this. It sparked a much needed and better outcome than I had hoped for.*

*The Chief Operating Officer pulled me aside outside of the meeting and said it was one of the most informative presentations he had heard in a Board meeting. It made me wonder why I hadn't been willing to present from the heart more often.*

Our state of mind affects the precision of words<sup>31</sup>, so we have to factor that into the timing, language and means we use to communicate.

Speaking the truth and clarifying whether our perspective is based on facts, opinions or guesswork allow us to communicate with integrity and authenticity, no matter what the message is.

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31 That is why if I think an email is going to be controversial, I'll type it out and leave it in my draft file for 24 hours. In most cases, when I come back to it, I find myself just picking up the phone.