



We Need to Talk

*Building Trust
When Communicating
Gets Critical*

PHILLIP VAN HOOSER

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Tell the Truth

The Truth Shall Set Your Free

It seems like telling the truth ought to be a whole lot easier than it actually is. Of course, if all we ever did was share good news with others, then telling the truth would always be fun and easy. But as evidenced by the conversation between the doctor and my son, sometimes it falls to us to share news truthfully that may not be readily welcomed or appreciated by others. That doesn't change the fact that truth telling is necessary.

The good doctor won the trust of a young patient, in large part, by simply telling the truth. Remember, my son had never had stitches before this encounter and as a result, really had no idea what to expect. Had his doctor said, "Joe, this won't hurt a bit," Joe would have had no practical, experiential reason not to believe him. In fact, I suspect Joe would have believed that statement and everything else the doctor told him right up until the very instant when the cold steel of the needle pierced the raw flesh of his chin. At that split second, when those nerve endings came alive, conveying to the brain the undeniable message that pain was, in fact, being experienced—from that moment on Joe would have believed nothing—absolutely nothing—that the doctor had or would tell him. All credibility would have been lost and rightfully so.

And so it is with each of us and the way people react and respond to us. Playing fast and loose with the truth is a recipe for disaster. On the other hand, learning to share the truth—even uncomfortable truths—in a masterful way can strengthen the foundation on which a relationship is built in a way that nothing else can.

You may be wondering how you can become known far and wide as a "truth teller" without exception. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

When Telling the Truth... Fess Up, When You Screw Up

In establishing your believability quotient as a communicator there is simply nothing more important than telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But, if mistakes have been made, if the untruths have already been told—how does one go about *reestablishing* believability?

My advice—fess up.

Try as we might, we can never retract the words we've spoken or the deeds we've done. And excuses won't help (e.g., "I didn't know the microphone was on...", "My boss should have told me...", or "I was afraid of what she might think..."). Plausible explanations are poor substitutes for taking personal responsibility.

Far and away, the most important action we can take in rebuilding a fractured reputation is to take responsibility publicly and quickly for the mistakes we've made and the lies we've told. Begin by fessing up to the people who were impacted most directly by your untruths. Here are three steps that can be taken to begin making things right.

- 1) **Be totally honest about your dishonesty.** Don't complicate the problem by continuing to lie about your lying. Just swallow hard and get the truth out there.
- 2) **Be contrite.** Once the truth is out there, take your medicine, in whatever form it might come...discipline, public ridicule, humiliation, diminished status, severed relationships, financial loss, and so on. Don't try to blame or implicate others for your actions. You will never look good by trying to make someone else look bad. Accept the fact that you screwed up and then go ahead and take your licks.
- 3) **Recognize that most people have short memories and a desire to forgive.** What was done or said during a thoughtless moment may take months, even years to undo. However, if mistakes are handled honestly

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and tactfully, the old axiom, “Time heals all wounds,” generally proves to be true. Be patient—it may take time. It may take time for others to forget and time for you to remember just how valuable the truth is to one’s reputation.

When Telling the Truth . . . Be Judicious With “Brutal Honesty”

The foundation building characteristic of well-intentioned honesty is one thing. The devastation that can be wrought by a malicious tongue set on destruction is something else entirely. In life, I have discovered there are few circumstances that call for unbridled, brutal honesty and even fewer individuals who can be on the receiving end of brutal honesty without having some sort of psychological after-effects.

Brutal honesty serves to tear down people, damage teams and sever relationships. Even when the truth is being told, if it is told in a way that disregards or diminishes the feelings of the one receiving the information, some level of harm and lasting hurt is almost certain to result.

The confrontation between Harvey and Butch detailed earlier in this chapter is one of those rare occasions where the person being spoken to honestly—but harshly, was able to internalize the message and find value in it. More often, the result is that offended individuals will lash out in an attempt to “get even” with the one who has been so brutally honest.

The reminder is simple. Choose wisely the manner in which you share information. People have long memories.

When Telling the Truth . . . Anticipate Emotions

Finally, let me remind you that human beings are emotional beings. As a result, the truth, be it positive or negative, when first heard, is certain to elicit any number of emotional responses. The truth can raise people to levels of exuberance or lower them to the depths of exasperation. To a great degree,

Will your business relationships suffer or be saved by your ability to communicate?

Like it or not, your professional relationships are impacted – positively or negatively – by your ability to communicate. Customers are won or lost – employees are encouraged or de-motivated – your network is expanded or extinguished – all by how well you communicate. We Need to Talk reveals key strategies to help you build trust, win respect and sidestep common minefields when communicating gets critical.

Discover how you can:

- Establish empathy and trust when communicating with subordinates, co-workers, superiors or customers
- Rebuild the believability quotient when truthfulness has not always been practiced
- Rein in “brutal honesty” and the damage it causes
- Build rapport by “actively” listening
- Earn respect while delivering difficult or sensitive messages
- Build integrity while eliminating communication barriers like the “grapevine”
- Get results by guaranteeing the message was interpreted correctly

Through a masterful use of stories and illustrations, Phillip Van Hooser shares six unique, powerful strategies for communicating when relationships and results are riding on your abilities.



Phillip Van Hooser, MBA, CSP, CPAE has spoken, written and consulted on leadership and service worldwide since 1988. His popular book, “*Willie’s Way: 6 Secrets for Wooing, Wowing and Winning Customers and Their Loyalty*,” and his management training system, “*The Leadership Journey*,” have been used by corporations across the U.S. and around the globe to cultivate great leaders who create competitive advantage.

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