

Speak With Good Purpose—# 4 of Eight Keys

At the beginning of many Mentor, Coach and Leadership Training workshops, I like to hand out a “Qualities of Leadership” questionnaire to see how the participants rate themselves in their role as a leader. Most describe themselves as effective communicators. They will often back it up with that is why I have reached this position. However, in reality, very few leaders are able to self-evaluate objectively and even fewer are open enough to request honest feedback from their charges. It is the wise leader who requests feedback to continue to look for areas of personal improvement. It is also the wise leader who models a “learner for life attitude.”

There are many qualities of effective leaders. In this article we are focussing on what good leaders say. Significant speaking qualities are:

- speaking in a positive manner;
- speaking purposefully;
- speaking directly with honest feedback;
- focusing on truth telling; and
- saying only what needs to be said when it needs to be said.

Some leaders talk too much and some not enough. There is an optimum amount of speech required with each person you meet. Some need more instruction. Some need a task analysis approach. These are “analytic learners” where all information is lined up in order. Some need what Stephen Covey refers to as “starting with the end in mind.” These are “global learners” which means they need to know what the end product will look like before they can begin. Each learner is unique and the leader needs to match their speaking style with the learner’s needs. This can be difficult to do. However, just being aware of different learning styles best prepares the natural leader to automatically do the right thing. It does take practice and there is a body of knowledge around learning styles that would be useful to becoming an effective leader.



In present business styles, there doesn't have to be an aggressive get things done speech. If you match the speech tone, speed and approach with the listener, you will find that the listener is more comfortable with you; and, they will learn faster and retain more of the content. In that way you will "speak with good purpose" and at the end of the day—be more efficient as a leader.

The slogan, "**Say** what you mean, **Mean** what you say, and **Do** what you say you are going to do," carries well in business and with people socially. To become an effective leader, one must be super conscious of speech and its impact on others that you meet.

a) "**To say what you mean**" suggests that:

- you do know what you are talking about;
- you have a sense of what the finished product should look like; and
- you can communicate effectively to others in a way they can understand exactly what you want.

In the recruiting business, as an example, there is a turn-around expected from the point of the request for a matched employee to the point of a successful placement must be less than three weeks. Beyond that is poor service. Two weeks is considered optimum response and one week is excellent service. Outside of three weeks, the job is often gone to another agency or the job has disappeared. You have to know your business and deliver!

This is not as easy as it sounds. Because of the speed of doing business, there is a tendency for leaders to fly by the seat of their pants in the hope that their previous experiences will somehow guide them. The wise leader knows when to slow down, do some serious planning and literally write out what needs to be said. By either saying it out loud or writing it down, it forces what you are thinking in your subconscious to become conscious. This process of declaring your intent makes it much clearer before you go public with your requests. Align these words with your short and long term goals for the company.



I observed a secretary who was frustrated with her boss and she posted a small sign by her desk for her boss to see. It read, “A lack of planning on your part doesn’t constitute an emergency on my part.” This particular boss was used to depending on his previous experiences solving problems and therefore merely trying to “wing it.” In fairness to him, he was very good at it. He had good people skills and could solve problems on his feet in the workplace. The difficulty here was that his goals were clear to him but not necessarily to his charges. His plan and company goals were not articulated well enough that his employees could work independently in the same direction. When he would say do this, others would often be surprised by the request in that it didn’t fit their perception of what and why these things needed to be done. So many would scramble sometimes in the wrong directions.

b) “To mean what you say” suggests that you have the courage of your own convictions. You must have a belief system that is in alignment with your business purposes. Your personal integrity depends on this alignment. Whatever business you are in to share or pass on in the market place, you must **believe in what you are doing**.

There needs to be:

- confidence in the product,
- confidence in your ability to provide “just in time service;” and,
- confidence that the customer can and will be satisfied with the end result.

c) “To do what you say you are going to do” forces you, the leader, to raise consciousness about the content of language. If you say something that involves action on your part, then you must wrestle that issue to the ground relentlessly. It may mean keeping little notes about things that you must do and making sure that you check that list every day until it is done. Finish what you start.

Be careful about the language you use so that you don’t make statements over which you have no control. If the situation depends on the responses



of others be careful then about making promises. It also forces you to use words like, “we’ll see what we can do” or “I will check into that.” Many people will come to see you as an action oriented leader and even see these statements as a promise. Therefore, be really clear by saying, “No promises!”

To become a more empowering leader, there are techniques to make sure that everyone else is doing their jobs. I like to throw a question back at the person who is asking me a question. For example, if my charge asks me, “We are having trouble getting the parts on time for the assembly line. It’s not my fault. What can we do about it?” I would respond with:

- “What have you tried already to solve the problem?”
- “What else do you think you might try to solve the problem?”
- “So, now, what have you decided to do about it?”

For more ideas of empowerment, read “Questions Are Powerful—We Need More Of Them,” found in the publications by Peer Mentor.net. There is so much power in a question. It puts the responsibility back to where it usually belongs. A question forces the other person to respond. You don’t have to have all the answers. It buys you thinking time as they respond. With this extra thinking time, often you can be more clear about your response and will be better able to follow through.

To become a powerful leader you must learn to: “Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say, and Do What You Say You Are Going To Do.” If you do say it, then you must do it. Be totally responsible for all of the words that fall out of your mouth. This is the fourth of eight keys, “Speak With Good Purpose Key,” for true success in life.

