



Episode 37: One Easy Way to Prevent Misunderstandings

Welcome to In the Right Direction podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness, one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Whenever I meet another coach for the first time, I usually ask them this question: What is one thing your clients always hear you say? I ask this for a few reasons. First, I'm curious. I want to know how other people see the world. Second, it's because we never know what someone is thinking until they share it with us. We cannot read anyone's mind or see into anyone's heart.

Today's episode is all about one big coaching idea that I share with all of my clients: the importance of telling people the conclusions you want them to draw about you.

Here's why this is important. Take a moment and think about a time when you felt misunderstood. Maybe it was a work relationship, where someone assumed something about you that was not true. Or maybe it was a personal relationship where someone jumped to a conclusion without giving you the benefit of the doubt.

Misunderstandings happen when people make up stories about other people's thoughts, motives, and behaviors. Misunderstandings can happen at home, at work, and out in the world. And there's a huge cost. When people make assumptions about others, they're usually negative. Feelings often get hurt, and the hurt can pile up.

When our expectations about other people are not met, we often get angry, and the relationship can suffer.

If that's what we don't want, here's what we do want. We want to be understood. We want to be seen and appreciated. We want others to trust us and know that we might be doing our best. We want love and collaboration and connection.

The good news is that there's an easy way to help enable this to happen. To close the misunderstanding gap. To reduce the risk of hurt feelings and frustrations. And the strategy to help is completely in our control.

Here again is the coaching idea I share with all of my clients: we get to tell people the conclusions we want them to draw about us.

It is in our control to tell the people around us what's going on in our minds and hearts. We get to tell them the truth of who we are, so that they don't make up their own story.

Let's talk about this idea of the stories our brain makes up. Our brains are making up stories all the time, about who we are, who other people are, and the reasons things happen around us. That's what brains do, and they do this, first and foremost, to keep us safe. Because our brains operate on the assumption that if they understand what's happening around us, they know how to adjust our bodily processes to keep us alive and ticking.

The trouble happens, though, when our brain notices a small behavior in another person and immediately extrapolates a whole story about that person, what drives them, and what they're thinking. And these stories might or might not be accurate.

Just like your brain is making assumptions about others all the time, the people around you are making up narratives about what drives you. If we want to have more control of the narratives about us in the world, the solution is easy: tell people the conclusions you want them to draw about you. Tell them what you're thinking, how you see a situation, what you're prioritizing, and what they can count on you for.

Now you might be saying, don't people close to me know me well enough? Don't they know how much I care? Or that I have integrity? Well, yes and no. Brains have a negativity bias, and brains are full of so much other information. In any given moment, they might or might not recall those things about you.

Even if you think the other person knows what drives you, even if you think it's completely obvious, and even if you said it before, other people's brains do not always have that information top of mind. It is in your control to help them remember the truth about you so they don't jump to unhelpful conclusions.

Here's a really small example. In this world of virtual meetings, most of my coaching sessions are on Zoom. One thing I've learned about myself in this virtual world is that it's hard for me to stare at a screen and do my most effective thinking. When I think deeply, my gaze wanders and I look off into the distance.

When I meet a new potential client on Zoom, I don't want them to see me looking away and then make up a story like I'm not paying attention. I want to tell them the conclusion I want them to draw. So I say to them, I've learned in this Zoom world that when I think I look around. If you see me looking around, please know that there are no animals or people in this room – it's just that I'm thinking about all the brilliant things you are saying. They always appreciate it.

That's one small example. The same practice of communicating fully about your thoughts works for bigger situations, too. It is especially helpful in difficult conversations.

Many of my clients want coaching around difficult conversations they are anticipating and navigating. They're worried what the other person might think of them and how their point of view might be perceived. This is the perfect opportunity to put this practice into action: tell the other person the conclusions you want them to draw about you.

You get to share things that you want them to know. Like maybe, for example, you want them to know that you appreciate them engaging in this difficult conversation. Or that you see this conversation as first step. Or that you've been asking yourself certain questions as you think through the situation.

It is in your control to share your intention, your beliefs and values, and what they can count on you for.

By making the implicit explicit, you are working toward shaping the narrative of you that they have in their head.

Communicating clearly and completely is a leadership trait. Leaders share how they see a situation, how they're approaching it, their vision, their timeline, and their goals. And when leaders do this well, they are more trustworthy and inspiring.

Let's bring this to you.

In the next few weeks, I invite you to practice this communication and relationship building strategy.

Here are some times when it works especially well to tell people the conclusions you want them to draw about you.

For example, when you are delegating something, you might tell the other person that you see this as a growth opportunity for them; how their assistance helps the organization; and that you are deeply grateful.

When you're onboarding someone new or starting a relationship with someone new, tell them what matters most to you, what they can count on you for, and how they can help you when you get stressed.

When you are trying a new leadership approach and your team might see you practicing new behaviors or communication strategies, tell them why you're doing what you're doing, what they can expect, and what you want to learn as you experiment with this new approach.

The big caveat to remember about telling people the conclusions you want them to draw about you is that what you say has to feel true to you. If you share a self-narrative that is not authentic, the other person will sense it. Be sure to speak from your integrity, your values, and your purpose.

Thank you so much for listening and being part of my community. If you found today's episode interesting, please share it with a friend. And if you need help communicating more clearly and confidently, please email me at deb@debelbaum.com for a complimentary consult. I'm here to help you create your best self at home and at work, so that you're confident you're moving in the right direction for you.

Until next time!