



## Episode 74: The 3 Pieces of Effective Communication

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. Here are the starting questions today: Do you ever find yourself holding back from saying something to someone, because you're worried how it will be received? What if you could communicate clearly and intentionally – what might that allow for?

In coaching, we talk about communication a lot, because that's the vehicle that allows us to share our thinking with others. It's the way people collaborate and brainstorm, and it's the way we know what others have done and are planning to do.

Communication is an integral part of working with others. It's also the foundation of a relationship. When communication is clear and well-meaning, it can increase trust and feelings of good will. When messages are delivered reactively or without thinking, it can cause frustration or feelings of hurt.

I define leadership as taking responsibility for how you show up – and that includes what you say and how you say it. Leaders try to be thoughtful about their communication, because they know that words have power. What we say and how we say it matters.

Here's the big idea today: there are 3 different parts of communication. Communication is more than the words we say – it's the energy we bring and the way we say it. When you understand and remember that, your communication can be much more intentional and powerful.

Keeping the pieces of communication in mind and putting them into practice will help you immediately feel more confident when communicating, especially with people you might be nervous about or when asking for something that feels brave.

Today, let's talk about the 3 pieces of communication, as well as some examples, so that you can start to think about bringing this concept to your conversations.

In a coaching session, when we talk about communication, I say: There are 3 pieces of communication. They are words, tone, and body language. All of these pieces are important.

Here's some data to back that up. In 1967 at UCLA, Albert Mehrabian did some studies on communication and the believability of salespeople. These showed that tone and body language were most important when it came to trust and credibility.

From these studies, Dr. Mehrabian said that believable communication is 7% words, 38% tone, and 55% body language. Tone and body language matter tremendously in our communication, and most of us forget to pay attention to that. When we prepare for a conversation, we usually think about what we want to say – our main talking points and the information we want to share.

Today's coaching topic is a reminder that to be an effective communicator, you also need to be aware of and intentional around your tone and body language.

When we think about tone, we're thinking about the inflection of our voice. Are you saying the words like a question or a statement? How strongly and forcefully are you saying it? I also include pacing in the this piece. Are you talking fast, or taking time to pause and let a big idea land?

It can take some effort to notice your tone. If you really want to know what you sound like, you can record yourself and listen to how you speak. I know, this is super uncomfortable for most of us, and it can be helpful to hear how confident – or unsure – you sound.

Along with tone, the other important piece to be aware of is your body language. Your body language is your nonverbal communication. It's your body position, your facial expression, your gestures, and energy. When meeting in person, it can be easy to read someone's body language. You can feel their energy when they walk into the room or speak.

What about on a virtual call? Many of my clients have virtual meetings all day long, and they ask me if body language matters. Yes! First of all, being intentional with your body language helps you.

Changing your body position, for example, standing or sitting up straighter will often help you feel more confident. Breathing and loosening your shoulders can help you center and relax. And when you do these things on a virtual call, it's usually noticeable by the person you're talking with. You show up differently.

If you want to be intentional when you communicate, think words, tone, and body language.

I want to share some examples of how to think about these pieces, with real situations from 2 clients.

Here's the first example. I was talking with a leader who had a goal of coaching one of her direct reports more. This direct report was new in the role and still finding his groove, and my client wanted to bring more accountability into their conversations. She wanted to make sure her direct report was leaving their conversations with clarity around next steps.

I suggested she ask the person this question: What are you taking from our conversation?

My client said, maybe, although won't that sound condescending?

I replied, It all depends on your tone. You could ask that question in a condescending tone, or you could ask it in a purely curious tone. I had her try asking the question out loud in different ways, so that she could see the different tones she could use.

Unless we stop to remind ourselves that we have different tones we can use, we often default to communicating in our narrow, familiar range. To communicate differently, it takes trying something different. It takes practicing out loud with different volumes, tones, and pacing. When we practice out loud, we can see what feels resonant and helpful.

After trying some different tones, my client realized that she could ask the question in a curious way.

Here's a second example:

Another client was starting a collaboration on a big project with a colleague, and she told me that she was unclear about people's roles and responsibilities. She was supposed to be the leader of the project, and she wasn't sure exactly who was involved and what their roles were.

She wanted to have a conversation with the co-leader and ask the question: How can we make sure there's no overlap of roles? And she was worried that sounded mean.

Because she knew the general words she wanted to ask, we focused on tone and body language. I invited her to try asking the question in different ways – from a mean way to a demanding way to an appreciative way. To help her have intentional body language, I asked her to choose 3 words for how she wanted to show up. After she chose those words, she found a body position that reflected those qualities.

As we practiced, my client realized a few things. One, she had more range than she initially thought. Two, she could ask the question in a respectful and direct way. And, three, shifting her body helped her feel more confident and more like the leader she wants to be. As I always say to my clients, our bodies are one of the most powerful leadership tools we have.

Remember, people cannot read your mind. The only way others will know what you're thinking about and what you want is through your communication – what you say and how you say it.

Your words, tone, and body language are the tools you have to be a more intentional leader, a more confident person, and a more direct communicator. Building these skills takes practicing out loud in different ways to find the way of communicating that feels authentic and empowered for you. And when you show up in your confidence and authenticity, others will notice and you'll feel proud.

Thank you so much for listening and being part of my community. If you want help being a more effective communicator, please reach out. Email me at [deb@debelbaum.com](mailto:deb@debelbaum.com) or go to my website [debelbaum.com](http://debelbaum.com) to schedule a consult. I look forward to it. 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!