

Ep #205: Confident Communication



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With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

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Welcome to *The Life Coach School* podcast, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Hello, my friends. How are you guys? I'm amazing. I'm so amazing. I'm so excited. I have an upcoming vacation with my husband. We didn't do our 20th-anniversary trip last year, so we decided to do it this year. We're going to the Caymans, just the two of us, for ten days. I am so excited. Oh my gosh, I told him, let's just say on the beach and stare at each other. He's like, "I'm in."

Oh my gosh, we're going to have so much fun. I'm going to bring books to read, we're just going to relax. I'm really looking forward to it because it's cold in Texas, y'all. Nobody told me it was going to be cold. I'm going to take this year to complain about it and then I'm never going to complain about it again; I promise. I was just shocked by the coldness of the state. When I think of Texas, I think of sunshine and warmth. I don't think of coldness. My girlfriend just came to visit. We were like glaring at the weather. Have you ever done that? You like glare at it – that's what we were doing. My little puppies are shivering...

Okay, let's dive in. Today, we're going to talk about confident communication. We're going to talk about communication in general, but confident communication is an important little caveat to it, and I'm going to talk to you about why that's important. But first, let's talk about what communication is. Here's how I define communication.

If you and I are having a conversation, there is what I say and then there's what I mean by what I say, and then there's what you hear and then there's what you make that mean. So it's kind of like that game, telephone. There's what I say, there's what I mean, there's what you hear me say and then there's what you make it mean. And those, all four, could be very different things.

Ep #205: Confident Communication

So by the time you have heard me say something and you've interpreted it, it could be so different from what I meant than what you're making it mean. Here's an example – my girlfriend comes in, she flies into the airport and she arrived at like seven. So I sent her a text and I said, “Hey, I wasn't sure if I should have dinner for you. Let me know if you've already had dinner.”

And she replied back and said, “I'll eat something.” That was her full text, “I'll eat something.” So she said, “I'll eat something.” And I heard her say that in the text. What she meant was, “Yeah, I'm hungry; I'll eat something.” But what I heard her say was, “Yeah, I'll get something to eat before I come. I'll eat something here,” is what I heard.

So what I made it mean, and what she made it mean, “I'll eat something – have something for me.” And I made it mean, “Oh, I'll eat something before I get there.” I added that on. So we were laughing – she got to the house and she's like, “Are we going to eat?” “Oh my god, I thought you already ate something.” She's like, “No, I said I would eat something. I was like, oh my god.

Anyway, we ended up going out to dinner and it was totally fine, but we were laughing at how challenging communication can be and especially with all the different types of communication that we have. Now, it's really important when you're communicating in a working environment; when you're giving direction to someone or you're communicating something that needs to be done for someone's job. When you understand that there's what you say and what you mean and what they hear and what they make it mean, it slows you down to the point where what I've been doing lately is basically saying, “Hey, can you summarize your to-do items from here so we make sure we're on the same page?”

And very often, we aren't on the same page. I'm like, No, no, no that's not what I meant.” They're like, “Oh, this is what I heard you say.” “What? No.” And that's why sometimes I think the written word – clarifying the written word – can be even better than having conversations when it comes to business because you can go back and reference it and be like, “Oh, that

Ep #205: Confident Communication

wasn't what that said. That's so interesting, the way I read it versus what is actually written there."

So I want you to know that when you're having conversations with people at work, that a lot of times, people will come back to you and say, "What you said was..." And what they're really telling you is, "The way that I interpreted what you said and what I made it mean was..." And if you understand that, that's going to help you prevent a lot of conflict, because people will come to you and say, "Well you said to do this..." And I'm like, "What? I would never say to do that."

They're like, "But you did say it." And then we get in this argument. But now when they come to me and they say, "You said this," I'm like, "Oh, that's what they heard me say." That's not what you meant and that's how they interpreted it. That's not what I meant. And so knowing that there's what I meant and there's what they meant, which is that interpretation – and neither one of us is wrong. And that sets up a much better conversation than me feeling like somebody's accusing me of saying something I never said, or I accused them of saying something or interpreting something or lying about what I said, which doesn't serve anything.

So when someone comes to you and they're like, "Hey, you said this." You can be like – just always be like, "Whoa, that's not what I meant to say then." And then it can lay a foundation of what did you mean to say and how can we handle this? And the other way that it can be really helpful is when you're talking to summarize what was said and what the direction is and what the next steps are from here.

Now, this also applies to relationships, right, when you're sitting down and conveying how you feel about something and making sure that the person understands what you're saying; especially when you're having a really in-depth conversation. Like, I'll sit down with Chris and I'll say, "Hey, I want to share with you how I'm feeling about something. I want to share with you what's going on for me." And he may come back and say something that makes me question whether he really understands what I'm saying. And I'll

Ep #205: Confident Communication

say, “What did you make it mean when I said that? What are you hearing me say? Can you put that in your own words?”

And he’ll come back and say something that’s like, “What? That’s what you heard me say?” So like if I say – sometimes this will happen in relationships where I’ll say, “I’m just really sad because you keep coming home late from work.” I would never say that, but let’s just say I did. “I’m very sad because you keep coming home late from work.” And what I could mean by that is, “I just miss you. I haven’t been seeing you that much and I love you and I just want you to know that you staying late at work matters and I miss you.”

And what he might say is, “Well what I’m hearing you say is that I should come home earlier and that I’m being disrespectful and I’m not taking good care of you.” And you’re like, “What? No, that is not what I meant to say. That’s not how I wanted you to interpret that.”

And a lot of times, what we’ll do is we’ll say stuff and we’ll want them to interpret it a certain way. So we’ll say, “Oh no, it’s fine if you don’t buy me on Valentine’s day.” But what you’re really meaning is, “What the hell is wrong with you? You better get me a dozen roses.”

So, how do we solve all of this miscommunication; all of this what I said, what I meant, what you heard, what you made it mean, is just be super clear in what you’re actually meaning to say and say what you mean in as specific words as possible. And then verify with them that they heard what you meant to say.

The second thing I want to talk about is this idea of telling the truth. “I’m just telling you my truth...” So the way I wrote this in my notes is – telling the truth, how to do it. So I was working with a client and he was telling me that his wife is always saying to him, “I’m just telling you my truth. This is just my truth.” And that somehow, if we say that, then it entitles us to say whatever we want to anyone because it’s our truth.

And I totally disagree that it is appropriate to tell someone what your thoughts are with the caveat that it’s your truth and make that okay. So if I

Ep #205: Confident Communication

say to you, “I don’t like that you’ve gained weight. That’s just my truth.” Or, “I don’t like the way you are dressing.” Or, “I don’t like the way you act when we’re in public. This is just my truth, so I can say whatever I want.”

If I say something that’s derogatory or something that could be interpreted as hurtful and I just say, “That’s my truth,” that does not give me license to say something because that’s what I’m thinking. Because what is our truth is simply thoughts we believe in our head. So for those of you who keep doing that, like feeling like this radical honesty is somehow really useful, one of the suggestions that I have for you in for communication is that you check your own thoughts for your own opinion first.

So, for example, if you have a thought about someone, it’s not just that it’s your truth and there’s nothing you can do about it. All thoughts are choices that we get to decide whether we want to think them, let alone speak them out loud. So if you have a negative thought in your head, you don’t get to just say that out loud and just say that’s your truth and have that be true.

If you have a thought in your head, that’s something you can consider as an option and decide if you want to continue thinking that or not, and certainly, decide whether you’d like to say it out loud or not. What makes it your truth is your decision to believe it. And that is something that you get to decide one way or another, and then you take full responsibility for that being a choice.

Okay, so if I say to my husband something like, “I don’t like that you’ve gained weight,” I have to make sure that that is a thought that I want to be thinking, that it serves me, serves our relationship and that there’s a reason for me to say it out loud; besides, “That’s just my truth. Just letting you know what’s in my brain.” That’s kind of like saying, “Well that’s just the dirt in my house. It’s just the truth. My house is dirty.”

My suggestion is that you clean up your own brain, you clear up your own mind, you do your own thought work before you have communications with people because, a lot of times, saying things like that and then not taking

Ep #205: Confident Communication

responsibility for saying them can create conflict in a relationship that is completely unnecessary.

The third thing I want to talk about in terms of communication is feedback, when you're giving someone feedback. And this can be an employee who works for you, this can be a relationship, this can be your kids, this can be someone that you're doing business with; anyone.

One of the things that I have found is that feedback is not necessarily an opinion that you want to share. Here's what I mean by that – let's use the example of an employee, let's say. You have an employee working for you, someone that you've employed, and they do something that you don't like, or they do something that doesn't produce the result that you've hired them to do.

There's a couple of ways that you can be confident in your communication and give that feedback. You can basically say, "I don't like what you did and here's why." And that's going to give you one result. And you can test whether you should be giving feedback by how you feel. So if I'm feeling upset or Angry, I'm going to give feedback in a certain tone and I'm going to say it in a certain way to indulge my negative emotion. I'm going to want to react from that negative emotion.

And what I have found is that that is not an effective way to give feedback. In fact, it's a very indulgent way to give feedback because it releases some of that negative emotion that you're feeling by kind of spewing it on the other person; which is a way that some of us buffer instead of managing our own emotions.

I'm speaking of people that aren't me, obviously. I would never do such a thing... But here's what I've found, that when I can clean up my own emotional opinions and my own emotional thoughts about something, feedback is always better when I give it in a way where I am taking responsibility for the end result and I'm offering a solution.

Ep #205: Confident Communication

So for example, if I have an employee who has done something for me and I don't like the result, I can back up and I can say, "Okay, how did we end up with this result? How is it my responsibility that we ended up with something that isn't acceptable to me?" And I can always find where I haven't given the correct direction or I haven't been clear enough or I haven't known exactly what I wanted and that's where I end up with a negative result that I don't want.

And what I find is, when I give what my girlfriend Chris calls feed-forward instead of feedback, I give feed-forward – I say, "Hey, this isn't what I want, but here's what I do want. Here's the solution and here's how we fix it." It's so much more effective for everyone because instead of dwelling in, "You're not good enough. You didn't do this right." And them interpreting that they're not worthy and that they're not capable and going through all that drama, you could just be like, "Hey, we're not quite there yet. Here's the result I want. Here are the changes you need to make. Here's what I want more of." It's so much better.

I had a situation where a contractor that I had been working with, one of the things that they had done for me didn't turn out the way I wanted it to and I was mad about it. And so I waited until I talked to this contractor because I didn't want to talk to them from a place of anger because I knew that I would be indulgent with my anger and I would probably say things that were not useful at all.

So I waited. I did some work and then I asked myself, "What is the solution that I do want? What is the result that I do want and can I focus on that?" What I said to this contractor was I said, "Hey, you're amazing. I think you're awesome. This result that we have right now is not awesome and here's my suggestion for fixing it." And immediately the person was like, "I appreciate you calling me amazing and I'm going to make it right."

And we made it right, basically, together by me giving that positive feedback. So just notice, when you're talking to someone, when you're giving them feedback or you're telling them your truth, that you've cleaned

Ep #205: Confident Communication

up your emotion and that you're not just indulging and being reactive with the person.

The next thing I want to talk about is saying sorry. I've talked about this before on the podcast, but I want to offer it up again as just like a beautiful opportunity. When somebody is upset with you or somebody is giving you feedback or someone wants you to change or someone's telling you their truth – quote, unquote – that is not the time for you to teach them how to communicate. It's not the time to offer them my podcast to listen to. It's always, I think, appropriate when someone's upset to offer an apology. Apologies are so easy.

And even if the person is confused or the person is wrong about what they think you did or whatever, offering an apology is the opposite of being defensive and it opens up communication instead of shutting it down. So when someone's coming at you and they're saying, "You did this and you did this and you did that," you say, "Okay, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." Now, in your mind, you know what you know what you're saying, "I'm sorry you're thinking that way. I'm sorry you're feeling that way." You don't have to say, "I'm sorry for doing that," because your intention wasn't to do it that certain way; if that is the case.

But saying I'm sorry is always a softener and always an opener and it's always a connector. So I really want to encourage you to apologize and take responsibility for all of it, because as soon as you take responsibility for it, then you have power within it; power to change it.

The last thing I want to offer is how to be confident when you're communicating. A lot of people have asked me, how do you present in a confident way and how do you speak in a confident way? And it's not complicated. Confident communication comes from feeling confident. And feeling confident comes from your thinking. So if you're noticing that you're going into situations and you're not communicating confidently, it's most likely because you're not feeling confident because you're not managing your mind.

Ep #205: Confident Communication

I want to tell you that when you manage your mind and you believe that what you're saying is important, you're going to feel confident. When you believe that what you're saying is true and it is useful and it is helpful, you're going to feel confident. Anytime you're going into a situation where you feel like you have to defend yourself against some villain or you have to stand up for yourself or anything like that, most of that comes from a place of insecurity.

When you're in a meeting and you want to offer an opinion, if you're not feeling confident, it's because you're way too focused on how you're going to be perceived or how someone's going to think of you, rather than offering value to the conversation. And I think one of the best ways to be confident about your communication is to separate out what you say from who you are.

So if you say something that's inaccurate or you say something that is interpreted a way that you didn't mean it, that doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you. There might be something wrong with what you said, and that's okay, but it has nothing to do with you as a person. And so allowing your communication to be misinterpreted or to be wrong is what will provide you with confidence, which is ironic because, a lot of times, we think in order to be confident, we have to know that we're saying the right thing. And what I have found is that confidence comes from being able to say the wrong thing and be okay with it. That's where true confidence comes from.

So, the way to be confident in your communication is to ask yourself, "How am I feeling when I'm saying this? And why am I saying it?" And if the answer is, "I'm feeling negative emotion and the reason I'm saying it is to indulge in my negative emotion," then you can clean that up.

If what you're saying is coming from a place of insecurity, it's coming from a place of doubt, it's because of the way you're thinking about it. You can go back to your mind and clear up your thinking so you can then say it in a positive way. And remember, the only truth is the truth that you decide to believe. So when you're expressing your truth, make sure you have put it

Ep #205: Confident Communication

through your own filter and that you've decided on purpose that that's what you want your truth to be and that's the truth that you want to say out loud. Because remember, there's what you say, there's what you mean, there's what they hear and there's what they make it mean.

Do your best to make sure that what they're making it mean is exactly what you mean and doing that by clarifying, communicating clearly and then checking with them and making sure that they repeat what they've heard when it's super important information. Have a beautiful week, you guys. I'll talk to you next week; bye-bye.

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