

COOL TOOLS FOR SPEAKING STRONG

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THE SPEAKSTRONG JOURNEY:
PHRASES, FORMULAS AND KATAS
TO COMMUNICATION EXCELLENCE

Meryl Runion's
**SPEAK
STRONG**

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THE SPEAKSTRONG JOURNEY:

CONVERSATIONAL KATAS TO COMMUNICATION EXCELLENCE

Speaking Strong is a journey. The destination is communication excellence. SpeakSTRONG provides phrases, formulas and katas, or practices to support your journey. Here are some ways to use SpeakSTRONG tools.

1. Adapt and apply SpeakSTRONG's PowerPhrases to your own circumstance. *The Quick Reference Guide* or the SpeakSTRONG website or any of the phrase books will help you find the expressions to get your message across.
2. Use the *Six Secrets of PowerPhrases* to formulate your own phrases. Those tips will help you translate your meaning into phrases that will get you the results you want.
3. Use the formulas in this reference, *Cool Tools for Speaking Strong* to prepare for challenging conversations. The formulas are tools that guide you in finding words for important conversations.

Your *SpeakSTRONG Cool Tools* are formula and contain phrases to apply in your practice of communication excellence.

WHAT IS YOUR COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE?

Before you apply the tools, review your own communication vision. What standards of communication do you aspire to, and why? How do you define excellence in communication? That knowledge will provide guiding principles for the way you use the formulas. Think about your vision of perfect communication. Then fill in the blank: I aspire to__.

The SpeakSTRONG Method is a very specific and unique style of communication. The goal is communication excellence. That includes many sub-goals, or definitions of what communication excellence really is.

1. Say what you mean and mean what you say, without being mean when you say it.
2. Advanced: Say what you mean and mean what you say, leaning forward in continuous improvement.
3. Say what you'll do and do what you say.
4. Stay in relationship when the going gets tough, rather than withdraw.
5. Seek synergy. Create trust and rapport, and draw out the excellence in others.
6. Continuously improve, refine and develop your communication skill.

Speaking STRONG is a journey – AND a practice. Like doctors have practices and lawyers have practices, serious communicators have a communication practice – where they/we exercise excellence in communication and continually improve and adapt to higher levels of brilliance. It's incredibly rewarding.

So before you apply the formulas, review the communication standards that you aspire to. Do they align with the list I have here? Not everyone aspires to this kind of communication. Some have no desire to be this transparent. Others rely on power games and want to keep it that way. For some, the idea of synergy seems like a loss of identity. Many are unwilling to give up their victimhood. Others have no desire to reach a higher level of accountability.

How about you? Know what standards you aspire to. If they match the ones I describe here, read on. Use these cool tools both to guide your conversations, and as katas – practices to guide your growth in your SpeakSTRONG journey.

COOL TOOL # 1: BE ADEPT IN SAYING “NO”.

Most people hate to say no. Too many say yes to avoid the discomfort. Others say no in ways that makes the requester regret having asked. It's a symptom of unclear boundaries.

You don't do anyone a favor when you say yes when you want to say no. Chances are that your delivered promise will be laced with resentment. Or worse, that you'll find a way to wiggle out or sabotage what you agreed to do. When you say yes when you mean no, you turn relationships of choice into relationships of obligation. That's a fast way to undermine good will – and block synergy. The SpeakSTRONG Method fosters relationships of mutual enrichment. That's why it's important to know how to say no effectively.

People who can't say no, can't really say yes. Even things you would willingly agree to become tainted by the tarnish of obligation. Obligation kills motivation, which can undermine the outcome.

When you can't say no, you are also likely to find yourself not being honest and agreeing to things you would know you couldn't deliver if you told yourself the truth. I'd much rather have someone tell me they can't make something happen than say they can and let me down when I need them. People need to be able to count on your words. Chronic yes-sayers too often commit to things they can't do – things they knew they couldn't do before they agreed.

I had a yes habit that I worked hard to break. I committed to six months of never saying yes immediately. Even if I knew right away that I wanted to do something, I would say...

- Let me think about it...

...before I agreed to it. I might come back five minutes later and say yes, but by giving myself a few moments, I broke my yes habit. Breaking that habit allowed me to say yes out of choice.

Here's another problem when people can't say no. While some people will gladly take advantage of someone's unwillingness and inability to say no, most people prefer not to impose on others. Many become reluctant to make requests of others who won't give them an honest no. If I think my request to you might lead to you resenting me, I'll hesitate to ask. That could mean that I won't ask you for something that you, in fact, would be more than happy to give. That doesn't serve anyone.

Of course you might be one of those people who say no harshly and/or abruptly, leaving people regretting having asked. That's no good either. It blocks synergy, and you just might miss out on some opportunities.

So either way, get ADEPT at saying no.

THE ADEPT FORMULA

Step 1:

***A*cknowledge their request**

Acknowledge the request before you decline. Say something that honors them for asking and makes them glad they asked, even though you decline. Some possible phrases:

- I understand this is important.
- Ordinarily I would love to help.
- I appreciate you thinking of me.
- Thanks for asking.
- I wish I could help out here.
- What a great idea!
- While I wish I could...

STEP 2:

***D*ecline politely**

Briefly and gracefully decline. Make it a definite no without being in their face or hard. Some possible phrases:

- I can't do that for you.
- Not this time.
- I'm going to pass this time.
- No thanks.
- That won't work.

STEP 3:

***E*XPLAIN BRIEFLY**

Give the *very short* version about why you are declining. This is NOT justifying or convincing them you have the right to say no. Some phrases:

- I have other commitments.
- It's not something I'm good at.
- That doesn't work for me.
- I'm busy.
- That would be awkward.

STEP 4:

*P*ROGRESS THE CONVERSATION

Move into alternatives, options or something that takes the conversation forward – without taking over responsibility for their problem. Phrases:

- Some other time maybe.
- What might work is...
- Have you considered...?
- I was wondering if you could ... for me.
- If it were me needing that, I think I'd...

STEP 5:

*T*AG. CLOSE WITH THANKS OR SOMETHING THAT AFFIRMS GOODWILL. PHRASES:

- Maybe next time.
- I hope you get the help you need.
- Wish I could.
- Ask again, will you?
- I'm glad you feel free to ask. I like for you to ask freely knowing that I will let you know if it doesn't work for me.

COOL TOOL #2: A FIRM FORMULA TO ADDRESS ISSUES AND MAKE REQUESTS

How do you let people know when things aren't working for you, and ask for what you want? Firmly and affirmatively. Prepare by picturing a positive outcome. It may be difficult but it doesn't have to be. You may not get the outcome you want, but you are far more likely to if you envision it as possible. Here are your steps and phrases.

THE "A FIRM" FORMULA

STEP 1:

A*PPROACH: GRACEFULLY OPEN THE CONVERSATION. ASK FOR THEIR ATTENTION.*

- I have a situation I need your help with.
- I have some feedback that might be useful to you.
- Can we talk privately about something I'm struggling with?
- Can you give me five minutes of your attention to discuss a concern I have?

STEP 2:

F*ACTS: Objectively describe what happened (happens), the situation and/or behavior.*

You know you're being objective and speaking factually when they can't argue with anything you say. Sentence stems:

- I notice...
- When...
- The other day...
- I see...

STEP 3:

I*MPACT: EXPLAIN THE EFFECT OF THE SITUATION OR BEHAVIOR.*

Note: while this formula is largely for issues and problems that need to be cleaned up, the highest use is to address opportunities you would like to develop.

- What happens is...
- As a result...
- The way it affects me is...
- This creates problems because...
- I realized we're missing an opportunity to...

STEP 4:

R*EQUEST: ASK FOR A NEW BEHAVIOR.*

- What would help is...
- I'd like it if we could... instead.
- In the future could you... ?
- Can you help me resolve this?
- One solution could be...

STEP 5:

M*OTIVATION; ACKNOWLEDGE THEM, YOUR RELATIONSHIP AND/OR OFFER A BENEFIT*

- Thanks for helping me out!
- This is going to be great for us both!
- This will make all the difference.
- Thanks for getting my back here.
- I'll be sure to get yours when you need it.

COOL TOOL # 3: GET CLEAR IN CONFLICT

This formula takes us one step farther. While the “A FIRM” formula makes a request, the CLEAR formula invites problem-solving (opportunity embracing) to move the situation forward. Again, start by envisioning a positive outcome, which will help you communicate affirmatively.

THE CLEAR FORMULA

STEP 1.

C*ONNECT. SEEK LEVITY, ALIGNMENT AND SYNERGY. PHRASES:*

- I find things get most uncomfortable right before a breakthrough. That makes me think we're about to have a stroke of genius.
- I brought you a wet noodle in case you need to give me 40 lashes.
- I don't know HOW we'll resolve this but, I know we WILL.
- Let's get on the same side of the table and face the problem together.

STEP 2.

L*EARN: UNDERSTAND THE ISSUE DOWN TO THE ROOT CAUSE. PHRASES:*

- Let's each go through the A FIRM formula until we feel heard. You first?
- I'd like us to stand in the other's shoes. Help me stand in yours now.
- Help me understand what's going on for you.
- Here's how I would summarize what you're telling me.

STEP 3.

E*XPLORE OPTIONS: SEEK TO TURN THE CHALLENGE INTO OPPORTUNITY. PHRASES:*

- What if we...
- Do you have ideas about how to resolve this that you're reluctant to tell me?
- Let's swap ideas until we drop.
- What's the craziest solution you can think of?

STEP 4.

A*LIGN AND AGREE: FIND AREAS OF ALIGNMENT AND SEEK AGREEMENT. PHRASES:*

- Which ideas make sense to you?
- I'd be willing to... if you'd be willing to...
- Can you think of another way to accomplish the same thing?
- How can we make this work for both of us?

STEP 5.

R*ESOLVE: COMMIT. PHRASES:*

- I am committed to...
- You've committed to...
- Let's meet again and see how it's going by (date).
- I invite you to tell me if I fall short of my promise. Will you do the same?

COOL TOOL #4: LISTENING

How good is your listening? This is an important tool to apply while using the phrase formulas. Most of us listen for things we can rebut, ways we can prove we're right and they're wrong, or at the very least, how we can respond. This tool helps you listen for what they're really saying. It's deceptively simple.

LISTENING FORMULA:

Listen for what they:

- Think
- Feel
- Want

Then affirm your understanding. A possible phrase is:

- Let me make sure my understanding is correct. You think... you feel... and you want... Am I hearing you?

COOL TOOL #5: THE ULTIMATE COMMUNICATION FORMULA

When push comes to pull, your best phrases will come from your own authentic expression. What would you say if you could say anything at all? Start there, finesse it, and then,

- Say what you mean and mean what you say, without being mean when you say it.

That's the Ultimate Communication Formula.