

WORKING COLLABORATIVELY – STRAIGHT TALK

Speaking Straight

What it is:

Speaking the truth openly and honestly in a way that is responsible and builds relationships. Supporting the other person's understanding and appreciation of your experience through your communication.

What it is not:

Allowing your choices of words to undermine or distort the information - usually in an attempt (whether intentional or unconscious) to avoid anticipated discomfort or to manipulate an outcome.

Examples of Distorted Communication:

- Exaggerating or understating the truth.
- Beating around the bush/throwing up a smoke-screen.
- Shading the truth.
- Pretending unfounded certainty or expertise.
- Withholding relevant information.
- Not letting others know your true position.
- Failing to give due credit.

What Do We Mean by Speaking Straight?

When we speak straight we say exactly how we see the situation, with a sensitivity for how it is being heard and a commitment to move things forward.

Speaking straight requires coming from a commitment to get everything needed up on the table. It is not a license for accusation or attack, nor an excuse to be without empathy. It challenges the speaker to be true to their own experience without pretense or hidden agenda.

Speaking straight may surface conflict, yet combined with generous listening it builds trust, understanding, mutual respect and shared wisdom.

What Gets In The Way of “Straight Talk”?

The fear of how it will be received is the reason we don't naturally speak straight – we want to remain comfortable, not rock the boat, even if it means not getting what we want. Often disguised as a noble intention to protect someone's feeling, we are actually afraid of feeling uncomfortable, not being seen as a team player, losing control, retaliation, loss of approval, confrontation or reprisals.

What Is The Cost of Not "Speaking Straight"?

The organization does not get the benefit of our wisdom. It costs speed and intelligence and it is damaging to our relationships. We demean another person when we don't respect them enough to be straight with them. All the negative things we have ever felt or heard about the person get magnified to justify our not speaking straight. The toll it takes on our self respect and the quiet shame we carry as a result is an enormous drain on our energy. The organization pays the price in countless wasted meetings, faulty decisions and strained relationships that undermine performance and personal satisfaction.

Speak Up To Keep Up!

- Ask for support when you need it
- Bring attention to unworkable situations
- Champion compelling opportunities
- As we work together to build an environment of speaking straight, it increases the speed and effectiveness of decision-making, and results in deeper more satisfying relationships.

How Do We Learn To “Speak Straight”!

It takes courage, rigor and discipline to speak straight. It requires developing an authentic, honest relationship to current reality.

The first step is to make a commitment to take on speaking straight. Acknowledge when you don't and let go of demeaning yourself for not speaking straight. Demeaning yourself weakens you and we need all the strength we can muster to take on this challenge. Remember what you are forwarding, and create an environment that rewards listening and speaking straight. Speak straight yourself and clean it up when you don't. Encourage others to speak up and acknowledge them when they do - especially in risky situations. No matter how skilled we get in speaking straight, there will still be times when it will take great courage to face the risk involved.

Straight Talk is . . .



Precise.

Concrete and specific – cuts through assumptions and expectations.

Elegant.

Simple and uncomplicated, promoting understanding without unintended side effects.

Constructive.

Advances the action toward the desired outcome.

Relevant

On purpose, relating directly to the desired outcome.

Congruent.

The same message is unmistakably communicated on all channels - words, tone, facial expression, body language, etc.

Conservative.

Streamlined in terms of time, energy and movement.

Some time ago we hired a very competent senior manager from outside of Intel as part of the process of bringing computer expertise onto our management ranks. He seemed to land on his feet, seemed to enjoy the give and take characteristic of our environment and diligently tried to follow the workings of the company as he understood them. Yet he missed the essence of what makes it really work.

At one point he organized a committee and charged it to investigate an issue and come up with a recommendation. It turned out that this manager knew all along what he wanted to do, but instead of giving that direction to the committee, which he could have, he was hoping to engineer a bottom-up decision to the same effect. When the committee came up with the opposite recommendation, he felt cornered. At this late stage, he tried to dictate his solution to people who by now had spent months struggling with an issue and had firmed up their minds. Coming as it did at this late stage, his dictate seemed utterly arbitrary. The workings of our corporate culture rejected it, and the man had a very hard time understanding where he went wrong.

Andrew S. Grove
CEO Intel Corporation
“Only the Paranoid Survive”