Communicate With Power - Workbook

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Communicating with Power

Source: Phyllis Mindell "How To Say It For Women"

Message 1: Follow The Leaders to the Language of Success – Leave the Sad Stories Behind

- ➢ our language skills convey messages about ourselves and our capabilities every time when interacting, writing, or presenting
- ➢ weak language lessens the impact of our words, undermines contributions, and hinders growth and influence
- ➢ where weak language sabotages us, powerful language enables us to take control
- ➢ many women hesitate to use powerful language for fear of seeming "pushy" or in the belief that to be powerful we have to act like men
- ➢ BUT power and empathy are not mutually exclusive and powerful language is not unwomanly
- ➢ language that leads to success at work is not confrontational, arrogant, or belittling; it does not take power away from or exclude others
- ➢ powerful language strengthens us and our ability to transform the corporate culture into one of dignity and civility

"We don't have to act like men to be strong - we can act like strong women."

"Language is the tool with which we define ourselves, our colleagues, and our workplace. Transform language and we transform them all."

Message 2: Throw Off Your Shackles – Break Free of the Grammar of Weakness

These samples, direct quotes from intelligent women who own businesses and hold responsible jobs, exhibit varied problems. But the one problem they all share is what Mindell calls "the indecisive I".

1. I can be pushed around, I guess.
2. I kind of relate to that. Managers never want to hear anything bad.
3. I enjoyed myself and learned more than I had expected. I would recommend this course to any women professional.
4. I felt she's very biased.
5. I think the reason I came is because I think I've heard women who I think sound right. I would like to have that skill.
6. I have a problem with my secretary; he never gets to work on time.

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7. I have a problem with my boss; she doesn't support her group.
8. I don't have enough time to complete the job.
9. I like the way you get your work done. Thank you.
10. I noticed that the door was left open too long.
11. I observed that the lab wasn't cleaned up on time.
12. I think we need…
13. I love this job.

[...] ***Most describe work problems in sentences that begin with I.*** *They do so even when they aren't, or shouldn't be, talking about themselves, as in all the examples above. To understand why it causes problems to start sentences with the word I when you're not talking about yourself, let's clarify the grammatical concept of subject.*
The subject of a sentence is what the sentence talks about. *For example, the sentence, "The computer operates on real time," is about the computer.* ***Starting it with the word I*** *("I know the computer operates on real time.")* ***implies that you are the subject of the sentence****, although you didn't intend to talk about yourself.*
In the following sentences, the speakers intended to talk about a subject outside themselves. Although I indicated a probable subject for each sentence, the lack of clarity shows their weakness: we can't be absolutely sure of the subject when you start a sentence with I.[...]

Exercise: What is it about?

Starting with the actual subject - what would these sentences read like instead?

Sentence		Probable Subject
1.	I kind of related to that. Managers never want to hear anything bad.	managers
Example: ~~I kind of related to that.~~ Managers don't want to hear anything bad.		
2.	I think the reason I came is because I think I've heard women who I think sound right. I would like to have that skill.	reason? skill?
3.	I don't have enough time to complete that job.	time or job
4.	I noticed that the door was left open too long.	door
5.	I observed that the lab wasn't cleaned up on time.	lab
6.	I think we need…	what we need

7.	I love this job.	this job
8.	I have a problem with my secretary; he never gets to work on time.	secretary
9.	I have a problem with my boss; she doesn't support her group.	boss
10.	I like the way you get your work done. Thank you.	work or you?

Message 3: Intimacies - Great for the Bedroom, Poison for the Boardroom

[...] the unbusinesslike touchy-feely statement. In their effort to make workplaces more humane, well-meaning management consultants have urged people to inject emotions. Yes, people's sensitivities matter, and workplaces should be humane, but the way to make them so is not to encourage fuzzy, emotional language and the fuzzy thinking that goes with it. [...] ***Verbs that can inject emotions into professional language include "feel", "like", "don't like", "want", "need", and others that convey emotion rather than action:*** *just the kind of language women are accused of using.[...]*

- I feel good about this engineering programme.
- How do you feel about this million-dollar investment?
- What are your feelings on this matter?
- I really like this idea for out ten-million-dollar building.
- Our team doesn't like the idea of ordering six new computers. We feel it would be wasteful.

Emotional	Powerful
I feel good about this engineering programme.	This engineering programme promises to cut costs.
How do you feel about this million-dollar investment?	How will this million-dollar investment improve our business?
What are your feelings on this matter?	How might we resolve this matter?
I really like this idea for our ten-million-dollar building.	This ten-million-dollar building represents a sound investment.
Our team doesn't like the idea of ordering six new computers. We feel it would be wasteful.	Our team opposes the wasteful idea to order six new computers.

Jim, it was very nice to meet you this morning (or I was happy to meet you).	Jim, our meeting this morning was cordial and productive.

Notice that the alternatives not only sound better but force the speaker to use precise action verbs as opposed to vague emotional ones.

Quick Tips

1. Embrace complexity (no grammatical form by itself is always weak or always powerful)
2. Follow the first two principles of the language of success. Ask, what is it not about? What is it about?
3. Avoid the indecisive I.
4. Start with the subject.
5. Save intimacies for the home.
6. Trim hedges.
7. Eliminate unnecessary verbal, vocal and gestural tags.
8. Shun the other f verb.

Message 4: Assert Yourself – Use the Grammar of Power

"What this country needs is a woman with verbs."
THE NEW YORK TIMES

*Use phrases and sentences that show you **mean business, force people to pay attention, focus on issues instead of people**. This enables you to choose the way to communicate, and empower you to disagree and criticize without rancor or hostility.*

*[...] learn how to **increase your stature and credibility through distance**. You'll see how to choose just how close or how distant you want to be by **adjusting the grammar of your assertions**. Let's take a sentence and see how to change positions with regard to its subject. [...]*

Example 1	
Your secretarial pool has lost a member and is overburdened with work. You must inform the manager. The choice of subject determines how intimate or distant you wish to be.	
Subject	
About oneself	I feel that we have too much work to get the job out on schedule.
About the group	We have too much work to get the job out on schedule.
About the manager	You've assigned more work than the pool can complete.
About the problem (active voice)	The pool cannot complete the work on schedule.
About the problem (passive voice)	The workload can't be completed on schedule.

These four grammatically correct sentences **contain the same information** but **vary in persuasiveness and power**, from a subjective statement that targets the victims to a factual statement that blames the workload.
Which will work best in that situation? Can you think of a situation in which one of the other perspectives might have worked better?

Example 2	
An employee badgers others and keeps them from their work. The manager must stop this behaviour.	
Subject	
About oneself	I want you to stop badgering the crew.
About the employee	You're badgering the other workers. You'll have to stop.
About the other workers	Everyone complains about your badgering.
About the problem (active voice)	Badgering disturbs the entire work crew and must end.
About the problem (passive voice)	Badgering will not be tolerated; it must be ended.

By distancing (from I, the closest, to you, to the problem) you move from statements that invite dismissal as merely your emotional positions to statements that seem objective. Gain credibility and authority by controlling your distance.

Example 3	
A man interrupts your presentations, and you want him to stop. You ask him to meet you privately.	
Subject	
About oneself	I feel terrible when you keep interrupting me. Please hold your comments till the end.
About the man	You interrupt me in the middle of my sentence. Please hold your comments until the end.
About the problem (active voice)	Interruptions destroy my credibility and train of thought. Please hold your comments until the end.
About the problem (passive voice)	My train of thought is destroyed by the interruptions. Comments should be held until the end.

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Exercise: Playing with distance
Describe a problem you face at work from the distances shown here. Copy the models or generate new sentences.

"Remember:
When you have unpleasant or critical things to say,
the distance of passive voice softens the blows."

Exercise: Writing powerful emails
Review a work related email and mark sentences using weak or powerful language. Rewrite the weak sentences and turn them into powerful ones.

Further resources: http://www.taramohr.com/2013/09/2-little-ways-we-sabotage-ourselves/ (5min)
http://www.taramohr.com/8-ways-women-undermine-themselves-with-their-words/ (5min)
https://leanin.org/education/power-influence/ Video (17min)

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