

THE ART OF THE CONCISE

*HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY
TO LIVE A BETTER LIFE*

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PREFACE

I promise that from this point on I will be a Trustworthy Narrator. Every word you read in this book is one I believe in wholeheartedly and each is intended to help you have a better life.

Why on earth, then, did I title this book with a negative framing? Because—very likely—you tell yourself equally doomed directions about speaking all the time: “don’t be nervous,” “don’t be stiff,” “don’t be salesy,” “don’t be anxious.”

Don’t.

Don’t.

Don’t.

All those phrases have two things in common:

1. They *don’t* work.
2. They activate thought suppression.

What is *thought suppression*? You’ll learn all about it as we go. For now, just know that I’m not going to ask you to *don’t* do anything again.

INTRODUCTION

HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY TO LIVE A BETTER LIFE

The stakes for my client could not have been higher. The presidential campaign was in danger after a critically panned first debate performance, in which he spoke for the shortest total number of minutes, clocked the fastest speaking speed of any candidate (7.2 words per second), and responded to his first question with a single word: “Sorry?”

The “longest of long shots,” according to the *New York Times*, he was polling at less than 1 percent, and a second poor performance would doom his candidacy. The National Committee was striving to narrow the overstuffed field by raising the bar for debate participation with strict fundraising and polling criteria. If he stumbled again, his fundraising would stall and, with that, his campaign.

His team reached out to me: Could I help the candidate turn it around for debate two?

So, he and I spent the next ten days in intensive communication training where I taught him the techniques that I have invented over a decade and a half teaching at institutions like Columbia Business School in the PhD and MBA programs and coaching at organizations like Major League Baseball, World Wildlife Fund, and three of the five biggest law firms in the world.

PART TWO

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO DO

CHAPTER 9

VOCAL VARIETY

How to Speak Expressively (and Avoid Monotone)

The human voice is the most flexible, nuanced, and powerful instrument in the world. When you speak in public, you want to convey confidence, warmth, and precision. Monotone delivery kills audience engagement faster than almost any other flaw.

To overcome monotone delivery, we employ modular pacing and pitch variation exercises. By practicing with physical cues, your voice naturally learns to rise, dip, and punctuate key concepts with dynamic energy.

On this page we continue the exercise. When you speak, ensure that each sentence carries its own distinct tonal color.

unreservedly changing your vocal variety from thought to thought. So, IF THOUGHT ONE SOUNDS LIKE THIS, thought two might sound like this, and *thought three could sound like this*, and so on. The different colored Lego blocks are your visual cue that each thought is unique and needs unique vocal variety, different from the previous and the following.

Please be mindful that blocks number one and number two are very frequently quite different, but blocks three, four, and five can tend to fall into the same pattern. Push yourself to go as far as possible through the entire series. You may feel like you have “run out” of options by the third or fourth sentence. That’s okay. Persevere. I promise ingenuity will strike and you will find new options if you keep pushing yourself.

Substitutions for Colored Blocks

If you don’t have different colored Lego blocks, you can modify the drill in two ways. One, if you have Lego blocks that are all the same color, stack them in a unique way each time—attached and shifted to the left, then shifted right, then fully overlapping on all the points of contact, and so forth. In this incarnation, the varied attachment is your reminder that each thought is unique, needs unique vocal variety, and needs to be different from the previous and the following thoughts. Two, if you are using single-color sticky notes, tear some into six different-sized pieces. Make one the full-sized untouched note; make another about two-thirds the size by ripping off a third of the paper; perhaps another can be a tiny fraction of an actual note—like one-twelfth of a sticky note. In this incarnation, the variously sized notes

are your reminders that each thought is unique and needs unique vocal variety.

PRO TIP

If you want an instant way to see what your vocal variety “looks like,” use the same tool I offered that politician and record yourself in the voice recorder app on your smartphone and try to do a “good” and “bad” version; then look at the visual representation of the sound. It will look something like this:

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To my agent, Byrd Leavell, at UTA, thanks for your camaraderie and support and for instantly recognizing that this book isn't about public speaking but rather living. And to Dan Milaschewski at UTA, thanks for your infectious enthusiasm, your spirit of giving, and your sheer intellect. Your clients and clients-to-be are fortunate.

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