

Great Conversations - text

Chapter 4

Managing impact

Managing impact

In Chapter 2, you learned that it can be challenging to focus your attention when someone else is speaking to you. By the same token, it is fair to assume that other people are not 100% focused on what you say.

While you cannot control other people, there is a lot you can do to manage their attention and how they participate with you.



Every time you interact with others, you have an impact; every interaction contributes to how much others respect and trust you, listen to you and how willing they are to respond to your requests.

Although that might sound daunting, it presents an opportunity to make the most of every interaction you have with others.

Take a moment to reflect on your current communication, from 1-1 conversations, meetings, presentations, and email communication. Consider how true these statements are for you:

- Everyone listens to me
- People get confused
- I feel misunderstood
- Other people's emotional reactions surprise me

Learning from communication mishaps

Quite often we aim for a simple communication and then we find that other people are confused, they didn't listen fully, they misunderstood, or they have some out of the blue emotional reaction. It can be frustrating!

But, given what we know about the brain, we should probably expect many of those reactions. We know that the brain is fear-based, easily distracted, it makes assumptions and jumps to conclusions. We should expect distraction, misunderstandings and even resistance from others. That's just the way we are wired.

And while we can't control other people, there is a lot we can do to manage their attention, influence their emotions and even manage how they participate with us.

This chapter is about taking responsibility for your communication so you can ensure your messages and requests are heard through everything else that is going on in the brain. This is about being mindful of our own emotions and behaviour so we can manage the impact we have on others.

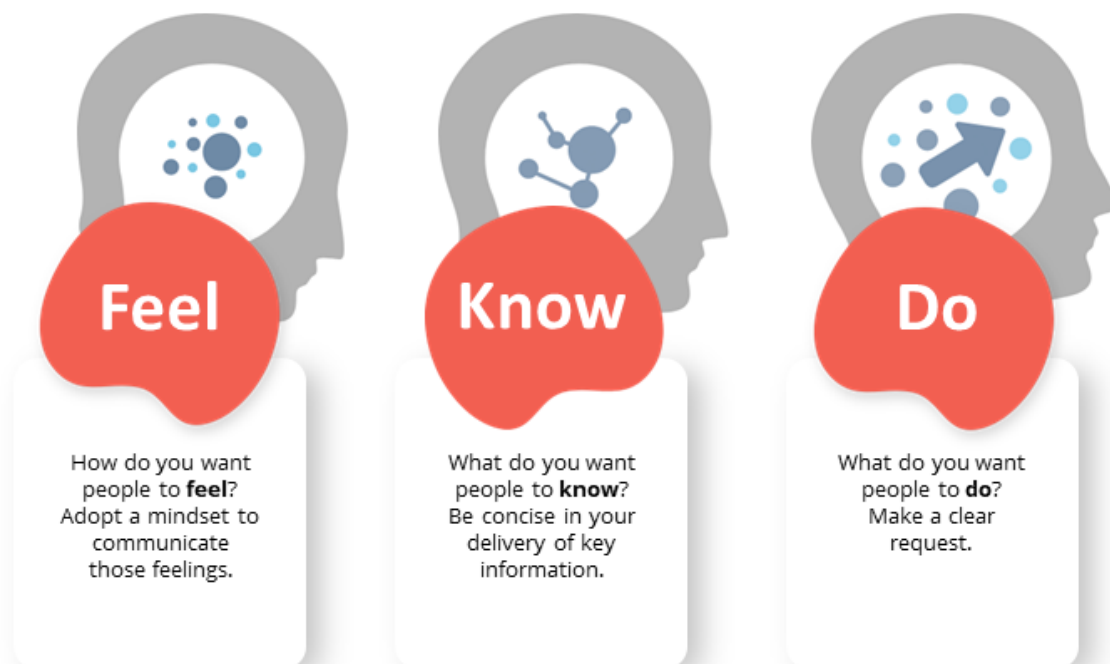
In this chapter, you will look at two new tools to help with this: **Feel, Know, Do** and **Metacommunication**.

Tool: Feel Know Do

When you are in the Education style of communication: where you are sharing information with others in a 1-way format with the spirit of collaboration, Feel Know Do will provide you with steps to help you have the impact you want.

This might be sharing information, knowledge or expertise, or giving a brief or assigning people projects. It is collaborative in the sense that you are on the same side; sharing information for their benefit, rather than competing with them.

Feel, Know, Do will give you a structure to follow to make these conversations impactful and that will result in the actions you are looking for. It is about deciding ahead of time what you want the other person to feel, know and do, so you can show up to the conversation ready to make that happen.



What do you want people to FEEL?



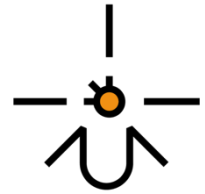
As we know, humans are emotional creatures and our behaviours are driven largely by our emotions. If you have ever chosen not to do your best work because you did not like the person asking or the way they asked, your work has been driven by your emotion. So, like it or not, if we want to educate or advise others, we need to appease their emotional brain to some extent.

To do this, focus on both what you say and how you say it. Both of these will contribute to the emotional responses the other person will have.

The single source of both your emotions and your language is your underlying mindset.

For example, a critical mindset will lead to toxic behaviours and impact, while positivity is more likely to create trust, motivation and action.

Consider each of these mindsets and the impact they will likely have.



Positivity focused

With a positive and possibility focused mindset, your energy will be enthusiastic; you will more easily find words that lead to motivation and inspiration in others

Critical and judgemental

If your mindset is critical and judgemental, you are more likely to use toxic behaviours and harsh words. These are likely to generate toxic behaviour in others and will be less likely to get the response you want.

Emergency

If you believe there is an emergency, you will want others to move quickly. With urgency in your voice, you can create an adrenaline response and fast action in others. This might be exactly what is needed in the moment.

Curious

If you are truly curious (without the edge of judgement), you will be better able to ask about the source of problems without people getting defensive.

Concern

With a mindset of concern for the other person and a desire to see them grow, you will be more at ease when training them or offering advice, which will make it easier for them to hear you and learn.

What do you want people to KNOW?

Recall our work about listening and attention: we have a very limited attention span and the brain is doing all kinds of things when we try to listen.

This is also true for people you are trying to communicate to. It will be up to you to manage their attention, if you want to successfully convey a message to them.

But it is not always that easy.

If you have ever over-talked when delivering a message that makes you uncomfortable, or embellished to make a message a bit more interesting, you may have given people more than they need to know.

To create a message that will cut through the brain's noise and short attention span, consider these tips when communicating your message. An **impactful message** is one that will cut through the brain's noise and short attention span. Consider these tips to master the 'Know' step:



- **Be Concise:** Given the action you want people to take, what information do they absolutely need to know? Too much will send their attention in different directions; too little information may not grab their attention at all. Planning ahead will help you be concise and stick to essentials.
- **Tailor your message:** share what you think this person needs to know rather than what you are interested in sharing.
- **Create obvious links** between different bits of information.

What do you want people to DO?



What do you want people to do with the information you give them?

Usually, we share something because we want people to take some action. It is easy to assume that the information itself will lead to a specific action, but people will make their own assumptions about what is important, and their brain will point their attention if you do not.

So get clear with yourself first: why are you providing this information? What do you want people to do with it?

This step in the model is about creating a call to action - a straight-forward request for what you want people to do.

For example, if you have created a new procedure for something in your office, just telling people that the new procedure exists might not be enough. Be explicit about what they need to do to comply with the new way.

For further clarity, here is a distinction between Know and Do:

KNOW (convey necessary information):

Because of the new QQQ law, we have a new procedure for handling data that needs to be in place by ZZZ date.

DO (clear request):

Read these instructions by Friday and consider the implications. Let's meet next Monday to create a plan for this change.

Think about a conversation you have coming up

It could be anything from a conversation with a customer to a meeting with some peers or a 1-on-1 development conversation and use Feel, Know, Do to prepare for the conversation by following these steps.

1. Begin with the end in mind: What do you want the other person/people to **DO** as a result of your conversation? Make it a clear and specific request.
2. What information do they need to **KNOW** so they can understand why you are asking them to take this action? What else would they want/need to know?
3. What do you want them to **FEEL** in this interaction, so that they will be compelled to take action?
4. What **mindset** do you need to adopt so you will have the best chance of creating those feelings in the other person/people?

Metacommunication

Often, when someone is confused after a conversation or has an emotional reaction, it is because there were different expectations about the purpose of the conversation or what was going to happen.



Metacommunication is communicating *about the communication you are having or are going to have* to create a shared understanding.

Four types of metacommunication

Metacommunication will help you manage others' attention and emotions. Agreements help you point attention to where you are going and how you will get there. They also provide an opportunity for people to be aware of how emotions are showing up and possibly impacting progress.

Take a look at these four types and notice that they can be used at different points in a conversation.

1. Agree on the type of interaction

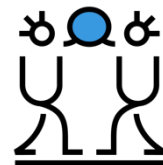
Stating your intended type of communication upfront set expectations with the others involved. For example:

- This is not a debate, I am providing you with the information you requested.
- I'm sharing unfinished ideas; I would like to get your thoughts and input. But please go easy on the criticism, these are fresh ideas.
- I'm actually looking for push-back so I can prepare for a customer presentation next week; so bring it on.

2. Set and stick to procedure

Agreeing a procedure for the communication clarifies expectations for everyone. For example:

- Can we agree that this meeting will only last for 30 minutes?
- Let's capture questions for a Q&A later, rather than answer questions in the moment.
- I notice we are moving into another topic, can we finish with this one first?
- Let's shift focus to our second point.



3. Redirect the conversation when it goes off course

Redirecting where needed helps you stick to the agreed communication style and procedure. For example:

- We're both fascinated by new ideas, perhaps we should re-focus on the question we need to answer?
- We started a friendly conversation but now it seems competitive, what do we need to get back to being collaborative?
- We seem to be very tired right now; we need a break.

4. Productively close the conversation

Closing a conversation well ensures that everyone leaves the meeting being clear about the 'Do' part of Feel, Know, Do. For example:

- We are close to the end of the meeting how should we spend our last 15 minutes?
- Who is going to take which action items?
- What do we do with the unanswered questions?
- Who will do that research and come back next time?

Using metacommunication in common workplace scenarios

Take a look at these common workplace conversations, and how metacommunication could be used to increase clarity.

Scenario 1: Presenting at a meeting

Imagine Ingrid, an HR specialist, attends a team meeting to present new company policies announced by headquarters.



Without metacommunication:

As Ingrid shares, everyone starts to give input on what the policies should be. This leads to frustration and conflict.

From Ingrid's perspective, the primary purpose of the meeting was to educate the team about the policies. Then, they would work together to figure out how to roll them out. She did not mean to invite debate or even conversation about the policies as they were already fixed by HQ.

With metacommunication:

As Ingrid introduces herself, she sets expectations for the meeting: **"I'm here to talk you through the new policies that leadership have signed off. Then we need to discuss and agree how to roll them out. Is that clear for everyone?"**

Later, Ingrid realises they have been talking about the same detail for 5 minutes and brings the meeting back on track: **"We are stuck on this one point. Let me find out the answer and get back to you after the meeting so we can move on."**

Towards the end of the meeting, a few members of the team start talking quietly amongst themselves at the back of the room. Ingrid states what is happening and brings their attention back to the meeting: **"I notice another conversation taking place in the back of the room. Could we just spend the next 5 minutes finishing this piece and then we will have a break?"**

Scenario 2: One-to-one development conversation

Greg is meeting with a direct report, Brianna. He wants to start supporting people's longer-term goals. Using his new coaching skills, Greg asks Brianna about her future plans.



Without metacommunication:

Brianna thinks this is a test, like these meetings usually feel. Carefully, she tries to give Greg the right answer. Greg senses her tension and thinks she is a closed book. She senses his frustration and thinks she must have got it wrong.

Brianna is confused and concerned for her job. Greg decides not to try that again.

With metacommunication:

Greg sets expectations and agreements at the start of the meeting **"This is an open conversation about your goals; it is not a review"**.

When he senses that Brianna is being careful about what she says, he names what is going on: **"That sounds like a 'right' answer. What would help you feel able to share honestly?"**

At the end of the meeting, he summarises what they have agreed and assigns actions to each of them.

Scenario 3: Using debate as practice

A project team gets together to prepare for a customer review. With input from everyone, the Account Manager, Shona, created a set of slides which she is now presenting to the team.



Without metacommunication:

Suddenly, one team member, Seb, starts asking very critical questions. Shona is defensive and feels attacked. Seb thought he was supposed to act like their contemptuous customer so they could make sure they have a robust presentation.

Everyone's limbic system reacts and unhelpful behaviours fly around the team.

With metacommunication:

At the start of the meeting, Seb clarifies what Shona wants from him: **"Should we imagine we are the customer and ask you questions from their perspective?"**

Shona clarifies: **"I'm ok with the role play as long as you do not attack me personally."**

Later, Shona says that she feels that Seb is giving her a hard time. Seb refers back to their agreement: **"It's been a tough year with this client. I think they might have some tricky questions for you, like that one. I'm airing those now as we agreed."**

Reflect on metacommunication

Think about a conversation you have coming up where there is potential for misalignment around communication styles. Take this opportunity to plan metacommunication to manage expectations.

1. What type of interaction will you be having? How will you communicate this up front?
2. How might the conversation go off course? How will you redirect it?
3. How will you close the conversation in a productive way?