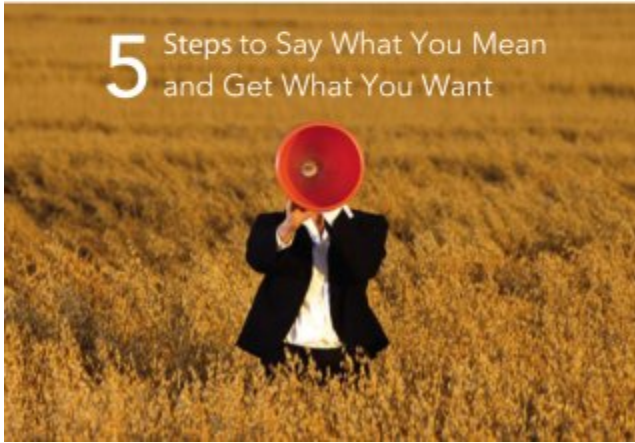


KAREN BERG

LOUD & CLEAR

5 Steps to Say What You Mean
and Get What You Want





Who Are These People?

It doesn't matter if you want a raise from your employer or if you need to reprimand a subordinate. To get the results you want, you have to do the legwork. You have to figure out to whom you're talking, and develop a message that speaks specifically to them.

Say you need to have a word with an employee; for our purposes, let's call him Steve. He's been underperforming lately. Maybe he's been coming in late frequently or missing deadlines, or not cooperating with his colleagues.

No one enjoys being reprimanded, and most people will react defensively when this thankless task falls to you. Now

you have to figure out how you're going to deal with Steve. He may get angry and lash out at you, blaming the problem on your "poor managerial skills." He may blame another coworker who's making him look bad. He may get upset, bawling away as you try to make your point through the waterworks, all the while trying not to hate yourself too much for inflicting such pain and suffering on another human being. He may clam up, having no response for you whatsoever, but, in his mind, he'll be planning his revenge and your downfall. It goes without saying that each of these scenarios requires a different touch.

Before you have to face Steve, find out about him. Who is he? How has he dealt with discipline before? Does he have a criminal record? You get the point.

Following is a "listener's profile," which offers questions you can ask yourself as you get to know others, and what they're going to need from you:

- ✧ **Knowledge.** Does Steve know his job duties and what your expectations of him are? Is he aware that you, as well as his colleagues, have noticed a decline in his performance? Have there been any prior warnings?
- ✧ **Needs.** Has Steve made any requests to you—additional staff or time to complete a project? More funding in the budget for his department?
- ✧ **Age.** Is he older than you? If so, he may feel outraged (on some level) that you're in charge of him, even though he's been at it a lot longer than you. Is he younger than you? If so, he may feel threatened that you have more experience than him, and you know ways to make his workaday life a living hell. Or worse, maybe he's fresh out

of school, perhaps has a higher degree, and thinks he knows everything? (See Tough-Love TurnAround: The Know-It-All on page 26.)

- ✧ **Gender.** If you are a female, is he the type who believes somehow his being a man already sets him on a level above you? Or does he feel he can flirt with you and somehow charm away your dissatisfaction? If you are also male, is he the type that constantly vies for the alpha position?
- ✧ **Nationality.** In this globalized workplace, it isn't uncommon for us to be working side by side with people from other countries and cultures, who may have different ideas about what should be expected of them in the workplace. (Just try telling someone who lived in the Mediterranean region, who's used to slowing down in the afternoon and has a different work rhythm, that it's *expected* for him or her to work through lunch.) We'll get into this a bit more later. (See Excursions in Unfamiliar Territory on page 41.)
- ✧ **Temperament.** Is Steve someone who easily flies off the handle? Is he generally easygoing and even-tempered? Again, how has he reacted to criticism in the past? How has he handled a disagreement with another coworker?
- ✧ **Family.** Is he married—and are you? Does he have children—and do you? On a professional level, none of this is any of your business. But if you can find common ground on a personal level (perhaps your kids are the same ages or your spouses do the cooking at home, even if you have cats or dogs or any other pets), you can use these

things to break the ice and try and forge a “comfort zone.”

- ✧ **Outside interests.** What does he do when he isn’t at work? Again, on a professional level, none of your business. But if you can connect through a shared love of books, the theater, sports, or even kite-flying, it will only help you in making him see that you’re “on his team,” and that you’re not attacking him simply because you don’t like him (whether you do or not).

You may be saying to yourself, “Hey, some of this seems pretty manipulative.” And on some level, you’re right. Finding out how to work with people to get what you want could be viewed as manipulation, but it’s also smart communication. And what it all comes down to is that the better you are at finding common ground with a person and connecting with them, the more effective you’re going to be when it comes to delivering a message—good news or bad.

What are some common things you can bond over?

- ✧ **Family.** You don’t have to air the family laundry, but if you have kids the same age and can share similar experiences, you have great common ground.
- ✧ **Hobbies.** Do you like knitting? Stamp collecting? The things you do in your spare time could help open new doors of communication you never knew existed.
- ✧ **Pets.** Do you have a dog or a cat or even something more exotic like a bird or reptile? People love to talk about their pets, sometimes more than their families, and this is a great way to bond with another person.

- ✧ **Sports.** Taking five minutes to talk about last night's game isn't going to lose the company any revenue. And bonding with people who like the same teams as you makes them want to be around you. Conversely, a playful rivalry sparked by a passion for opposing teams will also have people seeking you out—if only to gloat over their team being in a better position than yours. It's still a door for open communication.
- ✧ **Film, T.V., books.** Again, it's all about finding common interest. A weekly T.V. show you can talk about before the day begins or before a meeting keeps you bonded with your coworkers and keeps communication free and easy.

Tap into what interests people; focus your messages to appeal to these interests, and you'll win every time.

Overall, never guess the information. Don't expect that a woman likes shopping, a man follows football, or even that all parents enjoy talking about parenting. If you don't know something about a person, find someone who does and ask them. In the case of Steve, if you don't know what his "hot button" points are, find from someone who does. In what other departments has he worked? For which other supervisors has he worked?

Before you call Steve into your office, be sure you've thought through just how to approach the subject and how you will deal with any opposition from him. What happens if he gets defensive and threatens to quit—or to go over your head? With whom can you build an alliance to help smooth out any rough patches that may arise? Prepare yourself

beforehand, probing to find out everything you can, and you'll be much better equipped to diffuse any bombs you may set off. We'll get deeper into being prepared for anything when we get to the last strategy, which is *preempt*.



TOUGH-LOVE TURNAROUND: THE KNOW-IT-ALL

You say: I recently joined the firm and I have a doctorate from Harvard. I think these people should take my suggestions, but they just won't listen to me.

I say: I have three words for you, and they all have to do with probing: attitude, acknowledge, and approach.

First of all, congratulations on graduating from Harvard; it is an impressive school, but it's time to check your attitude at the door. You're now in the business world, not in the classroom, and things are happening in real time, not neatly mapped out in the pages of a textbook. The people you're trying to impress have been in this "real world" much longer than you have. For years, they've been slogging through, trying to make the best decisions possible to help the business run as well as keep their jobs.

Step back from your degree for a minute and *acknowledge* that you don't know everything, but

you do know something. Think about how you can translate what you do know into workable ways to improve the professional lives and situations of these specific people—they're not models you read about in your sociology class case studies.

Now, work on your *approach*. Try saddling up in a non-intimidating way—the “we're all in this together” approach goes a long way to win supporters. People generally want new ideas and fresh thinking; they just don't want it forced on them by some newbie who hasn't bothered to take the time to learn the ropes at their particular organization. That will shut down the crowd every time.

Crowded House

I've said it before and I'll probably say it 100 more times if I have to: Even if you're addressing people you already know, you still need to probe your listener. Not doing so can backfire on you, which happened to Andrea, a client of mine (see page 30).

Getting to know about one person isn't very difficult at all. When you're dealing with a small group of people, you have more challenges than looking into just one person, just in terms of volume, but you also have the added bonus that people generally know the same people. If you ask Dan's good friend Cheryl about Dan, and Dan is really good friends with Eric, chances are Cheryl knows Eric as well...two birds, one stone.