



THE INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT



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William Ely, Editor



To Make Your Points and Get Others to Follow You: Speak *Boldly!*

by David Casullo

My wife and I were watching "To Kill a Mockingbird" the other evening. I was feeling guilty because our daughter Sara was explaining the story as we prepared to watch and it occurred to me that I never read the book—required reading in my high school. Nor had I ever bothered to watch the movie—a classic. It seems most everyone my age has not only read the book and watched the movie, but they cherish both. Anyway, check the box. And, by the way, the movie is a classic indeed.

My favorite line was when Gregory Peck, Atticus, a small town lawyer in the prejudiced depression-era south was giving his closing arguments to the exclusively white male jury. He passionately explained that the humble defendant, Tom Robinson, an African-American, had the "... unmitigated temerity to feel sorry for a white woman." His intentional and bold sarcasm was meant to drive home his point—that Mr. Robinson genuinely wanted to help a white woman, the "victim"—something that Atticus anticipated no white man on that jury in that era would have ever considered.

As a leader, Atticus took a bold action and made a very bold statement.

Although it didn't overcome the jury's deeply-rooted preconceived prejudices, this comment certainly endeared Atticus to the all black audience in attendance on the second floor of the courtroom. It also reinforced the admiration his daughter had for him. Great leaders know when to be direct and how to use language to make an important point. Gandhi once said to a violently-charged following, "They may torture my body, break my bones, even kill me. Then they will have my dead body, but they will not have my obedience."

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This is a learned skill. That's the good news. And it's a skill we all need for our presentations to clients, prospects, business partners, professional colleagues and employees! Research done by my firm, Bates Communications, reveals four key elements that constitute this skill: eye contact; gesturing; voice inflection; pauses. Understanding, developing and effectively using these four skills will help you build your foundation.

Next comes the essential piece of the content of your bold statement. In this case, three steps in particular are imperative and primal: 1) preparation, 2) simplification and 3) practice, practice, practice!

When your content is set, and your delivery mastered, an "art" piece comes into play: timing. This piece separates the best of the best from everyone else. It's what makes powerful leaders (contemporary—Nelson Mandela, for example; and historical—Churchill and Gandhi) so influential. Back to literature, Atticus knew that his sarcastic, bold, well-timed words would slap the jury into consciousness, so he seized the opportunity to say what he was prepared to say, just at the "right" moment.

It is important to end by pointing out that courage too will always be present when speaking boldly. Extraordinary leaders know that game-changing opportunities emerge infrequently and often unexpectedly. So they seize them when they do emerge, not only because they are prepared for such moments but also because they are ready to bravely utter whatever is necessary to get their point across. In other words, they speak boldly and say exactly what they mean. So convicted are they to their cause, they courageously look their teammate(s) in the eye and reveal what's in their heart and on their mind, considerably yet powerfully and succinctly. This is how such presenters and leaders make a difference.

Communicating as a professional and a leader is really the most powerful tool in any of our tool chests. You may be a brilliant strategist; you may know your business better than anyone else around you; and you may have a sixth sense to see what is coming and to know what needs to be done in advance. You may even have the courage to stand up and face any challenge head on. But even all this is not enough. If you cannot also communicate what is inside you in a way that marshals the support of your troops, if you cannot speak your truth in a way that pierces through their layers of uncertainty, fear, and confusion, if you cannot touch the very hearts and souls of those who choose to follow you when they need it most, then you will not be counted among the best or the greatest.

Most of the senior leaders I work with want to be the best.

Communication skills are most often the one skill they must improve if they are to get there. As a leader yourself, have the "unmitigated temerity" to boldly say what those whom you want to follow you need to hear.

David Casullo is president of Bates Communications, a leading executive coaching firm in Wellesley, Mass. His passion is developing leaders who have the courage and capability to change the world. His methods ensure that leaders remember what is important by helping clarify values and recommit to behaving consistently, in alignment, with the "who that you are." Casullo can be reached at dcasullo@bates-communications.com



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