Straight Talk Self-Assessment
Scoring and Interpretation Report

Straight Talk

Influence Skills
for Collaboration
and Commitment

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*Survival of the Savvy: High-Integrity Political Tactics
for Career and Company Success*
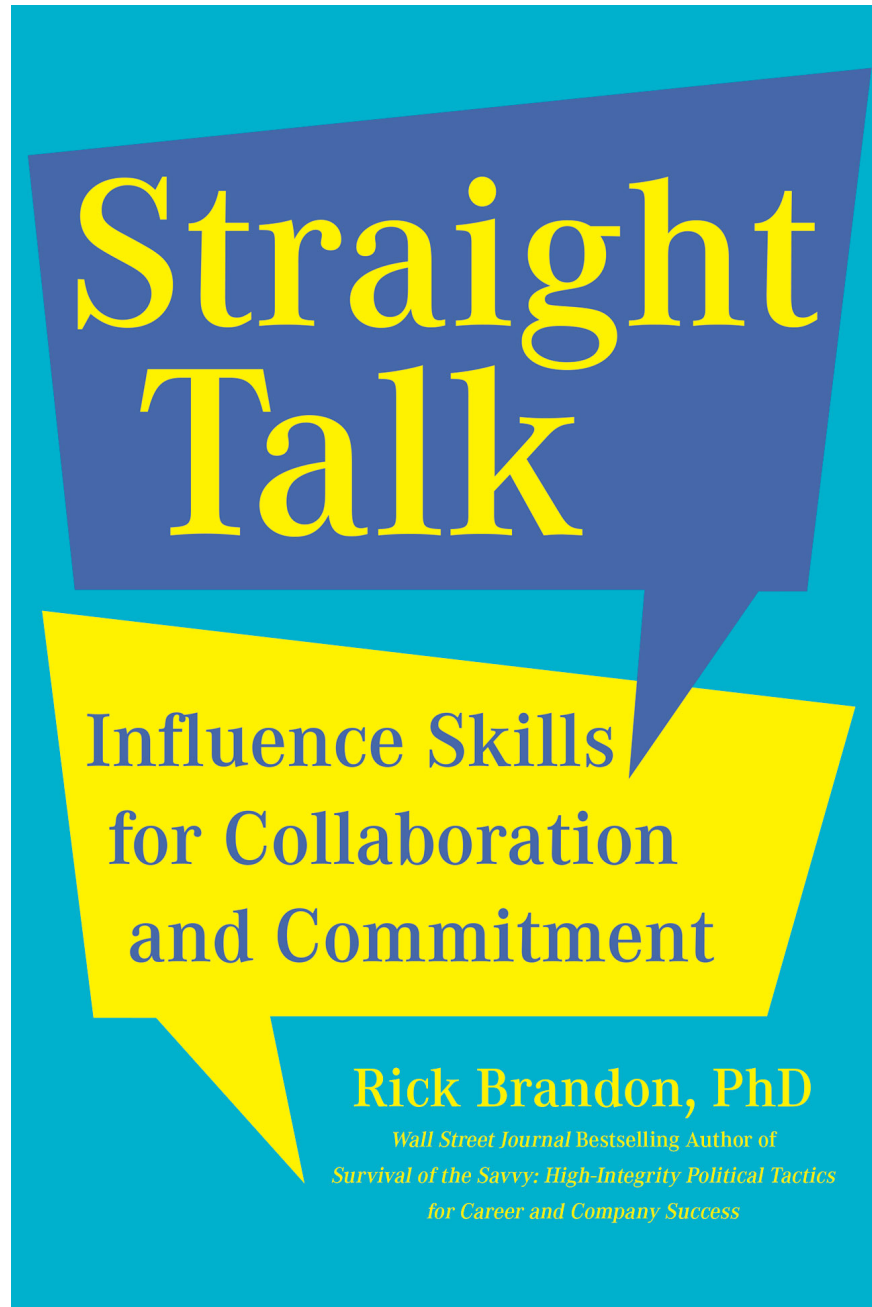
Scoring Instructions

Please perform the following calculations TWICE–– first for your ratings of your skills BEFORE reading the *Straight Talk* book and then again, for your ratings of your suspected skills now AFTER reading the text.

For each of the 7 Skill Sets in the accompanying *Assessment*, add up your raw total for those six items and divide by six (6) to determine that particular *Straight Talk* Skill Set Score. To gauge your *Straight Talk* Overall Score, add together all of your Skill Set raw totals (<u>not</u> the averages) and divide that total by 42. Do this for both your BEFORE and AFTER ratings. This Scoring Report's remaining pages will explain your Overall Score and Skill Set Scores, provide interpretations, and give recommendations for improvement. For each Skill Set page, there are boxes to which you can transfer your BEFORE Reading and AFTER Reading Skill Set Scores, so that you can then read the appropriate recommendations.

	BEFORE READING RAW TOTALS	BEFORE READING SKILL SCORES	AFTER READING RAW TOTALS	AFTER READING SKILL SCORES
SKILL 1: *STRAIGHT TALK* MINDSET	÷ 6 =		÷ 6 =	
SKILL 2: ASSERTIVE SPEAKING	÷ 6 =		÷ 6 =	
SKILL 3: ACTIVE LISTENING	÷ 6 =		÷ 6 =	
SKILL 4: ADVISING AND GUIDING	÷ 6 =		÷ 6 =	
SKILL 5: G.A.I.N.-ing COMMITMENTS	÷ 6 =		÷ 6 =	
SKILL 6: ROUGH CONVERSATIONS: DEFUSING EMOTIONS	÷ 6 =		÷ 6 =	
SKILL 7: CULTIVATING A STRAIGHT TALK ENVIRONMENT	÷ 6 =		÷ 6 =	

OVERALL *STRAIGHT TALK* SCORES	**BEFORE** READING OVERALL RAW TOTAL	**BEFORE** READING OVERALL SCORE	**AFTER** READING OVERALL RAW TOTAL	**AFTER** READING OVERALL SCORE
	÷ 42 =		÷ 42 =	

Scoring Report Overview

Your profile on the previous page shows your Overall *Straight Talk* score average and seven (7) Skill Set average scores for two moments in time: BEFORE reading the *Straight Talk* textbook, and now AFTER completing your reading. These BEFORE and AFTER ratings gauge your interpersonal influence competence, and can help you to make decisions about how you intend to implement the various skills you've hopefully honed. Our recommendations will hopefully guide you as you apply each Skill Set, as will other reinforcement resources at www.BrandonPartners.com/StraightTalkBook.

Most likely, your BEFORE reading score averages are lower than your AFTER reading scores, since the *Straight Talk* book is meant to increase your interpersonal performance commitment and competence. As such, this assessment instrument serves as a measure of the learning that's taken place through your reading. Of course, if you were already strong in a particular communication skill, your score may not increase, simply due to the fact that you were already functioning at a high level.

Please understand that this instrument is only a rough screening tool rather than an exact scientific measure of "truth." This is because no assessment can achieve 100% reliability and validity, and because it is a SELF-Assessment rather than a MULTI-RATER Assessment. So we recommend taking your absolute scores "with a grain of salt." You'll gain more value if you go beyond simply glancing at your scores, by carefully reading the *Interpretation and Improvement Considerations* and *Skill Set Recommendations* offered on the following pages.

Your Straight Talk Rating Definitions

For purposes of understanding your Overall Score, your Skill Set Averages (each comprised of six items), and your individual item scores, here is how we defined each rating level as you completed the assessment.

EXCELLENT (5) Your functioning on these items is so proficient that you are an example for others within your organization, and your mastery's positive impact on results and work relationships is evident.

ABOVE AVERAGE (4) Your functioning on these items demonstrates a high level of competence while avoiding significant weaknesses, so that your communication is an asset to the organization.

AVERAGE (3) Your functioning on these items demonstrates competence, but some improvement would further optimize the organization's environment and results.

BELOW AVERAGE (2) Your functioning on these items reveals areas of inconsistent or inadequate performance that may leave you vulnerable in results achieved or the quality of your work relationships.

POOR (1) Your functioning on these items reveals an area of persistent weakness where your skill deficits and behaviors are a liability to you, the team, and the organization.

Looking Ahead

You may wish to re-take this *Straight Talk Skills Self-Assessment* in order to see whether your interpersonal performance has gotten stronger the more you practice and implement the targeted behaviors, much like a muscle gets stronger the more it is exercised. Or, you may learn that you've allowed the classic "fade-out factor" to diminish your skill use over time.

Hopefully that won't be the case if you take advantage of the follow-up reinforcement and other post-reading sustainability tools you can find at www.BrandonPartners.com/StraightTalkBook. Either way, this future tracking of your skills will provide you with important data for improvement.

Your *Straight Talk* Performance Zones

For each *Straight Talk* Skill Set and your Overall *Straight Talk* Score, we will use three "Performance Zones" to describe your level of interpersonal effectiveness. The Performance Zone labels and related descriptions below are less important than your 5-point ratings that were used to arrive at them (5=Excellent, 4=Above Average, 3=Average, 2=Below Average, and 1=Poor). That's because these Performance Zones are arbitrarily established merely as rough cut-off points for thinking about the "so what?" meaning of how you scored. Still, they are instructive for your decision-making about next steps in your development.

PROFICIENT (Above 4.00)
Your performance on these Skill Sets represents your most expert interpersonal savvy and astuteness capabilities. Your actions and agility on these Skill Sets position you for maximum influence, organizational impact, execution on results through others, motivation, morale, and collaborative working relationships.

CAPABLE (3.0 to 4.0)
Your performance on these Skill Sets demonstrates steady capability and competence while avoiding significant interpersonal blind spots. You can count on these strengths to protect you from major problems with team morale, influence, or organizational impact due to the quality of your interactions. Still, you may benefit from honing your skills for further individual or company/agency results and value.

VULNERABLE (Under 3.0)
Your performance on these Skill Sets represents a risk or danger to your contribution, value, career, team's effectiveness, or company's welfare. Your influence and impact may be compromised by interpersonal blind spots. Your scores may either call for caution due to unsteady performance, or may indicate derailment potential where quick action is urged.

Keep Perspective
Please remember that what's more important than any Skill Set's raw average score or the Performance Zone label we've attached is the set of general recommendations and friendly challenges we'll offer you based on your Skill Set Averages. Also more important than any isolated score is how each Skill Set score compares to other Skill Sets scores, which Skill Set or individual item deficits might be hurting you more than others, and similar dynamics you can explore based on the *Interpretation and Improvement Considerations* and Skill Set Recommendations that follow. The real key is what you decide to DO through any mental or actual written action planning for improvement.

We offer this assessment as an informal screening tool -- an invitation to explore the component behaviors of interpersonal savvy as taught in the book, *Straight Talk: Influence Skills for Collaboration and Commitment*. Since your self-ratings may or may not match how others perceive your communication, we cannot know if your scores represent "truth." We do not presume to know you, so your Performance Zones, and our related interpretations and recommendations may not perfectly fit you. But keep an open mind. Treat our comments as a set of hypotheses to filter through your own self-knowledge, careful consideration, and conversations with trusted colleagues, friends, mentors, and coaches.

Interpretation and Improvement Considerations

OVERALL PROBLEM? The key outcome of this assessment is insight into your functioning on the vital competency of interpersonal communication and influence. Do your skill levels BEFORE and/or AFTER reading the *Straight Talk* textbook point to ways to improve? Your scores may show that you were faltering before completing the book, but your ratings for AFTER reading are encouraging. If so, it's reassuring that you learned so much. But don't become overly optimistic, since you may fall back into old habits. Hold yourself accountable by developing clear action plans.

SELF-PERCEPTION BLIND SPOTS? Remember this assessment is based on SELF-ratings, as opposed to a 360 MULTI-rater scores. Were you too lenient in your ratings? Would others rate you as having more of a problem? Conversely, maybe you took the assessment on a day when you were being overly self-critical due to one bad interaction.

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER? How might different rater groups consider your interpersonal performance? Would direct reports or peers rate you far lower than your manager/s or customers? Keep yourself honest about how you communicate with *all* levels and functions.

DON'T "KISS YOURSELF OUT THE DOOR!" This quip is a friendly reminder to not become complacent. Even if your ratings are high, accurate, and aligned with how others might score you, you can still improve. We don't have to be physically ill in order to become even healthier. The same is true with communication skills -- you may be in good interpersonal shape, but you can *still* raise the performance bar higher for even greater satisfaction and impact.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THESE SKILLS IN YOUR LIFE? Consider how important interpersonal competence is to your role, function, and enterprise. If lower skills aren't hurting you because you're not dependent upon these skills for job success, you may not need to be concerned. On the other hand, if your company's core business, strategy, values, or culture places a premium on such skills, it may not be enough to just be good -- perhaps you need to be unfaltering. The bottom line is to compare your scores with the company's expectations**.** Of course, also monitor your skills in your personal life.

SET SCORES? Scan your Skill Set Scores to identify how you can improve. What are the patterns?Is there an imbalance between your *Active Listening Skills* and your *Assertive Speaking Skills?* Do you excel in using these foundational core interpersonal skills compared to the higher-order application Skill Sets of *Advising and Guiding, Gaining Commitments, Recognizing*, etc.? Are these three easier, "smooth sailing" conversations like second nature to you, but the "rough sailing" conversations like *Reminding, Confronting,* and/or *Disagreeing Agreeably* more threatening to you? Do you use the skills yourself, but fall short in *Cultivating a Straight Talk Environment*? Maybe modeling and spreading the skills isn't key to a non-manager... or maybe it is. How about your skills at home?

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT? What impressions are created by your interpersonal trends? As a manager**,** how do others view faulty listening ("doesn't care about others' views...")? Do you aspire to a leadership role but have weaker *Assertive Speaking* skills ("may be a push-over as a manager...")? These skills have an impact on your career, results, influence, and relationships.

ITEM ANALYSIS. For each of the seven skill sets, target any item that signals a challenge for you. Such an item analysis helps you review, reinforce, and ground the skills you've learned. The *Straight Talk* book was merely a "door opener" that requires further thought, decisions, and practice.

NEXT STEPS? Study your Overall Score, Skills Set Scores, and Item scores, and our comments. Ponder the *Interpretation and Improvement Considerations*. Consider attending a *Straight Talk* workshop where you can receive intensive practice with honest feedback and helpful coaching.

> **SKILL SET 1:** *Straight Talk* **Mindset**
> These items relate to your level of personal accountability for positive workplace communication, and your commitment to being constructively open, direct, and respectful in your interactions.

1. I hold myself fully responsible for constructive communication habits without excuses, even when the situation and people involved make it challenging.

2. I believe that positive workplace communication has strong business benefits for the organization.

3. I strive to always communicate openly, directly, and respectfully.

4. I recognize when I'm being aggressively harsh or domineering and when I'm being passively silent or too nice.

5. I monitor and alter my internal Self-Talk from negative to positive thinking when necessary.

6. I strive *both* to get my work (instead of being too passive) *and* to maintain work relationships (instead of being too aggressive).

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BEFORE READING SCORE:

AFTER READING SCORE:

<u>Recommendations</u>

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Explanation: Some people "cop out" about their workplace communication and use other people's negative treatment, extenuating circumstances, and tough work conditions as excuses to rationalize their own substandard interpersonal behavior. The *Straight Talk* Mindset means taking ownership for being part of the solution rather than part of the problem -- no matter what. This demands an unwavering commitment to positive communication. It flows from a values-based belief in the business benefit and the moral imperative of an Assertive spirit (respectfully direct while open), rather than Passive or Aggressive energy. This starts with your mind -- accepting the challenge of always being conscious of where you are on the *Straight Talk* Continuum. Sell yourself on the benefits to you, your team, your company -- not to mention your family and friends -- of balancing self-respect with respect for others.
Chapter 2 of the book, *Straight Talk: Influence Skills for Collaboration and Commitment*

<u>VULNERABLE: Below 3.0</u>
Some may interpret this to mean you just don't care enough about others. But maybe you're just frantically busy or unaware. You see, we *know* you're not a "bad person," since even people who intentionally mistreat others may have their own scars from life; their abusive behavior can be emotional armor that comes from a tough background. So forgive yourself, rather than using the past as an excuse to play victim. It's never too late to change.

<u>CAPABLE: 3.0 to 4.00</u>
Are you not fully grasping the business benefits and rationale for *Straight Talk*, even though you can exhibit the behaviors (a question of commitment more than competence)? Do you just need to nudge yourself a bit towards greater consistency? Perhaps, you sometimes "bail out" of a tough conversation (Passive). If so, what inner fear or faulty "self-talk" in your head sucks you into sacrificing your own work-based needs and rights. If you're sometimes too harsh (Aggressive), tune into your self-talk fears then as well. Is it realistic?

<u>PROFICIENT: Above 4.00</u>
Are there rare, but occasional times you fall short of your ideals? Is it with a certain role or level that you become Passive or Aggressive? Your growth is probably more about buying into the noble role of becoming a model for others. Stretch yourself to provide coaching and mentoring to others. After all, a leader is a steward for the organization's culture, resources, and reputation. That means you strive to invite others to examine their *Straight Talk* Mindset.

SKILL SET 2: Assertive Speaking Skills
These items relate to how well you express your point of view when gaining commitments from others, giving feedback, voicing ideas, or reacting to others.

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7. I take into account factors of timing, place, and risk level in deciding how directly honest to be with others.
8. When communicating my views, my body language and facial expressions look firm and confident without becoming threatening or intimidating.
9. When asserting my opinions, my vocal tone, volume, and rate sound strong and convincing, while also conveying openness to dialogue about the issue.
10. I clearly express my ideas through specific wording and examples to ensure others understand my perspective.
11. The content of my communication is non-judgmentally and objectively worded, in order to avoid triggering upset or resistance.
12. When stating my views, I frequently check for the other person's understanding and agreement.

BEFORE READING SCORE:

AFTER READING SCORE:

Recommendations

Explanation: This cluster of skills isn't about public speaking prowess -- rather, it's how you express yourself in one-on-one or small group interactions -- in person, on the phone, in emails, or during video-meetings. It overlaps with the *Straight Talk* Mindset, in that both entail terminology of "Assertive" rather than "Passive" or "Aggressive." But this Skill Set's items transcend your internal, attitudinal commitment to such a firm while fair stance -- to actually *implement* specific outer behavioral nuances that convey directness balanced with approachability.
Chapter 3 of the book, *Straight Talk: Influence Skills for Collaboration and Commitment*

VULNERABLE: Below 3.0
You come across as too harsh (Aggressive) or too weak (Passive). Does speaking your mind stress you (Passive)? Or, do you get feedback that you bully others (Aggressive)? Your growth areas are likely obvious -- either to amp it up with firmer verbal and body language if you're Passive, or to tone it down -- a lot, if you're Aggressive. Remember that there's a difference between honesty and idiocy! You are likely using *blatant* rather than sensitive, *appropriate* honesty. Review the "Right Stuff" criteria for being direct: right time, right place, right reasons, right risk level, and right way. Conversely, if you're too weak, so that you swallow your thoughts and feelings, remember that your stomach may be keeping score (i.e., ulcers).

CAPABLE: 3.0 to 4.00
You clearly are NOT extreme in your tone or posture, but may simply talk a bit too much and give too little airtime to others. Your conversations avoid "duel-logues," since you are not often Aggressive. Still, it may be that while you're not blatantly harsh, you may lapse into "mono-logue" rather than "dia-logue." Check others' reactions more and perfect your *Active Listening* -- especially paraphrasing. Maybe you're the opposite -- too deferential or soft in your behaviors. If so, change your self-talk to remind yourself you have the right and the responsibility -- to yourself, your team, and the company -- to be firmer with your views.

PROFICIENT: Above 4.00
Here, we're just tweaking your skills -- no overhaul needed! Consider these items' subtleties to move from being really *good* to being *stellar* in how you express your viewpoint. Are you sure your language is concrete and specific, rather than vague? Do you give feedback that's objective versus lapsing into inferential labels (e.g. "unprofessional" versus "did not stand to greet the customer")? People likely respect you as direct versus harsh, but may wish for more proactive invitations and demonstrations of openness to hear *their* point of view.

> **SKILL SET 3: Active Listening Skills**
> These items relate to how well you listen and show understanding of others' work needs, feelings, ideas, feedback, and reactions.

13. I set aside whatever else I'm doing to focus fully on others when they speak rather than multi-tasking, when it matters.
14. During conversations, my body language is attentive to others and their views.
15. When others are speaking to me, I convey that I am following what they are saying through brief acknowledgements (e.g., "I see...uh huh," etc.) and open-ended questions.
16. I paraphrase the other person's statements in order to verify that I fully understand his/her point.
17. I demonstrate emotional empathy when others express their views, by stating my understanding of how they are feeling and by using facial reactions and tone of voice to match their mood..
18. When using listening skills, I make sure I've fully heard the person's viewpoint and that they are ready to hear my reaction when it matters.

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BEFORE READING SCORE:

AFTER READING SCORE:

Recommendations

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Explanation: Many people define "communication" as *speaking*, but communication entails encoding (putting messages into words and sending them) *and* decoding (receiving and understanding messages). Many managers think that because their role is to guide, lead, and direct, leading is mainly a speaking and telling function. In truth, managerial listening has countless benefits and uses. Further, listening goes beyond merely *hearing* others' messages. It demands *proving* that we understand the other's point of view -- both at a thought *and* feeling level. This standard for listening, besides being a noble discipline, opens others up to voicing their true opinions.

Chapters 4 & 5 of the book, *Straight Talk: Influence Skills for Collaboration and Commitment*

VULNERABLE: Below 3.0
You may be at the Aggressive end of the *Straight Talk* Continuum, since it usually includes the sense that you don't care about others' opinions or emotions. You may not bully or abuse people, but poor listening is still Aggressive, because it implies a lack of concern for others. Your scores mean you may be seen as too full of yourself to invest time to understand others' frame of reference. So first, do some soul searching. Then work on *Focusing* skills (paying attention), *Exploring* skills (asking for others' views or urging them to speak), and *Empathizing* skills (paraphrasing others' viewpoints to check for accuracy of understanding and validating the others thoughts and feelings).

CAPABLE: 3.0 to 4.00
Your challenge isn't an attitudinal one -- your head and heart are in the right place about investing your time, effort, and expertise to understand others' perspective. Now scan this Skill Set's items for clues to improvement. Does your body language mirror the person's emotions? When paraphrasing, do you restate the *content* of others' messages but miss the *emotions*? Work to be smoother in your listening. Like a golfer who is learning a new swing, you may be so conscious of your new skills that you feel or seem a bit awkward or phony. But with time and practice, your paraphrasing will become more integrated, automatic, and natural.

PROFICIENT: Above 4.00
Your improvement areas are finessing points -- the *art* of listening. Your paraphrases aren't forced or technique-like, compared to new users who sound like they just took a listening course! Still, your paraphrases will sound *even more* natural if you use variety of "training wheel" lead-in phrases, or even drop them altogether. Listen in your own style, as long as you're showing empathy and understanding of the other's frame of reference as much as conveying your own. "Stretch" to use *Active Listening* in team settings as you paraphrase groups' views, agreements, disagreement, decisions, and action steps. Become a world -class listener!

SKILL SET (: Advising and Guiding These items relate to how well you help others explore and resolve problems, decisions, and dilemmas they bring to you.

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19. When others approach me for advice, I avoid giving suggestions until I have fully explored and understood the issues,
20. When questioning to understand a person's problem, I paraphrase the other's answers to be more conversational and to avoid sounding like an interrogation.
21. To fully understand someone's problem before giving input, I ask about the facts of the situation, the person's problem and/or goals, and what has been tried or considered so far.
22. After exploring a problem, I summarize, check readiness to work on solutions, and ask how I can be most helpful now.
23. If I give advice or offer input, in order to avoid monologuing, I check the other's reactions to each of my ideas.
24. When giving input to a person, I adjust how directive and detailed I am, taking into account their experience level with the problem, their motivation, and how invested I am in a specific solution.

BEFORE READING SCORE:

AFTER READING SCORE:

Recommendations

Explanation: You're often approached by others seeking help and advice as they cope with a troubling work or home problem. They need a caring sounding board as well as your experience and expertise. Effective help, however, depends upon far more than the soundness of your solutions. It demands listening well enough and long enough to adequately arrive at and explore the person's problem before making input. We need to systematically ask about and clarify the person's problem specifics, desired goal, and what's been considered or tried as a solution so far. Then we need to carefully calibrate the kind of input we offer, taking into account the receiver's experience and motivation. The conversation requires sharing our suggestions in bite-sized pieces and checking so the person doesn't feel overwhelmed, lectured to, or insulted.

Chapter 6 of the book, *Straight Talk: Influence Skills for Collaboration and Commitment*

VULNERABLE: Below 3.0

Others may interpret your lower level skills to mean you don't care enough to make time for supporting and advising others in need. Or, If you do make yourself available, you may too often and too quickly short-circuit a struggling person's outpouring of their problem by interrupting their train of thought with your ideas and premature advice— or worse, with your criticism, moralizing, or judgements. Instead, seek to first fully absorb the other's frame of reference, to really understand their world, before you react from your own frame of reference. Otherwise your "solution" may not even address the underlying "real" issue. Worse, work problems may simply fester as employees figure it's not worth approaching you for help.

CAPABLE: 3.0 to 4.00

Others sense your caring, empathy, and desire to be of assistance. You have the basics down, as you seek to first understand the person's problem before trying to solve it. You may tend to explore the issues more exclusively with questions without enough paraphrasing. Be sure to systematically explore all four of these key areas before moving to solutions: the facts of the situation, the bottom line problem/s, the goal/s the person hopes to achieve by resolving their issue, and action steps considered or tried so far. When you do make input, be sure your enthusiasm and wealth of ideas do not allow you to slip into a monologue of multiple suggestions that wash over the person without a chance to process each one. Also, make sure that you build the other's self-reliance and development by refraining from solving the person's problem yourself instead of ensuring that problem ownership stays with the other.

PROFICIENT: Above 4.00

Congratulations! You are excellent at avoiding communication short circuit responses that block full exploration of a person's problem. You admirably invest time to ensure the person has fully aired their emotions as well as uncovered their deeper issue. You earn the right to provide expertise and solutions by fully exploring the issues, and you make suggestions interactively. Now stretch yourself to be a world-class consultant to others by adapting the range and type of input you provide, taking into account how directive to be. More experienced employees may feel insulted by overly detailed input. Other people who are less savvy about their particular problem or challenging decision may *need* you to be more specific with your advice in order to feel confident and competent in implementing the solution to their problem.

> **SKILL SET 5: G.A.I.N.-ing Commitment**
> These items relate to how you forge clear, accountability-oriented agreements with others about needed results, actions, and requests.

25. When seeking a commitment, I clearly explain what I want, along with my reasons and the benefits of the agreement.
26. When seeking buy-in, I achieve a dialogue versus a monologue by checking for and paraphrasing the reactions along the way before moving on.
27. When forging an agreement, I adopt an assertive, respectful, and firm tone rather than being either too pushy or too weak.
28. I inquire about any concerns, questions, or impediments to what I'm requesting, and problem-solve to reduce the concern.
29. When ending a commitment discussion, I make sure one of us summarizes the agreement and that we set any needed next steps like checking in, providing support, etc.
30. I follow up on commitments by recognizing and appreciating agreements that are kept and by reminding others if they forget or do not act on what we discussed.

BEFORE READING SCORE:

AFTER READING SCORE:

Recommendations

Explanation: A cornerstone of interpersonal influence entails getting work results and behaviors you want from others by obtaining solid, clear commitments from others about your needed actions, quality, results, goals, and requests, as well as securing buy-in to your ideas and recommendations. Passive communicators either fail to approach others about their needs, or when they do have a conversation they may cave in at the first sign of resistance. Aggressive communicators are too command-and-control in manner, winding up with mere compliance rather than true commitment. Effective agreement conversations are characterized by clearly expressing our own goals for the discussion balanced with listening to the other's concerns, questions, and objections. Buy-in is more likely when we give thought to how to sell the other on the benefits of what we're requesting— to the person, ourselves, the team, the organization, and the public. Finally, empathically inquring about impediments to the person's agreement and providing sound answers and support to lower concerns paves the way to lasting commitments.

Chapter 7- 9 of the book, *Straight Talk: Influence Skills for Collaboration and Commitment*

VULNERABLE: Below 3.0
You likely suffer from two classic flawed expectations around forging commitments:
1. Expecting Others to Be Mind Readers - Do you expect others to read your mind and simply know what you want, and then resent them for not meeting your expectations?
2. Expecting Ineffective Conversations to Produce Effective Results- You probably fall short on providing necessary content during your attempts to achieve commitments, leaving out specifics, the reasons and advantages of agreeing, and omitting any inquiry about the obstacles the other foresees. The interpersonal process may be marked by your monologue, with too little checking in or paraphrasing of the others's reactions.

CAPABLE: 3.0 to 4.00
You regularly conduct commitment conversations assertively rather than passively buckling in the face of objections or aggressively bullying others into compliance. However, you may suffer from the third typical flawed expectation around gaining commitments—*Expecting Without Inspecting* . You may not be keeping commitments on your radar screen and may not consistently remind others if they drop the ball, so that they may figure they don't have to follow through. If others <u>do</u> fulfill the commitment, they may wish for more recognition and appreciation from you. During your agreement discussions, you likely are open to hearing the person's resistant responses, questions, obstacles, and concerns; now just make sure you inquire a second time later in the conversation, in case the other is reticent to share their concerns and needs further encouragement to do so.

PROFICIENT: Above 4.00
Your commitment conversations are exquisite in that you cover the content bases thoroughly, covering the desired goals, advantages of the person's committing, inviting discussion of any concerns about committing, and ensuring a summary of the agreement along with any follow-up action steps. Your respectful yet assertive tenor builds trust and invites cooperation while conveying a decent boldness in gently pushing for what you want. Your growth edges may involve tackling the more challenging applications of this skill set, like forging agreements in groups and/or during virtual meetings. Nudge yourself to rehearse/role-play such higher order skills with people you trust as your learning support team.

SKILL SET 6: Difficult, "Rough Sailing" Conversations
These items relate to how you conduct difficult conversations, in which emotions can become volatile and defensiveness can be triggered.

31. Before reminding someone about an agreement or confronting someone's problem behavior, I prepare by writing, editing, and rehearsing what I will say to ensure a clear, persuasive, and fair message.

32. If others get emotionally reactive during conflicts or confrontations, I mentally calm myself to remain poised and professional.

33. I listen empathically and fully to a person's reactions to my message before reasserting my point, even if they get emotional.

34. If a person's reactions to my feedback are aggressive, emotionally upset, or unreasonable, I still respond respectfully with objective, noninflammatory language.

35. If a person derails a tough feedback discussion with defensive reactions or excuses, I refocus us back to the main point instead of geting sidetracked.

36. When challenging a person's idea, raising factors the other hasn't considered, or saying "no" to a request, I first listen nonjudgmentally and state the merits of the idea or request before surfacing my concern**s.**

BEFORE READING SCORE:

AFTER READING SCORE:

Recommendations

Explanation: The pinnacle of emotional intelligence involves being ready, willing, and able to navigate conversations that involve disagreement, conflict, and emotionality (the other person's <u>and</u> yours). It's vital to hold others accountable for their agreements with you as well as for other actions. This demands staying poised and balanced when holding others accountable for broken commitments or other problematic behavior. Objective language is key, as is listening empathically to defensive reactions and then firmly refocusing the discussion Other rough sailing situations entail disagreeing agreeably when challenging an unsound idea or turning down a request. Doing so without committing a "career limiting move" requires listening and then acknowledging the idea's or request's merits before surfacing your concerns and giving your bottom line contrary response.
Chapters 10 -11 of the book,*Straight Talk: Influence Skills for Collaboration and Commitment*

VULNERABLE: Below 3.0
Your low scores may mean you're passively avoiding difficult conversations or aggressively bullying when addressing tough issues, instead of maintaining an assertive, balanced, fair posture. Others may therefore either ignore or take advantage of your weak behavior, or fear and resent your harsh treatment. These sentiments likely hinder results and morale in your team and/or overall organization. Work at expressing clean, non-polluted anger and do some soul-searching about what inner fears and dysfunctional self-talk might be triggering your counter-productive patterns of communication. Before confronting someone, write and edit your message to objectively express the problem behavior without excessive personal judgement and to convey the negative impact of whatever you are trying to correct. Then remind yourself to actively LISTEN to the other's predictably emotional, defensive push-back reaction before responding.

CAPABLE: 3.0 to 4.00
You probably do a good job at listening to someone's initial emotional reactions, but do you tend to only paraphrase the content of the person's defensiveness and miss showing empathy for their emotions? Or do you reassert your *Straight Talk* message in a long-winded or more heated fashion? What people, situations, and emotional reactions trigger you? Do you discipline yourself to stay cool during difficult conversations, but sometimes later allow the stress get to you? Do you lapse into subtle retribution with people that aren't at their best during emotional interactions? Do you later withdraw or retaliate? Strive to rise above such pulling of rank or revenge, since Confucius said, "The mightiest warrior is the one that has conquered himself."

PROFICIENT: Above 4.00
You are solid in your communication, even under the stress of personal attacks and manipulative defenses, because you keep your head and usually avoid showing your inner stress. But you are only human. Perhaps you sometimes buckle under pressure if it's a powerful boss who is emotionally reactive with you, or if you are hit with volatile reactions in a group setting, where you are caught off guard. Perhaps certain kinds of defensive reactions tend to hook you more than others (e.g., people who cry, pull rank, or abusively blame you, etc.) Try to pre-plan your internal self -talk before these more stressful scenarios. What can you say to yourself in order to calmly *expect* such challenges, not get thrown off balance, and exhibit poise and grace even under pressure? We call this form of self-discipline "deactivating your own buttons."

37. I encourage my team to practice open, positive communication of ideas, suggestions, and feedback.
38. I coach and teach my direct reports how to communicate openly and handle difficult conversations.
39. I openly discuss my goals and action plans for improving my own communication habits with others.
40. I guide and lead my team to establish ground rules and norms for positive communication.
41. I regularly ask my team members during meetings to discuss how openly and constructively we are communicating.
42. I structure team meetings to invite open dialogue, constructive debate, and dissenting opinions.

BEFORE READING SCORE:

AFTER READING SCORE:

Recommendations

Explanation: This next level of mastery beyond using the skills involves becoming an exemplar of positive communication, so that you are an even greater asset to your organization. Building *Straight Talk* skills into the fabric of your organization includes being a model, setting and discussing your action plans for improvement, urging your team to establish positive communication norms, giving feedback or coaching others on the skills, and finding ways in team meetings to build group awareness of these "soft skills that lead to hard results." This makes you a steward of your company's human capital pool and communication climate. And you don't *have* to be a team leader officially in order to lead the team in this area, do you?

Epilogue of the book, *Straight Talk: Influence Skills for Collaboration and Commitment*

VULNERABLE: Below 3.0
It seems that whatever your own level of *Straight Talk* skills, you simply don't take initiative to cultivate the skills around you. This doesn't mean you are incompetent or that you don't care about the company. Maybe you don't see it as your place or role. But we invite you to consider that if you don't accept ownership for optimizing the organizational climate and culture, aren't you part of the problem? And doesn't standing on the sidelines make you a victim?

CAPABLE: 3.0 to 4.00
You make efforts to impact the communication climate of your company, but can improve. You likely are modeling the skills, but need to take it to another level. Which of the above items' change agent actions for improving the culture do you ignore? If nothing else, reflect upon the reasons -- is it because you don't have the time, you worry about overstepping your bounds, or you fear that the actions would put you in over your head? If you decide these are valid reasons to opt out of fuller, more proactive spreading of the positive communication, you are now at least more aware of the conscious choices you are making.

PROFICIENT: Above 4.00
You can be proud of all you are doing for the communication health of your company or agency. Any areas of improvement for you most likely involve inviting *other* leaders to join the effort, so that your constructive impact is even broader. Even if you are enhancing the entire enterprise by embracing all of the "stewardship" behaviors described above, perhaps you can now enroll others in this initiative. How might you teach or coach other leaders to also cultivate these skills? You can even how to "manage up" in order to influence powerful stakeholders to join your noble effort.