

*Straight Talk*  
Exercises Journal

**Straight  
Talk**

**Influence Skills  
for Collaboration  
and Commitment**

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## STRAIGHT TALK Exercises Journal

*Straight Talk: Influence Skills for Collaboration and Commitment* is a “workshop in a book,” like attending an actual skill-building course. Its goal is to be a rigorous, fun “workout,” with high-energy exercises to help you master communication best practices for increasing employee engagement, workplace satisfaction, accountability, continuous improvement, and sustained results.

This *Exercises Journal* contains each activity and skill practice that is featured in the corresponding *Straight Talk* textbook. Please fully “participate” in this “workshop-in-a-book” by printing out this document to complete the drills with a pen or pencil, or feel free to post this booklet onto your computer and type directly onto this fillable pdf file.

At the end of this *Exercises Journal*, you’ll also find Action Planning Sheets for each module and an orientation to the *Straight Talk Self-Assessment* at [www.BrandonPartners.com/StraightTalkBook](http://www.BrandonPartners.com/StraightTalkBook).

I sincerely thank you for reading *Straight Talk: Influence Skills for Collaboration and Commitment*, and for taking your personal and professional growth seriously enough to invest your time, energy, and expertise towards honing your interpersonal communication skills (and for buying the book!).

I wish you an enjoyable, productive reading experience jam-packed with plenty of hands-on practical learning experiences!

Warm regards, Rick Brandon



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## Module 2, Straight Talk Mindset, pg. 23

# Awareness of Your "Trash Talk"

**Directions:** Negative Self-Talk is any internal statement that triggers negative emotions, especially stronger reactions than you want to have. Identify your thinking patterns that lead to Fight feelings (e.g., resentment, anger, etc.) or Flight feelings (e.g., anxiety, insecurity, intimidation, etc.). Notice when you “awfulize,” predict catastrophe, beat yourself up, worry excessively, over-criticize yourself or others, jump to conclusions, or place demands on yourself with “shoulds” (“should-ing” all over yourself!).

***Jot down what you say to yourself when you slip into negative Self-Talk about...***

### Challenging Interpersonal Situations

Fight Self-Talk

Flight Self-Talk

### Other Challenging Work or Personal Stress

Fight Self-Talk

Flight Self-Talk

### Using Any of the *Straight Talk* Skills

*Fight* Self-Talk

*Flight* Self-Talk



## Module 2, The *Straight Talk* Mindset, pg. 53

# Identify Your Communication Patterns

### Directions

Jot notes about when you act from different stances on the *Straight Talk Continuum*. Ask yourself: “With what kinds of people do I tend to become more *Passive* or *Aggressive*? Does it depend on their personality, their role or function, their gender or other demographic trait, their position power, the situation (e.g., an appraisal or a negotiation), or other assumptions that I bring to the situation?” Finally, list times when you are more skillful by adopting an *Assertive* mindset and behaviors. Even here, you can list how you could be even more effective.

- What situations, types of people, or fears trigger you to be *Passive*?
  
- What less effective behaviors do you use when you are *Passive*?
  
- What is the negative impact when you are *Passive* — on teams, results, relationships, or yourself?
  
- What unconscious fears or inner “self-talk” may trigger your *Passive* behavior?



## Module 2: *Straight Talk* Mindset, pg. 3 Identify Your Communication Patterns

- What situations, types of people, or fears trigger you to be **Aggressive**?
  - What less effective behaviors do you use when you are **Aggressive**?
  - What is the negative impact if you're **Aggressive** on teams, results, relationships, or yourself?
  - What unconscious fears or inner “self-talk” may trigger your **Aggressive** behavior?
- 
- What situations, types of people, and positive, encouraging self-talk help you to be **Assertive**?
  - What positive behaviors do you use when you are **Assertive**?
  - What is the positive impact if you are **Assertive** — on teams, results, relationships, or yourself?
  - When you are **Assertive**, how might you still improve?



## Module 3: Assertive Speaking, pg. 49

# Appropriate Honesty

## When You Had “The Right Stuff” ... Or Not?

### Purpose

To hold yourself accountable about when you may not have used the appropriate honesty guidelines:

- Right time
- Right place
- Right reasons
- Right risk level (savvy about power)
- Right way (not passive or aggressive)

### Directions

When have you expressed yourself in ways that did NOT follow some of the guidelines you’re reading about for “The Right Stuff?” Be honest with yourself!

Not the right time:

Not the right place:

Not the right reasons (to gripe, to prove you were “right,” to show how smart you were, to hurt the other, to get even, to power-trip, to hear yourself talk):

Not the right risk level (ignored politics or power):

Not the right way (*Passive* or *Aggressive* versus *Assertive*):



## Module 3, Assertive Speaking, pg. 53-54

# Bias-Free Language "Quiz"

### Using the "Just the Facts" Test

#### Directions

Code each of the items below as either Factual (F) or Opinion-oriented (O). Then, for any that you code as "O," think about what alternative wording or examples would make the item factual, observable, and objective? Check the answers on pg. 55 of the *Straight Talk* textbook.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. "Tom, I really need you to be more of a team player."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. "During weekly meetings, I'd like you to share written file notes you have about customers we are transferring to our new sales reps, and to make a time to coach each one about each customer's style and buying habits."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. "You wore blue jeans to the client meeting today."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. "You were unprofessional in the client meeting today."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. "We sure need a lot of people to facilitate meetings better."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. "We need shift supervisors to end each meeting with a summary of decisions and action items with who's responsible."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. "You've obviously been really disengaged since vacation."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. "I've noticed since you got back this week, you've been late to each meeting and haven't spoken up except when I call on you. This isn't like you. What's up?"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. "Jordan really has to do things on a timely basis."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. "Elki threw two pink elephants off the Empire State Building." (Sorry, just had to make sure you were still with me!)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. "I'd appreciate Sydney's Friday finance reports being submitted by 11 am so that I can integrate everyone's numbers by 5 pm."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. "Damn it, Kareem!! All of your technology status reports to the ABC account totally miss the mark and show me that you don't give a crap about ever being client focused! Who do you think you are pretending to be committed to our company values of customer focus when you clearly aren't on board?!"



## Module 2, Assertive Speaking, pg. 61-62

# Unloading “Flaming Emails”

### Directions:

You are helping Edgy Ed, who is upset with “Rude Ron,” a colleague who co-led a public speaking workshop with him for a top management team. Ron arrived late to the program and didn’t help Ed set up the room or equipment. Ed shows the email to you, and you predict a disastrous outcome if he doesn’t rewrite it to be less inferential and loaded.

Ed knows that tough conversations are best conducted in person or by phone, but Rude Ron is known for insisting upon receiving a preview email so that he can digest the issues and prepare. Below, identify words and phrases Ed needs to edit and translate into more behavioral language. On the next page, correct the invitation email’s problematic language and rewrite it with Bias-Free Language. You’ll also plan your wording for the conversation..

The screenshot shows an email client window with the following details:

- Menu: File, Edit, Insert, Format, Survey, Tools, Help
- Toolbar: Send..., Load Document..., Send Test Email..., Preview..., Default Values...
- Font: Times New Roman, Size: 3
- Rich Text Tools: Bold, Italic, Underline, Bulleted List, Numbered List, Indent, Outdent
- From: Edgy Ed
- To: Rude Ron@abccorp.com
- Subject: Thanks for NOTHING!
- Body Text:

WELL, “FRIEND,” YOU DID IT THIS TIME!!!! I can’t believe how UNPROFESSIONAL YOU ARE!

First, you didn’t even bother to show up on time an hour before class to set up the room, saddling me with all the responsibility for setting up the equipment. When you finally DID grace us with your presence, you thought that mingling and getting in good with people as they filtered in was more important than helping me trouble-shoot the video cameras. So the equipment was CRAP!

Maybe if you’d shown a little bit of teamwork, we wouldn’t have had to apologize for not being able to videotape people’s presentations like we promised in the prework. I thought we were supposed to be equal partners, but nooo. You’re NOT my boss, so I don’t get where you get off acting like you’re above the grunt work.

Feel free to reply here, not that I think you’ll even bother. Anyway, “sorry” now doesn’t do much good, does it?!?!

Ed
- View Options: Plain Text, HTML View (selected), HTML Code



## **Module 2, Assertive Speaking, pg. 61-62**

# **Unloading “Flaming Emails” (cont.)**

**Directions:** You and Ed know that usually emails should not contain the full list of details relating the purpose for wanting to conduct a tough conversation, but Rude Ron won't meet before knowing the reasons for meeting. Therefore, based on your work on the previous page, rewrite Edgy Ed's polluted email for him below. Give enough detail for Ron to know your purpose for talking by phone or in person. Then jot notes for how you'll word Ed's reason for being upset that he will use in the actual conversation.

**Email Request to Meet to Discuss a Concern:**

**Notes for Describing the Problem in the Actual Conversation:**



## Module 3, Assertive Speaking, pg. 64

# Amping Up Voicemails

**Directions:** We've all regretted leaving a volatile voicemail that drained our time and energy as we de-escalated and salvaged the blowup. Laurence Peter counsels in *The Peter Principle*, "Speak when you are angry, and you'll give the best speech you'll ever regret." Other times, we are Borderline Passive or outright submissive. Again, it's best to work issues voice-to-voice, but if you do leave a quick voicemail with your reason for wanting to meet, be sure you're not self-discounting. Let's help Maurice strengthen his voicemail below.

### **Meek Maurice's Voice Mail (insecure tone, stammering speech, low and slow delivery):**

Um, uh . . . hi, Joe. Maurice here . . . Maurice from the task force? Anyway, I was just wondering if maybe it'd be OK to grab a few minutes sometime to chat about something that, you know, I was a little surprised happened. I mean, it can wait if you're too busy, I guess. But it's about the monthly meeting? I sort of wish it'd gone in a little bit different direction, you know? No offense, 'cause your input was right on and everyone said so. I just wondered if maybe you took a little too much time? I felt a little rushed and now I'm not sure how to meet my deadline of briefing everyone before the off-site. So maybe you'd be willing to coach me on ways to make up the lost time? I mean, if it's OK, I'd really appreciate it.

**Could Maurice be any less Assertive? Let's fix his voicemail by re-writing it below.**

**Imagine that he now will utilize a cordial yet firm, confident-sounding vocal tone and rate.**

## Drill #1: Paraphrase Emotionality or Complexity

**Juan says to your team:**

"Hey, guys, sorry I'm late. I have to get something off my chest. I'm so peeved!" *[Juan sighs with exasperation and shakes his head back and forth.]* "I feel undermined as a manager. Nguyen just dropped in unannounced to my customer contact team like a bull in a china shop. He started *[Juan gestures air quotes]* 'coaching' my reps on procedures. He totally contradicted the new complaint logging procedures I taught the team in last week's training that he skipped." *[Juan mutters an expletive.]* "He threw my guys way off track and now I have to unravel his mayhem! To make matters worse, he didn't even tell me that he was coming, much less ask permission! He's incredibly inconsiderate!"

Sort Juan's message content into a "thoughts bin" and his feelings into an "emotions bin." Then, funnel these bins into a succinct yet comprehensive, accurate, and empathic paraphrase of Juan's outpouring.

**Thoughts Bin**

**Emotions Bin**

**Your Paraphrase:**

**Now Edit Your Above Paraphrase After Perusing the Guidelines and Samples on pp. 93**

## Drill #2: Paraphrasing Feelings Enrichment

### Juan's follow-up statement after your 1st time paraphrasing:

“Yeah, you’re on target that I’m upset with Nguyen for sabotaging my credibility and for wasting my time by triggering confusion.” *[Juan slumps, looks at the floor, and murmurs.]* “You know, I’m also discouraged. I don’t understand why he doesn’t trust me to coach my own people. Maybe he has a problem with me as a newer manager.” *[Juan sighs as he slows down.]* “He’s probably skeptical that I can get the job done on my own. I guess I feel a little insecure myself with this new role, so no wonder he doubts me. Maybe I’m letting him down.”

Sort Juan's message content into a “thoughts bin” and his feelings into an “emotions bin.” Then, funnel these bins into a comprehensive, accurate, and empathic paraphrase of Juan’s outpouring.

**Thoughts Bin**

**Emotions Bin**

**Write Your Next Paraphrase of Juan’s Follow-Up Communication:**

**Now Revise Your Above Paraphrase After Perusing the Guidelines and Samples on pp. 96-97:**

## Module 5, *Listening Lab*, pp. 99-100

# Drill #3: Unpeel the Artichoke Leaves

**Directions:** For this drill, you'll paraphrase several times to uncover deeper layers of Donna's problem. You need to earn the right to hear the real issues versus the surface level "presenting problem." As you paraphrase, Donna will trust you more and more to reveal her true concern.

**Donna:** "I'm so fed up with so many useless meetings. Why do we need six people and two hours to make mundane decisions? We often don't even make decisions. It's a lot of talking and discussing, going round and round." *[Donna pauses to see if you understand, so paraphrase:]* **Your 1st Paraphrase:**

**Donna:** *[Donna validates your paraphrase and continues:]* "Right. I'm in constant meetings with our team, sales, marketing, supply chain, and external vendors. Something's got to give! I often don't start my regular work until 2 am, and don't finish until 7 pm, if I'm lucky. Why spend time planning the work if there's no time left to work the plan?" *[Donna hopes you'll check your understanding, so you do.]* **Your 2nd Paraphrase:**

**Donna:** *[Donna feels heard and unfolds more:]* "It's affecting my health. I think I'm getting an ulcer from all these meetings. And it's hurting my home life, never seeing my kids. Last night I got home, and my husband sarcastically said, 'Hi. We haven't met. My name is Mario.'" *[You and Donna are in rhythm. She pauses for your paraphrase.]* **Your 3rd Paraphrase:**

**Donna:** *[Donna seems calmer and trusts you enough to "get real:"]* "Look, it's not *all* the meetings. I'm overstating things because I'm stressed. Actually, some meetings are helpful. It's mainly *your* staff meetings that have been driving me crazy lately." *[WAIT! It's tempting, but don't ask the obvious question, "What's wrong with my meetings?"]* **Your 4th Paraphrase:**

**Donna:** *[Donna reveals the real issue:]* "Let me clarify. Staff meetings that *you* conduct are super. You facilitate well and we get things done. But our new client means you travel two weeks a month, so George runs our meetings. He doesn't send out the agenda like you do, and he totally dominates the meetings. Everyone's discouraged because he doesn't call on anyone. Maybe we could rotate who facilitates or get him some coaching." *[AHA! This is the real problem. Still, resist the urge to jump in with solutions. I know I'm pushing my luck, but paraphrase one last time. Then, you'd thank Donna and problem-solve.]* **Your Final Paraphrase:**

Module 5, *Listening Lab*, pp. 100-101

## Drill #4: Paraphrase Reactions to Your Agenda

**Directions:** This time, *your* speak piece begins the interaction. You're *G.A.I.N.-ing Commitment* with Grant to present to management. Your request triggers a contrary reaction. You decide to unpeel the artichoke leaves by paraphrasing in order to arrive at the real reason for resisting so you can address it.

**Grant:** "I'm really sorry, but I just can't squeeze in taking over the full presenting responsibilities. I'd love to help while you travel, but my schedule won't allow for all the extra prep." [*You resist pushing back and instead paraphrase:*] **Your 1st Paraphrase:**

**Grant:** [*Grant confirms your paraphrase and elaborates:*] "Right. I'm fine with fielding questions as the technical expert after you present, but taking on both roles with the meeting five days away doesn't give me enough planning time. But Ahmad from engineering can handle it." [*OK, he feels put out so you paraphrase.*] **Your 2nd Paraphrase:**

**Grant:** [*Good job. You've opened the door to hearing Grant's fuller picture:*] "Look, I'm a little embarrassed to bring this up, but stand-up presenting isn't my strong suit. I get flustered and nervous. I just think Ahmad or anyone else would make a better impression and have more prep time." [*Grant looks to you for your answer, but instead you paraphrase one more time in case there's a deeper layer (and there will be).*] **Your 3rd Paraphrase:**

**Grant:** [*Grant feels safe and reveals the real issue:*] "OK, this is incredibly confidential, but... the truth is, I have a serious presentation phobia. In my last job, I was presenting to the executive committee and had a full-blown panic attack. Sweating, heart palpitations, brain freeze—the whole nine yards. It trashed my reputation. I had to leave the company. Ever since then, I've avoided taking that risk. That's why I prefer sitting and facilitating more informally. [*Ah! Now it makes sense! No wonder. Good thing you listened instead of reacting. You use one last summary paraphrase to wrap things up before problem-solving.*] **Your Final Paraphrase:**

**[NOTE:** Now that you understand the real issue, you might brainstorm a number of next steps (e.g., Ahmad subbing, re-schedule the meeting, you present the data virtually and Grant conduct the Q&Q, practice with Grant, suggest a presentations coach, explore anxiety management counseling, etc.). *It's a very different conversation once you paraphrase to uncover the real block to his "yes."*]

## Drill #5: Don't Get Hooked!

**Directions:** You walk into your performance appraisal with your boss, Lina, and you're anticipating a positive review because you've achieved tremendous sales results from the team you manage for the third consecutive quarter. Let's stretch your paraphrasing and empathy muscle with this tough scenario.

**Lina:** "Well, I think it's clear that as far as your numbers go, you hit the ball out of the park again. with strong sales results and metrics for your team. As far as productivity goes, I have no issue." *[Lina's tone of voice and body language hint that there is a "but." You decide to paraphrase. You summarize the good news as well as the possible negatives she's telegraphing with your nonverbals.]* **Your 1st Paraphrase:**

**Lina:** *[You're Focusing your body skills and empathizing, so Lina continues:]* "Yeah, no kidding there's a downside. The problem is *how* you get your numbers. Your communication habits baffle me. I can't fathom how you can't get it about our core values of Respect and Team Focus. You need to treat your reports and colleagues more like you relate to your customers." *[Lina pauses to see how you're taking in this feedback.]* **Your 2nd Paraphrase:**

**Lina:** *[Great job of showing non-defensive listening. It's tough work as Lina unloads more:]* "Your interpersonal behavior abuses people. You alienate your team, berate them in public, and delegate new tasks without listening to reactions. And the way you set sales goals is way too autocratic and unilateral. You're forcing compliance but not fostering enthusiastic commitment." *[Here's your chance to show that you do know how to listen.]* **Your 3rd Paraphrase:**

**Lina:** *[You reach Lina's bottom line:]* "Look, I've already coached you on this. I may return you to just selling instead of supervising unless you can speak in less inflammatory ways and listen to your subordinates. *[Prove to Lina that you fully understand and are willing to hear the whole truth and nothing but the truth, which will earn her respect.]* **Your 4th Paraphrase of Lina's concern:**



## Module 6, Advising and Guiding, pg. 126

# Assess Your *Solving* Habits

**Directions:** Reflect upon your typical ways of giving input to employees, peers, bosses, clients or customers (internal or external, friends, kids, and others).

**Least Directive:** Express faith by asking what they want to do; use facilitative questioning to guide the person to their own solution; or ask the person what they'd advise a friend to do.

**Moderately Directive:** Brainstorm ideas and options and let the other person decide; provide information that points the person in the right direction; share criteria to consider with their next steps without giving a solution; refer the person to manuals, resources, or people; check for fit as you share your similar experiences and what you did.

**Most Directive:** Make a suggestion; give advice; teach how to handle the situation with detailed instructions; demonstrate how to execute particular steps; take responsibility to handle the problem yourself (yes, remember that now *you've* got the monkey!).

- 
- Which level of directiveness (Least, Moderate, Most) do you most often adopt?
  - Which input options *within* each cluster (Least, Moderate, Most) do you most utilize?
  - Do you vary your input depending upon the speaker's level of experience and commitment, and the problem's gravity, or do you usually approach most *Advising and Guiding* situations in the same way?
  - How can you develop greater range and versatility with your input?





## Module 7, G.A.I.N. Commitment, pg. 136

# “They’re Driving Me Crazy!”

**Directions:** Who makes you pull your hair out and why? Identify direct reports, peers, customers, business partners, cross-organizational team members, suppliers, and others who try your patience.

- People who aren’t doing things you need done:

- People who are doing things you need them to stop doing:

- People who are doing something you want done differently:



## Module 7, G.A.I.N. Commitment, pg. 141

# Action Plan: New Issues

**Directions:** List the topic of the conversation (What) and the person (Who).

### Getting buy-in for a new strategy, goal, policy, procedure, project action steps, etc.

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

### Delegating new tasks or assignments, etc.

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

### Clarifying changing roles and responsibilities, etc.

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

### Setting goals, objectives, quotas, or deadlines, etc.

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

### Establishing team norms for meetings or overall functioning, etc.

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

### Announcing organizational or operational changes.

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

### Making a request or asking a favor.

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_



## Module 7, Advising and Guiding, pg. 142

# Action Plan: Pre-Existing Issues

**Directions:** For each type of commitment to fix something, list the topic (What) and the person (Who).

**Someone is doing something you requested but in the wrong way.**

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

**You must correct something the person “should know” that you never discussed.**

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

**New constraints change how someone needs to do a task (e.g., budgeting, staffing, etc.).**

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

**New regulations mean that someone is technically breaking a standard.**

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

**The person is achieving results but how they achieved them is problematic.**

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

**Quality standards are being met, but you must clarify results that aren’t being reached.**

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

**You haven’t emphasized certain responsibilities of a job enough and they are lacking.**

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_ Who: \_\_\_\_\_



## Module 6, G.A.I.N. Commitment, pg. 148

# Your G.A.I.N. Examples

**Directions:** Pick two agreements it'd be helpful to forge. Draft *G.A.I.N. Commitment* notes. Can you anticipate possible Impediments so that you can check about them if the person doesn't raise them?

### CONVERSATION #1

Goals:

Advantages:

Impediments:

Next Steps:

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### CONVERSATION #2

Goals:

Advantages:

Impediments:

Next Steps:



**Module 6, G.A.I.N. Commitment, pp. 157**  
**Unpacking the G.A.I.N. Demo**

**Directions:** What in the scripted G.A.I.N. demo in the *Straight Talk* book did you especially like and/or find skillful? What did you not like, any mistakes or stylistic differences you have?

**STRENGTHS, SKILLS, AND “LIKES”**

**Steps of the Conversation (Goals, Advantages, Impediments, Next Steps):**

**Dialogue Cycle (Active Listening and Assertive Speaking):**

---

**DISLIKES, MISTAKES, IMPROVEMENT POSSIBILITIES**

**Steps of the Conversation (Goals, Advantages, Impediments, Next Steps):**

**Dialogue Cycle (Active Listening and Assertive Speaking):**



## Module 7, G.A.I.N. Commitment, pp. 160-161

# G.A.I.N. Mensa Society Test

**Directions:** Jot answers for the following questions about *G.A.I.N.-ing Commitment* virtually. Try not to peek at the answers in the *Straight Talk* book (pp. 161-166) before making notes below.

### PHONE CALLS AND VIDEO CONFERENCING

1. How can you use the G.A.I.N. skills over the phone or on a video call?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How is G.A.I.N. more challenging over the phone?

### EMAILS AND OTHER WRITTEN G.A.I.N.s (TEXTING AND MESSAGING)

1. When should you and when shouldn't you *G.A.I.N. Commitment* via email, text, or messaging?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What are the pros and cons of forging agreements, assigning tasks, announcing changes, or requesting assistance via email or written messages?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How can you avoid the cons?

### VIRTUAL MEETINGS WITH VIDEO

1. How should you adapt *G.A.I.N.-ing Commitments* in a group-based video call?



**Module 8, Recognizing, pg. 171**



## A Self-Strengths Bombardment Activity

**Directions:** We only recognize strengths in others to the extent we can see our own. First brainstorm your positive assets and then your negative drawbacks (a minute or two for each round).

**Round One: Strengths (One Minute): List your positive strengths, talents, and attributes.**

**Round Two: Weaknesses (One Minute): List your negative traits, deficits, and weaknesses.**



Module 8, Recognizing, pg. 178

## Write Some *Recognizing* Messages

**Directions:** Who in your life deserves a *Recognizing* Message? Remember the format and jot notes.

**POSITIVE BEHAVIOR** (“When you...”):

**POSITIVE FEELINGS** (“I feel/felt...”):

**POSITIVE IMPACT** (“Because the result is/was...”):

---

**POSITIVE BEHAVIOR** (“When you...”):

**POSITIVE FEELINGS** (“I feel/felt...”):

**POSITIVE IMPACT** (“Because the result is/was...”):

---

**POSITIVE BEHAVIOR** (“When you...”):

**POSITIVE FEELINGS** (“I feel/felt...”):

**POSITIVE IMPACT** (“Because the result is/was...”):



## Module 9, Reminding, pg. 188

# Your *Reminding* Message

**Directions:** Plan a *Reminding* Conversation. The first two steps you can anticipate. The rest unfolds.

**GOALS:** Reference the Gap (“What we’d discussed/you committed to...what’s happening is...”):

**ADVANTAGES:** Reemphasize the Commitment’s Benefits:

**IMPEDIMENTS:** Ask for Obstacles, Problem-Solve, and Support (and/or suggest some to work out):

**NEXT STEPS:** Discuss Next Steps and Close with Appreciation (this step will unfold in the discussion):



## Module 10, Confronting, pg. 201

# Your Confronting Message

**Directions:** Think of broken commitments or problem behaviors you need to confront. Prepare two messages and review each against the “Be Straight With Yourself” questions on page 202 of the book.

**NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR (“When you commit to... and don’t...”):**

**(Optional) NEGATIVE FEELINGS (“I feel/felt/get/got...”):**

**NEGATIVE IMPACT (“Because the result is/was...”):**

---

**NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR (“When you commit to... and don’t...”):**

**(Optional) NEGATIVE FEELINGS (“I feel/felt/get/got...”):**

**NEGATIVE IMPACT (“Because the result is/was...”):**



## Module 10, Confronting, pg. 205

# Scan Your World for Defensive Reactions

**Directions:** Peruse the below defensive reactions and answer the related self-reflection questions.

### FIGHT DEFENSES

Blaming Others  
Blaming You  
Turning the Tables, Confronting You  
Verbal Attacks and Insults  
Mocking You  
Sarcasm  
Yelling  
Stomping Out  
Pulling Rank, Threatening

### FLIGHT DEFENSES

Distracting, Changing the Topic  
Making Excuses  
Denying, Lying  
Playing “Poor Me” Victim  
Guilt Tripping  
Minimizing the Situation  
Silence  
Crying “Crocodile Tears”  
Trying to Postpone

- 
- Which ones have you encountered?
  
  - Which ones do *you* employ, even when you know you’re wrong?
  
  - Which emotional responses might “hook you,” causing you to lose your poise, professionalism, and *Straight Talk* skills?



**Module 11, Disagreeing Agreeably, pg. 234-235**

## Disagreeing Agreeably: Improvement Plans

**Directions:** Note key insights and changes you can benefit from making when *Disagreeing Agreeably*.

**KEY INSIGHTS:**

**POSSIBLE CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS:**

**WHAT ARE YOUR REACTIONS TO THE CONVERSATIONAL AIKIDO TECHNIQUE?**

- Listen Nonjudgmentally and Empathically
- Generously State the Merits of the Idea
- Surface Concerns Tactfully
- Give Your Conclusion

**Merits of the Technique**

**Concerns About the Technique**



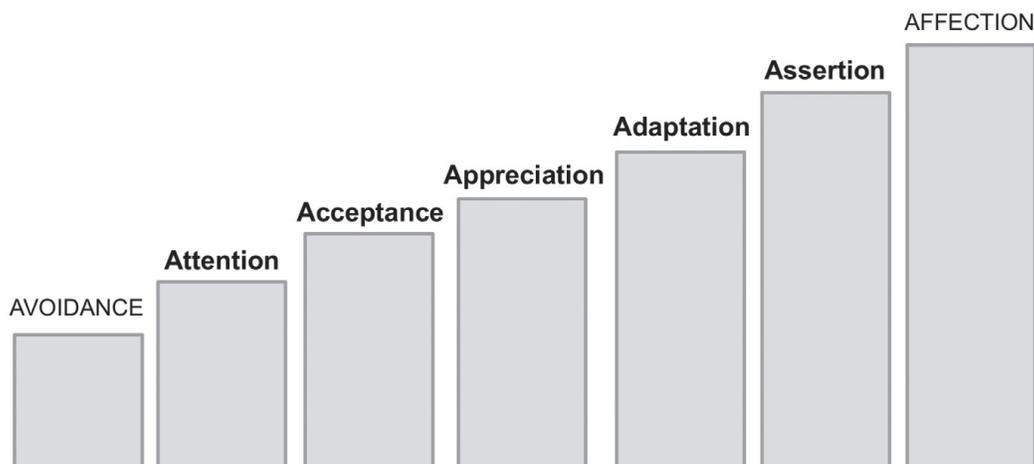
## Epilogue, Weaving the Skills Into Your Life, pp. 238-241

# Implementing the “A” Stairway

**Directions:** Think about the questions below about how you can apply "A" Stairway model in your life. Jot notes above the diagram.

- Have you ever had an experience of initially disliking someone, and later changing your feelings by deciding to make an effort (e.g., attending to them, through listening to accept them more, noticing their strengths and appreciating something about them, getting through a tough conversation and learning something about them, etc.)?
- Who in your world do you find it challenging to like, or you even dislike? Be honest with yourself... are you staying locked in Avoidance as a result?
- Think of people in your work or personal life and where you are with that person on the “A” Stairway. Which interpersonal needs other than Affection have you made an effort to extend to each person? Which steps are you willing to target with each person in order to develop the relationship?
- Make a conscious choice about implementing any of the steps on the “A” Stairway. How can you expand your interpersonal options with different people?

### Notes to Yourself





Module 2 Wrap-Up, pg. 37-38

## Action Planning: *Straight Talk* Mindset

### *STRAIGHT TALK MINDSET* (F.I.T.)

- Foster the Business Goals
  - Identify Your Communication Patterns (Assertive, Passive, Aggressive)
  - Take the *Straight Talk* Challenge
- 

#### **Key Insights:**

#### **Possible Ways to Change:**

---

#### **Resulting Action Plans:**

**GOAL:**

**ACTIONS:**

---

**GOAL:**

**ACTIONS:**



## Module 3 Wrap-Up, pg. 64

# Action Planning: Assertive Speaking

### ASSERTIVE SPEAKING SKILLS (A.B.C.)

- Assertive Delivery
- Behavioral Language
- Checking Reactions Key Learnings

---

#### Key Insights:

#### Possible Ways to Change:

---

#### Resulting Action Plans:

**GOAL:**

**ACTIONS:**

---

**GOAL:**

**ACTIONS:**



Modules 4-5 Wrap-Up, pg. 89 and pg. 108

## Action Planning Journal: Active Listening

### ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS (F.E.E.)

- Focusing: Your Mind, Your Environment, Your Body
  - Exploring: Acknowledgements, Open Questions, Encouragements
  - Empathizing: Validating and Paraphrasing
- 

**Key Insights:**

**Possible Ways to Change:**

---

**Resulting Action Plans:**

**GOAL:**

**ACTIONS:**

---

**GOAL:**

**ACTIONS:**



Modules 4-5 Wrap-Up, pg. 89 and pg. 108

# Action Planning Journal: Advising and Guiding

## ADVISING AND GUIDING

### UNDERSTANDING

- Questioning Cycle (Position Question-Ask Open Question-Paraphrase-Repeat)
- L.P.G.A. Agenda
  - Landscape
  - Problem
  - Goal
  - Actions Tried or Considered
- Avoiding Short-Circuit Responses

### SOLVING/SUPPORTING

- Checking Readiness
- Dialogue Cycle (Speak-Check-Paraphrase-Repeat)
- Decide Levels of Directiveness

---

### Key Insights:

### Possible Ways to Change:

---

### Resulting Action Plans:

**GOAL:**

**ACTIONS:**

---

**GOAL:**

**ACTIONS:**



## Module 7 Wrap-Up, pg. 133

# Action Planning: G.A.I.N.-ing Commitment

### G.A.I.N.-ing COMMITMENT

- Dialogue Cycle (Speak-Check-Paraphrase-Repeat)
  - G.A.I.N. Agenda
    - Goal
    - Advantages
    - Impediments
    - Next Steps
  - Inspect What You Expect
    - Recognizing
    - Reminding
- 

### Key Insights:

### Possible Ways to Change:

---

### Resulting Action Plans:

#### GOAL:

#### ACTIONS:

#### GOAL:

#### ACTIONS:



## Module 10 Wrap-Up, pg. 225

# Action Planning: Confronting

## CONFRONTING

- Confrontation Message (“When you... I feel...because...”)
  - Defuse with the Dialogue Cycle
    - State Your Confrontation Message
    - Stay Calm and Use *Focusing* Skills
    - Use *Active Listening* to De-Escalate the Defensive Reaction
    - Refocus Back to Your *Confronting* Message (Address or Set Aside the Defense)
  - Close with Accountability
- 

### Key Insights:

### Possible Ways to Change:

---

### Resulting Action Plans:

#### GOAL:

#### ACTIONS:

---

#### GOAL:

#### ACTIONS:



## Module 11 Wrap-Up, pg. 234

# Action Planning: Disagreeing Agreeably

## DISAGREEING AGREEABLY

- Dialogue Cycle (Speak-Check-Paraphrase-Repeat)
  - Conversation Agenda
    - Listen Nonjudgmentally and Empathically
    - State Merits of the Idea or Request
    - Surface Concerns Tactfully
    - Give Your Conclusion
- 

### Key Insights:

### Possible Ways to Change:

---

### Resulting Action Plans:

**GOAL:**

**ACTIONS:**

---

**GOAL:**

**ACTIONS:**



# Straight Talk Assessment

## Comparing Skills Before and After Reading

### Purpose

You can now take the *Straight Talk Skills Assessment* to rate yourself on the skills you learned by reading *Straight Talk*. This instrument will yield a personalized Scoring Report that compares your pre-course and post-course scores and provides robust and practical recommendations. To complete it, link to [www.BrandonPartners.com/StraightTalkBook](http://www.BrandonPartners.com/StraightTalkBook) where you will find the *Assessment*.

**What is the Straight Talk Skills Assessment?** This 15-minute *Skills Assessment* is a quick, web-based 42-item rating instrument that yields an *Overall Straight Talk Score* and seven *Skill Set Scores*:

- √ The *Straight Talk* Mindset
- √ Assertive Speaking
- √ Active Listening
- √ Advising and Guiding
- √ G.A.I.N.-ing Commitments, Recognizing, and Reminding
- √ Rough Conversations: Defusing Emotionality

The resulting self-scored *Scoring Report* provides a profile of your strong points and gaps, with detailed coaching and guidance. For each of the seven *Straight Talk* Skill Sets, you'll receive:

- √ A list of the six assessment items that comprise the Skill Set (42 items total)
- √ Your Skill Set numerical score and performance rating as Proficient, Capable, or Vulnerable
- √ A comparison of your perceived Skill Set performance before and then after the course
- √ An explanation of the Skill Set's purpose and impact
- √ An interpretation of your score for that Skill Set
- √ Specific pointers and recommendations for improvement

**Who Is It Aimed At?** *The Straight Talk Skills Assessment* is meant for executives, managers, professionals, or individual contributors who want to measure their skill level and better understand the components of positive communication in organizational settings.

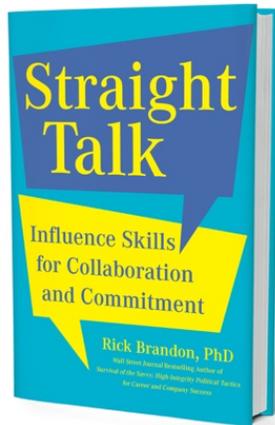
**What's the Take-Away Value?** You'll discover any blind spots you have in the arena of *Straight Talk* Skills. You will reinforce many aspects of the *Straight Talk* textbook simply by rating yourself on each Skill Set item. Finally, regardless of how well you currently function, the recommendations for improvement in the *Scoring Report* will kick-start your journey to even greater interpersonal savvy.

# BRANDON PARTNERS

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## Human Capital Development

Helping Business Leaders and Professionals  
Maximize Effectiveness Through Influence Skills

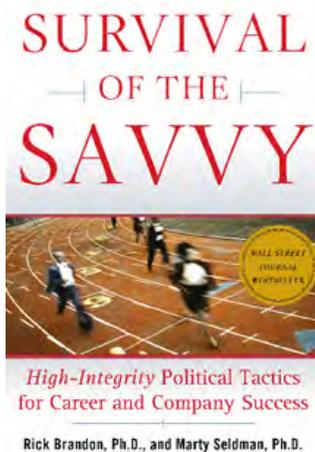


Brandon Partners is a global training firm that cultivates the mission-critical workplace competencies of Interpersonal Savvy and Organizational/Political Savvy.

We offer worldwide classroom delivery, webinars, trainer certification, online assessments, and two textbooks: *Straight Talk: Influence Skills for Collaboration and Commitment* (BenBella Books, 2022) and the Wall Street Journal bestseller, *Survival of the Savvy* (Simon & Schuster's Free Press, 2004).

**Interpersonal Savvy.** Our *Interpersonal Savvy* courses transcend “touchy-feely charm school” training. We convert soft skills into hard results — by honing world-class communication and self-management skills to maximize influence.

**Organizational Savvy.** Our *Organizational Savvy* courses teach skills for navigating company politics and power dynamics with integrity. Since few proven development programs exist that address organizational politics and ethical power, we made high-integrity politics and strategic influence part of our core business. Since 1998, Brandon Partners has been the preeminent thought leader on transforming organizational politics from a taboo topic to an ethical, intriguing and inspiring force for influence, impact, career development, and company success.



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