

# Straight Talk

Influence Skills  
for Collaboration  
and Commitment

**Rick Brandon, PhD**

*Wall Street Journal* Bestselling Author of  
*Survival of the Savvy: High-Integrity Political Tactics  
for Career and Company Success*

## *Straight Talk* Self-Assessment

A Learning Resource to Expand Your Skills  
Development After Reading *Straight Talk:  
Influence Skills for Collaboration and Commitment*

© 2021, Brandon Partners



## SKILL SET 2: ASSERTIVE SPEAKING

These items involve how well you express your viewpoint when getting agreements, giving feedback, voicing ideas, or reacting to others.

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent

- |     |  |        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----|--|--------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7.  | I take into account factors of timing, place, reasons, delivery, and risk level in deciding how direct to be with others.                          | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|     |  | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 8.  | When communicating my views, my body language and facial expressions look firm and confident without becoming threatening or intimidating.         | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|     |  | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 9.  | When asserting my opinions, my vocal tone, volume, and rate sound strong and convincing, while also inviting openness to dialogue about the issue. | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|     |  | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 10. | I clearly express my ideas through specific wording and examples to ensure others understand my perspective.                                       | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|     |  | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 11. | The content of my communication is non-judgmentally and objectively worded, to avoid triggering upset or resistance.                               | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|     |  | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 12. | When stating my views, I frequently check for the other person's understanding and agreement.  | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|     |  | After  |   |   |   |   |   |

## SKILL SET 3: ACTIVE LISTENING

These items involve how well you listen and show understanding of others' work needs, feelings, ideas, and reactions to what you say.

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent

- |     |  |        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----|--|--------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. | I set aside whatever else I'm doing to focus fully on others when they speak rather than multi-tasking.  | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|     |  | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 14. | During conversations, my body language and eye contact is attentive to others and their views.   | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|     |  | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 15. | I convey that I'm following what others are saying through acknowledgements (e.g. "I see... uh-huh," etc.) and open-ended questions.                       | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|     |  | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 16. | I paraphrase the others' statements in order to verify that I understand their viewpoints.   | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|     |  | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 17. | I demonstrate emotional empathy by stating my understanding of how others are feeling and by using facial reactions and tone of voice to match their mood. | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|     |  | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| 18. | When using listening skills, I try to make sure I've fully heard the person's viewpoint and that they are ready to hear my reaction.                       | Before | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|     |  | After  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## SKILL SET 4: ADVISING AND GUIDING

*These items relate to how well you help others explore and resolve problems, decisions, and dilemmas they bring to you.*

	1 Poor	2 Below Average	3 Average	4 Above Average	5 Excellent
<b>19.</b> When others approach me for advice, I avoid giving suggestions until I have fully explored and understood the issues.				1	2 3 4 5
				Before	
				After	
<b>20.</b> When questioning to explore a person's problem, I paraphrase the other's answers to be more conversational and to avoid sounding like an interrogation.				Before	
				After	
<b>21.</b> 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.				Before	
				After	
<b>22.</b> After exploring a problem, I summarize, check readiness to work on solutions, and ask how I can best be most helpful now.				Before	
				After	
<b>23.</b> If I give advice or other input, in order to avoid monologuing, I check the other's reactions to each of my ideas.				Before	
				After	
<b>24.</b> When giving input to a person, I adjust how directive and detailed I am, taking into account their experience level with with the problem, their motivation, and how invested I am in a specific solution.				Before	
				After	

## SKILL SET 5: G.A.I.N.-ing COMMITMENTS

*These items involve how well you forge clear, accountability-oriented agreements with others about needed results, actions, and requests.*

	1 Poor	2 Below Average	3 Average	4 Above Average	5 Excellent
<b>25.</b> When seeking a commitment, I clearly explain what I want, along with my reasons and the benefits of the agreement.				1	2 3 4 5
				Before	
				After	
<b>26.</b> When seeking buy-in, I achieve a dialogue versus a monologue by checking for and paraphrasing the reactions along the way before moving on.				Before	
				After	
<b>27.</b> When forging an agreement, I adopt an assertive, respectful, and firm tone rather than being either too pushy or too weak.				Before	
				After	
<b>28.</b> I inquire about any concerns, questions, or impediments to what I'm requesting, and problem-solve to reduce the concern.				Before	
				After	
<b>29.</b> 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.				Before	
				After	
<b>30.</b> I follow up on commitments by recognizing and appreciating agreements that are kept, and by reminding others if they forget follow through or do not act on what we discussed.				Before	
				After	

## SKILL SET 6: ROUGH CONVERSATIONS: DEFUSING EMOTIONALITY

These items relate to how well you conduct difficult conversations, in which emotions can become volatile and defensiveness can be triggered.

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent

- |   |        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|--------|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>31.</b> 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.                | Before | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|   | After  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <b>32.</b> If others get emotionally reactive during conflicts or confrontations, I mentally calm myself to remain poised and professional.   | Before | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|   | After  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <b>33.</b> I listen empathically and fully to a person's reactions to my message before reasserting my point, even if they get emotional.   | Before | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|   | After  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <b>34.</b> If a person's reactions to my feedback are aggressive, emotionally upset, or unreasonable, I still respond respectfully with objective, noninflammatory language.  | Before | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|   | After  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <b>35.</b> If a person derails a tough feedback discussion with defensive reactions or excuses, I refocus us back to the main point instead of getting sidetracked.   | Before | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|   | After  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <b>36.</b> 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 concerns. | Before | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|   | After  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## SKILL SET 7: CULTIVATING A STRAIGHT TALK ENVIRONMENT

These items relate to how well you strive to build a work climate of open, honest, respectful communication within the organization.

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent

- |   |        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|--------|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>37.</b> I encourage my team to practice open, positive communication of ideas, suggestions, and feedback.              | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|   | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>38.</b> I coach and teach my direct reports how to communicate openly and handle difficult conversations.              | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|   | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>39.</b> I openly discuss my goals and action plans for improving my own communication habits with othersd.             | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|   | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>40.</b> I guide and lead my team to establish ground rules and norms for positive communication.                       | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|   | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>41.</b> I regularly ask my team members during meetings to discuss how openly and constructively we are communicating. | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|   | After  |   |   |   |   |   |
| <b>42.</b> I structure team meetings to invite open dialogue, constructive debate, and dissenting opinions.               | Before |   |   |   |   |   |
|   | After  |   |   |   |   |   |