

# STRAIGHT TALK

Influence Skills for  
Collaboration and Commitment

## Meeting Toolbox



Structuring  
*Straight Talk*  
into Meetings



# Straight Talk Meeting Toolbox

## Purpose

To weave the skills and principles of *Straight Talk* into staff, team, and cross-organizational meetings. These pages will help you to cultivate *Straight Talk* skills on your team through simple tools and processes for structuring opportunities for speaking up meetings.

These meeting tools can increase safety by assigning the role of voicing dissent to different people, stressing the need for new ideas, improving open interaction, and finding creative techniques for stimulating idea input and healthy disagreement.

These meeting tools automatically weave open *Straight Talk* standards into a group's interaction.

## Directions

1. Read these pages and think about how you will incorporate these tips and tools into team meetings.
2. Use the *Planning Templates* as you read each section to plan your initial strategy for proceeding.
3. At the end of this resource, you can use the *Summary Straight Talk Meeting Template* as a comprehensive job aid, for individual meeting planning, or as a teaching tool to support other managers or reports in incorporating *Straight Talk* skills into their own team meetings.

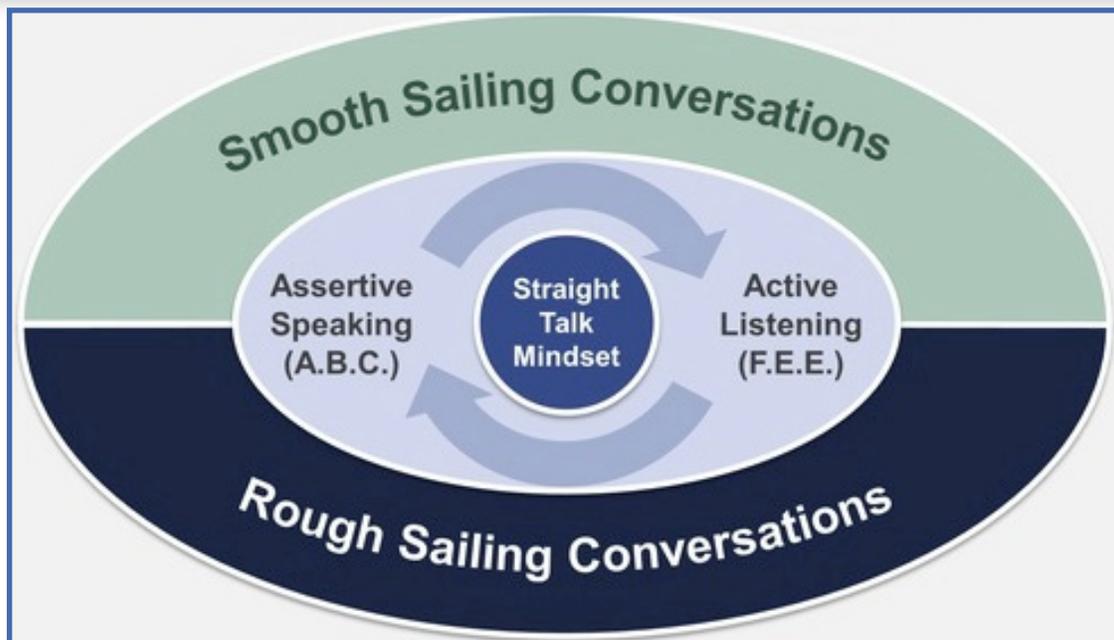
**“Talk doesn’t cook rice.”**

**– Chinese Proverb**



**“A promise is a cloud;  
fulfillment is rain.”**

**– Arabian Proverb**





# **Straight Talk Meeting Toolbox**

## **Model Commitment to *Straight Talk***

**Talk the talk.** “Enthus-IASM” sells! The last four letters of the word “enthusiasm” are “I-A-S-M,” which can stand for “I Am Sold Myself!” As a team leader or committed team member, you are a steward for the group’s resources and morale, and an advocate for its effectiveness. Prove your own commitment to accepting the *Straight Talk* Challenge by talking about the importance of assertive speaking, active listening, open and honest communication, speaking up, and forging a climate of safety.

**Walk the walk.** But actions speak louder than words. It’s vital to use the skills yourself, state your intent to do so, ask for feedback on your skills during one-on-one interactions and meetings, and non-defensively accept constructive criticism on your non-use of the skills. Paraphrase the input and state your goal to improve. This isn’t about perfection— it’s about striving for *Straight Talk* standards.

## **Set Group Norms for *Straight Talk***

Once you make clear your own goals and commitment about open and direct communication, ask the group to discuss and commit to similar standards for team communication and functioning.

**Share the *Straight Talk* definition from page 11 of the book and have the group endorse or revise it:** “Assertive Speaking to express our viewpoint directly and respectfully; Active Listening in ways that invite open expression from others, promote productivity, and cultivate positive workingrelationships; and using proven, step-by-step Conversation Formats for executing critical day-to-day discussions at work and home.”

**Use these discussion points to build ownership around team ground rules:**

- Refer to the definition for *Straight Talk* as part of your team’s vision and mission. Results matter, but so does how you achieve them.
- Show your team *Straight Talk* skills you’re honing and request buy-in to similar skills by each person.
- Make time to teach, coach, or tutor on the speaking and listening skills.
- Discuss which behaviors you all want as meeting ground rules, and get commitment. You may use the G.A.I.N. format to forge agreement.
- Discuss ways to adhere to the norms and how to manage situations when norms are broken.
- Somehow capture the team’s *Straight Talk* norms in writing and post them during meetings.

### **Planning Template: Steps to Lay the Groundwork**

Use this checklist to review your groundwork for embedding *Straight Talk* skills into your team’s meetings. Check action steps you’ve fulfilled and plan any steps you’ve missed.

#### **Model Commitment to *Straight Talk* Skills**

- Show “enthus-iasm” for *Straight Talk* skills as you discuss them.
- Talk about personal and team *Straight Talk* goals and action plans.
- Use the *Straight Talk* skills and ask for feedback.

#### **Set Group Norms for *Straight Talk* Skills**

- Agree on a team definition and targeted skills for *Straight Talk*.
- Agree on how to capture *Straight Talk* norms in writing.
- Agree on how to manage *Straight Talk* norms if they are not kept.





# Straight Talk Meeting Toolbox

## Debrief the Group's *Straight Talk* Skills

**WHAT does debriefing mean?** Debriefing about group *process* and *Straight Talk* skills differs from checking in about what the group thinks about the *content* and decisions covered. Debriefing team *process* entails discussing:

- individuals' reactions
- the group's energy and functioning
- the degree of participation
- what is going well or poorly regarding the level of safety
- honoring of the team's *Straight Talk* norms
- use of the *Straight Talk* skills (e.g., assertive versus passive or aggressive behavior, appropriate honesty, behavioral language, checking reactions after speaking, active listening, etc.).

**Choose WHEN to debrief.** As suggested for the timing of facilitator input or feedback, you can wait until the end of a meeting to debrief or debrief along the way with the *Stop Action* technique. The team leader, facilitator, or *anyone* can request the team to "hit the PAUSE button," so that the group can discuss pros and cons related to the team communication process.

**Decide HOW to debrief.** Debriefing involves open discussion input using discussion cues like these:

- Name a feeling word or phrase about the group's functioning.
- What is working well and not working well in our group process, participation, or communication?
- Rate the overall team (or each person) on *participation*, *active listening* (focusing, exploring, empathizing), *assertive speaking* (behavioral language, assertive versus passive or aggressive visuals, vocals, or verbal language), and *taking turns* versus dominating the air time, etc.
- Give positive and improvement feedback to individuals (either one by one, or by only spotlighting particular team members needing corrective feedback or deserving of positive recognition for stellar communication).
- Appoint a "Process Policeman" to give out "tickets" when *Straight Talk* norms are being broken, or to give out "civic awards" when positive skills are used. Urge the Process Police to have fun with this tactic.

### Planning Template: Debrief the Group's *Straight Talk* Skills

Plan how to use debriefing to improve the team's *Straight Talk* skills.

#### **WHEN Do You Want to Debrief?**

- During the meeting with the *Stop Action* technique.
- At the end of the meeting.

#### **WHAT Debriefing Discussion Cues Will You Use?**

- Name a feeling about reactions to group functioning.
- What is working well or not in the group's process, participation, or communication?
- Rate the team on active listening, assertive speaking, and taking turns.
- Give individual feedback about positive behaviors and skill strengths.
- Give individual feedback about needed improvement and growth areas on the skills.
- Appoint a "Process Policeman" to have fun giving out "tickets" or "civic awards."

# Summary Meeting Toolbox Template

## Planning Template: Steps to Lay the Groundwork

- Model Commitment to *Straight Talk* Skills.
- Set Group Norms for *Straight Talk* Skills.

## Planning Template: Use a Facilitator to Support *Straight Talk* Skills

### WHO is the Appropriate Facilitator for Your Meetings?

- An outside facilitator (e.g., HR, Training, another team, etc.).
- A group member skilled in *Straight Talk* and meeting facilitation.
- You (as long as you can be clear when you are facilitating vs. leading).

### WHEN Do You Want the Facilitator to Guide the Team?

- During the meeting with the interventions above.
- At the end of the meeting.

### HOW Should the Facilitator Intervene?

- Prompt All to Speak Up- How:
- Shape Skill Use- How:
- Give Feedback: To the Group  To Individuals

## Planning Template: Debrief the Group's *Straight Talk* Skills

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