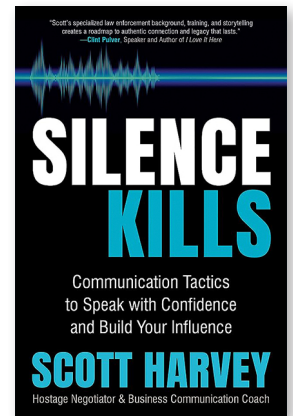


Silence Kills

Communication Tactics to Speak with Confidence and Build Your Influence

by **Scott Harvey**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Most of us get trapped in the illusion of silence when a problem knocks at our door. But does silence truly solve a problem that stares us right in the face? The answer is a massive “no.”

An insightful take on breaking the “silence bubble,” *Silence Kills: Communication Tactics to Speak with Confidence and Build Your Influence*, points out the most pressing problems that replace result-oriented communication with the threat of silence. The book lays out detailed solutions to combat each one of these problems by mastering the art of effective communication.

Former FBI-trained hostage negotiator and public information officer, Scott Harvey breaks down how communication is the most critical element for an organization’s (and an individual’s) success. He infuses the book with his own experiences from his hostage negotiation days to bring home the value of rapport, active listening, kindness, and clarity and drive positive outcomes from every conversation.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to know what to say.
- The skills needed to deliver your message clearly.
- How to lead your team with confidence.
- How to win the trust of your customers and clients.

Introduction

No organization is immune to crises. When a problem knocks at your door, you're forced to deal with it. You can either stay silent and watch the emergency unfold, hoping there are no casualties. Or you can communicate clearly to negotiate a positive outcome.

Silence Kills: Communication Tactics to Speak with Confidence and Build Your Influence is your training to not be afraid of saying the wrong thing, always knowing what you can say, the best tactics to deliver your message, to lead your team with confidence, and get your clients and customers to trust you.

The skills you learn here are the skills you will use every day. They'll not only make you better at work, but they'll also make you a better spouse, a better parent, and a better friend. That said, welcome to Training Day!

Phase 1: The Problem

Silence

We live in a world that is knee-deep in technology and it seems to be never silent. So, naturally, "silence" of any kind often seems like a threat. Why? Because of the difference between situational and dispositional attribution.

Situational attribution is when we infer that someone's actions are a result of their situation (external factors). Meaning, if your boss didn't respond to you in a timely manner, it could be because she's busy. Dispositional attribution is when we infer that someone's actions are a result of their disposition (internal factors). Meaning, if your boss didn't get back to you promptly, it's because she doesn't like you.

Without enough rapport built up, our brains interpret silence as a dispositional attribution. When there is no explanation for why someone important to us is silent, our brain naturally alerts us to an imagined threat. But in reality, silence is more often a situational attribution. This is where the need for rapport or communication comes in.

The Brain

As discussed before, silence without rapport feels like we don't care. This is why it's important to say SOMETHING during a crisis. Sure, you won't kill the story by not talking but you WILL lose control of it by keeping silent. The best way to go about the process would be to release a statement as soon as you can, and then get about fixing the problem.

When communicating a message, however, you have to do more than simply craft the words.

Evolutionarily speaking, our brains prefer to process communication in a face-to-face mode. Research says we only get 7% of the message from the actual words someone says. Our brains extract 38% of the message from the tone and the other 55% from nonverbal cues.

If we want to tell our story, we must make sure our message is heard. We have to acknowledge the importance of tone and nonverbal cues and understand how important it is to manage stress and fear.

Stress

Stress. Anxiety. Depression. We don't like to talk about these, and that's not okay. We can only heal what we are about to talk about. Open and honest discussions are often the only way we can improve things. We need to understand the hindrance that stress creates for people whom we are hoping to communicate with.

One of the key things I learned in hostage-negotiator training is about the teeter-totter in everyone's brain. In the teeter-totter of everyone's brains, emotion sits on one end, and logic/reason sits on the other.

When one side is low, the other side is high. Meaning, when emotion is high, the logic/reason side of our brain is low, and vice versa.

Don't allow someone's unbalanced teeter-totter to unbalance your own. At the same time, don't focus only on logic. The goal here is to bring the perfect balance of emotion and logic. Start by addressing their emotion and follow the conversation through with logic.

Fear

The more we try to tap-dance around some perceived hot-button issue, the more awkward we make things. The more awkward something becomes, the more offensive it ends up being. So, in an effort to not offend anyone (or stay silent), we end up being more offensive because we draw all the attention to things we're not trying to say!

Fear keeps us silent. But there is nothing to be afraid of except inaction. Staying silent won't solve a problem, taking action will. Even if this action seems difficult. Recognize the fear. Label it. And then take appropriate action even though you're afraid.

Phase 2: The Solution

Rapport

Phase one was all about identifying the problems: silence is deadly, and fear and stress stand in the way of showing up. Phase two is all about identifying the solution. So, what breaks the silence and helps us speak up in spite of our fear? The answer lies in one little word, “communication.” The only way to capture and keep someone’s attention and have your message heard is with these three skills:

- Building genuine rapport
- Listening like it’s your superpower
- Choosing your words wisely.

We do business at the speed of rapport. People do business with organizations they know, like, and trust. Don’t just build a rapport for the sake of making a sale. Eventually, you’ll come off as manipulative. Instead, understand your people – this could be your customers, team members, or clients. Know their fears and goals. Understand their motivations. Speak their language. Most importantly, demonstrate words and actions that you want them to succeed. Manipulating your way to long-term success never truly works. But when you help people get what’s best for them, rapport becomes a natural byproduct.

Another way to build rapport is with consistency over time. The people you lead at work will learn to trust you or hide from you by the little ways you show up every day. For instance, when your team member walks in frazzled and late, kindly ask them what held them up instead of directly reprimanding them. Build rapport by showing up and being present and listening as much as you can.

Listening

The world today is so noisy that listening almost seems like a superpower! Perform “Active Listening” to be more actively involved in listening to someone. People will only reveal their feelings if they know you’re listening.

- Maintain eye contact. Remember, you’re not listening if you’re not looking. Our ears face forward for a reason, after all.
- Offer minimal encouragers. This involves smiling, nodding, saying things like “I see,” “Okay,” and so on. The more minimal encouragers you use, the more a person is going to feel heard, connect with you, and talk.

- Paraphrase. By simply repeating back to someone what they have said, or what you heard them say, you move into an advanced level of active listening. Paraphrasing shows you are paying attention and enables you to build trust.
- Help them With Emotional Labeling. When you help someone label their emotions, you help them move from the primitive part of their brain to the rational part – from reacting for survival to thinking and responding. When people label their feelings, they balance their teeter-totter.
- Ask open-ended questions. This helps you avoid the one-word-answer trap. For instance, a question like “How was your day?” could be followed by a one-word answer, “Good.” But a question like “What surprising thing happened today?” would require more thought. Asking open-ended questions is key to truly helping our clients, colleagues, and even stubborn teenagers!
- Disclosing similar experiences. The reason this is last on the list is that nobody cares about your experiences until they feel like you care about them. The goal here is to not move to the solution too early.

Remember, amidst all the listening, you will occasionally be expected to respond. So, when you do, make every effort to balance clarity and kindness.

Kindness & Clarity

I believe in the absolute POWER of our words. When you run your organization with clear communication that comes from your heart, you will prevent many disasters, and your team members will love coming to work. Words not only hurt, but they have the power to shape what we believe about ourselves. Once we believe those words, we will often become those words.

What story are we telling our team members? What story are we inviting our customers to? What do they believe to be true about us? What do they believe to be true about themselves when they interact with us? We should be using our words to invite people into an identity that will make them, and this world, better!

Clarity wins every time, in every conversation. If I was planning on killing myself, your asking directly about that greatly reduces the chance that I will actually do it! When the time comes to have a difficult conversation, being unclear is synonymous with being unkind. If you’re speaking with a team member, customer, or client, make sure you’re

100% clear. If you cannot meet a deadline, let them as soon as you can. Clarity is the kindest way to do business.

Phase 3: The Tactics

Face-to-Face

Phase 3 is all about unpacking some of the more popular ways that people are communicating, and some of the pros and cons of each method.

Face-to-Face is often the best way to have an important conversation with someone. Successful peoples go by the same philosophy because they know the key to clarity is not just what you say, but how you say it. Here, people feel seen and heard when they connect with people. What's more, it's the only way to build rapport through shared experiences.

Sure, virtual meetings are popular. They may even be the next best thing to being face-to-face. They're way better than not interacting with people at all. But those who have experienced the power of face-to-face conversations know that nothing can replace the power of being in the same room with people or comprehending the tone and nonverbal cues that are so valuable for conversations.

However, in scenarios where you cannot be present, at least use video to be virtual and make an effort to hear the sounds of Voice and Tone.

Phone

If you cannot get face-to-face (in person or virtually), a phone call is your best bet. When you are on the phone, others will at least pick up the cues in your tone.

One of the ways that our brain identifies emotions is through tone. When tone is added to the message, our brains begin to pick up on how someone is feeling about what they are talking about. When we catch the emotions behind the words, we begin to build rapport. Tone often communicates sincerity. Sincerity builds trust. Trust increases business.

As a hostage negotiator, I have literally been able to save lives based on phone conversations. The phone can be POWERFUL if you choose the right tactic at the right time.

Print

Putting words in print must be treated with respect – and that means we must use print thoughtfully and intentionally. We must not forget how the words we type are open to

interpretation, can build up or tear down, and become a permanent record.

When we put something only in print, we risk leaving 93% up to interpretation. In other words, it's important to be cautious about communicating only in print with people you don't yet have a relationship with. Every piece of writing you send to someone is always permanently saved and can even be used against you. So, when you do decide to use it for communication, here are three specific ways to go about it:

- Use it to schedule and re-cap. Whether it's scheduling an event or re-capping a phone call, print is a great way to remember and clarify details.
- Use it to reach a wider audience. This could be for all-staff emails, website content, press releases, newsletters, and more.
- Keep a written record. Records can serve organizations internally and help build individual rapport.

Social Media

Social media is great for market research, brand building, reaching potential customers, or anything you want to communicate with your audience. However, not understanding social media today can cause more problems than achieving a goal. Let's bust some myths to strategically build your business on the social media frontier.

Myth 1: Personal = Private

Truth 1: Things said on social media, during our personal time, can spill over into our work time.

Myth 2: Social media = Free online store

Truth 2: Social media is a rapport-building machine where people come not to buy a product but to engage with a community.

Myth 3: Everyone understands social media

Truth 3: Set the expectations by crafting social media policies for what your team members can and cannot post about your company.

Other Media

Traditional media has been telling stories for hundreds of years. Newspapers, radio, and television are always looking for stories. Celebrations, new products, events, and local impact stories are a few of the stories these forms of media would be interested in.

Other ways to communicate include podcasting and writing a book. Over 144 million people listen to podcasts in the U.S. alone, making podcasts a strong medium of communication. Writing a book, on the other hand, benefits both the readers and the writer by learning and sharing valuable content.

Conclusion: The Debrief

Becoming a better communicator isn't just for work. Improved communication makes you a better spouse, a better parent, a better friend, and a better coworker. So, when a problem knocks at your or your organization's door, what would help solve the problem, silence or communication? Silence may make you feel safe but it won't keep you from drowning. Build the boat of communication to let your message reach the shore and even save the day!



Scott Harvey spent 20 years as an FBI-Trained Hostage Negotiator and Public Information Officer for a police force in Central Kentucky. Since 2010, he has spoken to hundreds of thousands of people who want to communicate more effectively. Harvey seeks to help people break the silence and communicate their way through any crisis. He currently resides outside of Lexington, KY.

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