



How to Say Anything to Anyone

A Guide to Building Business Relationships That Really Work

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

We all know how it feels when our colleagues talk about us but not to us. It's frustrating, and it creates tension. When candor is missing in the workplace, employees feel like they're working in the dark. Leaders don't know what employees really think; managers are frustrated when outcomes are not what they expect; and employees often don't know where they stand performance-wise.

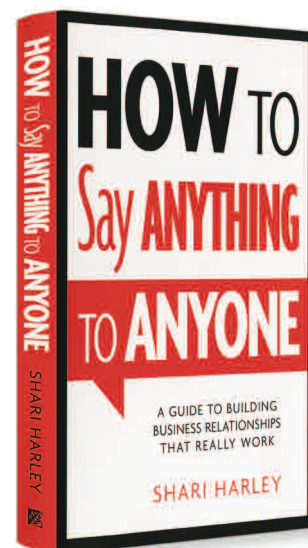
Many of us remain passive against broken, indirect communication habits, hoping that things will miraculously improve — but they won't.

In *How to Say Anything to Anyone*, Shari Harley shares the real-life stories of people who have struggled to get what they want at work. With her clear and specific road map, she enables you to create the career and business relationships you really want — and keep them.

Harley urges you to take charge of your career by taking charge of your business relationships. Make your work environment less tense and more productive by practicing direct communication. Set relationship expectations, work with people how they like to be worked with, and give and receive regular feedback.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to ask for what you want at work.
- How to improve all types of working relationships.
- How to reduce the gossip and drama in your office.
- How to tell people when you're frustrated, in a way that resonates.
- How to take action on your ideas and feelings.
- How to get honest feedback on your performance.



by Shari Harley

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: HOW TO SAY ANYTHING TO ANYONE

by Shari Harley

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The Case for Candor

Most of us have no idea how we come across to others or what our employers and colleagues think of our services. We don't know what people think, because, for the most part, they don't tell us. Instead, they tell other people behind our backs. This is why we need to encourage people to be candid with us, even when it hurts to hear their feedback. Otherwise, we'll operate under false assumptions and make unnecessary, career-killing mistakes.

Candor is not bad news, and a candid organizational culture is not necessarily about saying hard things. Instead, candor is asking more questions at the onset of relationships. Candor is stating expectations rather than expecting employees and vendors to read your mind. Candor is making a commitment to talk about things as they happen, not six months after the fact. In candid cultures, coworkers, employers and employees say what they need to say quickly and easily. They have created relationships in which all parties can speak openly without concern.

When you know what people think and say about you, you have choices. When you understand the impact of your behavior and consciously choose your outcomes, you are in charge of your career and your life. ●

How to Establish Candid Relationships

Despite the abundance of training programs on giving and receiving feedback, speaking up in organizations

remains difficult, and many people don't do it. We tend to think it's too difficult to confront people. We don't want to deal with the conflict, so we say nothing.

Be smarter. Rather than waiting for something to go wrong, set clear expectations at the beginning of working relationships and projects. Tell your coworkers you want to have good relationships with them. Make an agreement that when challenges arise, it's not only OK but also expected to discuss what's going on. Agreeing to talk about difficult situations before they happen makes it more likely that when breakdowns occur, you'll be able to speak up with less anxiety. ●

You Get What You Ask For

The Consequences of Insufficient Expectations

Lisa, an internal HR recruiter, is conducting a search for Carol, a hiring manager. Lisa doesn't get enough information from Carol when the job is posted. As a result, Lisa sources candidates who aren't appropriate for the position. Carol rejects every candidate she meets and finally decides that Lisa is incompetent. Lisa decides that Carol is difficult to work with and asks to support a different department. The two never speak to each other about their frustrations.

Does this scenario sound crazy? Of course! Yet it happens all the time.

If, at the onset of the search, Lisa and Carol had asked more questions about what was important to each person, had agreed to periodically talk about how the search was progressing and had given feedback when things weren't going well, their mutual dissatisfaction and the unfortunate outcome might have been avoided.



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Setting Expectations

Follow the steps below to successfully set expectations with clients, coworkers or your boss during a one-on-one conversation or at a project kickoff meeting:

Step One: State your goal.

“We want a great relationship. We want our work together to be easy and smooth.”

Step Two: Set expectations.

“Let’s have a conversation and agree on roles and responsibilities so everyone is clear about who will do what.”

Step Three: Agree on how you will work together.

“Let’s talk about how we will address challenges. Things will happen that we don’t anticipate. We’d like to be able to talk about any challenge that arises — as it occurs — and not have anyone take anything personally.”

Step Four: Ask for feedback.

“Anyone can say anything at any time. We all want the project to go well, and we need to know on a regular basis how you feel things are going. Knowing what’s working and not working will allow us to make improvements. We should all periodically check in and ask for feedback.”

Step Five: Ask for permission to give feedback.

“If we have concerns at any point during the project, we’d like to be able to speak up and have you trust that we are speaking from our commitment to your business and the project and from our desire for this process to go smoothly.”

Step Six: Agree on roles.

“Let’s also discuss who will be having those conversations. Should particular leaders have the discussions, or is it OK for anyone on the project to give feedback at any time? Either way is fine. We just want to be clear so people know what to do and what to expect.”

Step Seven: Agree on the communication process.

“Let’s agree on what way, specifically, and how frequently we’ll check in to assess progress and evaluate how our working relationship is going.” ●

Taking the Mystery Out of Working With Others

When beginning to work with a new set of people, avoid unforeseen missteps and shorten the inherent learning curve by asking about their work habits and preferences.

After I tell people I want a good and candid relationship in which both of us can speak freely, I ask

permission to ask a few questions. Then I get specific as I inquire about their working-style preferences.

Asking Your Coworkers About Their Working-Style Preferences

Below are questions that you can ask coworkers, fellow team members and direct supervisors to get a clear sense of their working styles.

1. How do you best like to communicate? Via email, voicemail, text message, instant messenger or telephone or in person?
2. Are you a morning, afternoon or night person?
3. If we need to talk, do you prefer to work by appointment or would you prefer I drop by your office or give you a call?
4. If I need to reach you outside of regular business hours, what method is best? What time is too early and what time is too late to call?
5. How do you feel about being called on your cellphone?
6. What are your pet peeves? What types of things annoy you at work?
7. How will I know when you’re frustrated?
8. If I need something quickly, how do you prefer to be interrupted?
9. If I have something to give you when you’re not in your office, where would you prefer I leave it? On your desk or chair or in your inbox or with your assistant?

There is one hard-and-fast rule here: You cannot introduce these questions via email.

Taking the time to ask about another person’s working-style preferences is a rapport builder. Emailing a list of questions is not. ●

How to Create Candid Managerial Relationships

If an employee quits and his manager is surprised, the manager doesn’t know his employee as well as he thinks he does.

Every manager should be able to answer the following two questions about each of his or her employees. If you can’t, I’ll go out on a limb and assert that you’re not as good a manager as you could be. You’re at risk of losing employees and never knowing why.

1. What are three things that will keep you with the organization?

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2. What's the one thing that would make you leave the organization?

Your employees are keenly aware of your authority. Even those with whom you have good relationships know you're the boss, and there are some things direct reports just don't say to the boss. Because they fear the consequences, employees often don't state their greatest needs, even when not getting those needs met will drive them out of the organization.

As managers, we sometimes assume that others want what we want. Not the case. People need different things to be happy. If we don't ask them, we'll never know what those things are. ●

Managing Up With Candor

Your boss is, of course, responsible for managing you. But savvy employees know that they also manage their bosses. When we don't manage upward, our careers stagnate.

Ask for Feedback Along the Way

Everyone has a preference regarding communication of information — how much, in what format and how often. Even people who say they don't care usually have a preference. Some managers want to know exactly what you're working on at all times. Others are happy to receive periodic updates on just the big initiatives.

Why guess what your boss is expecting, when it's such an easy question to ask? Consider asking:

- Did my last update contain enough detail, or would you have liked more information?
- What can I change about how I put the data together to make it easier to review?

Your Job Is to Make Your Boss Look Good

The higher someone gets in management, the more his performance is evaluated based on his team's performance. This is why smart managers surround themselves with the best people. Thus, regardless of what you think of your boss, your job is to make him or her look good. And the more clearly you understand how your boss is being measured, the better position you are in to achieve your own goals.

Knowing where your boss sees your department going helps ensure that your actions are aligned with his vision and focused on what's most important. What you think is important may not be what your manager thinks is important. Work on agreed-upon priorities. ●

Strengthening Internal Business Relationships

The next step is to learn more about what the people and departments you work with do on a daily basis, the challenges they face, and how your work impacts theirs.

Departments Don't Talk to Each Other

In my experience, most people in organizations know very little beyond the basics about what other departments do. We often don't know what types of challenges and constraints other departments deal with. And even less often do we know why other departments require certain forms, timelines and processes. Asking these questions helps people get their jobs done and eliminates much of the strife, redundant work and frustration that is prevalent in most workplaces.

Every department has its own way of doing things. There is a reason why payroll needs to be reported by three o'clock, why you must supply accounts payable with a \$2 receipt for a cup of coffee when the federal government doesn't require it, and why you have to go through purchasing for some purchases but not others. For the most part, there is a good reason — at least in someone's opinion — for those practices.

Unfortunately, there is often little communication about these policies and procedures. We just expect people to know why we do what we do and to follow our rules. When other departments don't play along, we become annoyed, grumbling about how difficult they are to work with and how they make our lives hard.

In the absence of knowledge, people fill in the gaps. And it's never good. Give more information than you think you need to give.

For the most part, people will do what you ask, but they want to know why you're asking. They need to understand the rationale behind what they're being asked to do. Once they understand, they often stop complaining and follow the rules. ●

Relationships Require Maintenance

Starting a relationship by asking what people expect from you but never checking in to ask how things are going is like taking someone's order in a restaurant but never checking back to see how he is enjoying his meal. If the food isn't quite right, the customer is forced to track down his server to make a request. But most people are not likely to do that. They are more likely to

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leave a lousy tip and tell everyone they know how bad the service was. Your coworkers are no different. They're more likely to work around you than tell you they're dissatisfied.

The priorities of a business tend to change. What was important during the first quarter may not be a priority in the second. If you don't periodically check in and find out what's changed in your coworkers' departments, you could be dedicating time and resources in the wrong places and never know it.

You Can Be Fired and Never Know It

The VP of marketing at a firm I used to work for got a call from a friend who had seen the VP's job posted on a job board. The friend said, "Hey buddy, I just wanted to see if you were still there. Your job is posted on Monster, so I figured you'd moved on."

That's what I call feedback. It isn't specific or particularly helpful, but it is feedback.

In this case, the company determined that the VP of marketing wasn't working out and decided to replace him. To reduce the amount of time the job would be vacant and to keep the current VP engaged, the company began searching for his replacement before telling him that he wasn't meeting expectations.

This is wrong, but it happens all the time.

If you want to control your career, you must identify your blind spots and know your reputation. The only way to find out is to ask.

Consider conducting what I call a Relationship Inventory — a method of touching base with the people you work with to see what's changed in their business since you last talked. It's also an opportunity to ask for feedback.

You can schedule a meeting to ask for an update and get feedback, or you can use an already scheduled meeting. It doesn't matter how you get the information; it just matters that you ask for it and respond appropriately. Just ask a few questions. You want to have a conversation, not conduct an interrogation. ●

Can I Trust You?

You can tell your colleagues, your boss and your direct reports that you want good working relationships with them. You can ask for feedback and promise to say thank you. And you can ask about their working-style preferences. But none of this will make a difference if the people you work with don't trust you.

Relationship Inventory Questions

1. What's happening in your department that you want me to know about?
2. What's changed in your business since we last met?
3. What's working about how our departments are working together?
4. What's one change we could make that would make the biggest difference for you?
5. What's it like to work with the people who report to me?

You have to demonstrate that you meant what you said and that you really are the person you say you are.

We've all received feedback or input that we've questioned or invalidated because of our relationship, or lack thereof, with its source. If you want others to hear your suggestions and take them as you intend them, you must have trust-based relationships. If you don't, every word you say will be questioned and tested.

As relationships develop, it's important not to kill them by damaging trust. Building trust takes time. Breaking trust can happen in a moment. Do your best to avoid the behaviors that are classic trust and relationship killers.

Relationship Killer Number One: Gossip

People have a tendency to talk about us, not to us. If you haven't been gossiped about, you just need to get out and meet more people.

If you have something to say, say it directly to the person involved. If you're not going to speak to the person directly, say nothing at all. As we all know, this is easier said than done.

Gossip will destroy relationships, organizational cultures and careers faster than anything else. And we are all tempted to gossip.

Relationship Killer Number Two: Breaking Your Word

Do the things you say you will do. Here's a goal to aspire to: Make only commitments you intend to keep. We all know this isn't possible, so do the next best thing. As soon as you realize you can't or won't keep a commitment, tell the people who are affected. Don't wait.

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Relationship Killer Number Three: Not Telling the Truth

We all do things we wish we hadn't done. We miss deadlines, make mistakes and disappoint people. Adults are not very different from kids when it comes to confessing to failings. We've all said, "It wasn't me" or "I didn't do it" way beyond the age of 9. We don't want to disappoint the people we work with.

Relationship Killer Number Four: Withholding Information

When people don't know what is happening or why, they make things up. It stems from a human need to know and understand what's happening in our surroundings. However, made-up information that starts quite innocently can quickly spread throughout an organization, destroying the culture leaders are working to create.

A little candor in the form of an organizational announcement can mitigate the gossip and rumor mill. And the organization's leaders can build good will for being candid and trusting that employees can handle sensitive information. The more you trust people, the more they will trust you. ●

Giving and Receiving Feedback — What, When, Why and How

Landmarks in driving directions serve as feedback, letting us know we're on the right track and are progressing toward our desired destination. Just as we need to know whether we're driving in the right direction, we need to hear both what's going well and what's not going well regarding our performance at work.

Knowing When to Shut Up

Before we talk about how to give feedback, let's talk about what feedback is and what it isn't. There are two purposes for providing feedback: to either change behavior or maintain it. There are no other reasons.

Give feedback when:

- The person asked for your opinion.
- You asked for and were given permission to give input, and you have a specific example to share.
- The incident happened recently, preferably within a week.
- You are trying to help the person improve his or her performance or want to be sure he or she keeps doing something that is working.

Don't give feedback when:

- You're annoyed and it's a chance to express your frustration.
- You don't like this person and this seems like a perfect time to tell him or her.
- He or she hasn't asked for feedback but needs it.
- You don't have permission.
- It's a chance to blast someone in front of others.

If You Can't Give an Example, You're Not Ready to Give Feedback

If you want to be sure people get really defensive, give vague feedback. Any time feedback can be interpreted in more than one way, it's too vague.

Arrogant means different things to different people and can be demonstrated in many ways. Telling Mark he is arrogant is unhelpful, but telling him specific behaviors and actions that made him appear arrogant is quite helpful. Without knowing the specific behaviors that created that unfavorable impression, Mark is left with guesswork, which creates paranoia and defensiveness. ●

The Feedback Formula

Below are eight steps that will enable you to say anything — no matter how difficult — in two minutes or less. Conversations following these eight steps enable recipients to remember the situation; see the impact of their actions; speak on their own behalf; and create, hopefully with your input, a plan for the future.

1. **Introduce the conversation** so feedback recipients know what to expect.
2. **Empathize** so both the feedback provider and the recipient feel as comfortable as possible.
3. **Describe the observed behavior** so the recipient can picture a specific, recent example of what you're referring to. The more specific you are, the less defensive he will be and the more likely he'll be to hear you and take corrective action.
4. **Sharing the impact or result** describes the consequences of the behavior. It's what happened as a result of the person's actions.
5. **Having some dialogue** gives both people a chance to speak and ensures that the conversation is not one-sided. Good feedback conversations are dialogues during which the recipient can ask questions, share his point of view and explore next steps.
6. **Make a suggestion or request** so the recipient has another way to approach the situation or task in the future. Give people the benefit of the doubt. If people

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knew a better way to do something, they would do it another way.

7. Building an agreement on next steps ensures there is a plan for what the person will do going forward. Too many feedback conversations do not result in behavior change. Agreeing on next steps creates accountability.

8. Say “Thank you” to create closure and to express appreciation for the recipient’s willingness to have a difficult conversation.

If you’re giving more than one piece of feedback during a conversation, address each issue individually. For example, if you need to tell someone that he or she needs to arrive on time and also check his or her work for errors, first go through the eight steps in the formula to address lateness. When you’ve discussed an agreement of next steps about being on time, go back to step one and address the errors. But talk about one issue at a time so the person clearly understands what he or she is supposed to do.

Remove the Emotion and Deal With the Facts; How You Feel Makes No Difference

The eight-step Feedback Formula is short, simple and straightforward. But something is deliberately missing. The Formula focuses on the facts — not on how you feel about the person or situation. Too often feedback conversations contain the following phrases: “I’m so disappointed in you” or “I can’t believe we’re having this conversation again.” How you as the feedback giver feel is not part of the Feedback Formula, because the conversation is not about you. It’s about the other person and the impact of his or her behavior.

When Do You Cut Bait?

Addressing the same behavior multiple times begs the question, At what point do you stop giving feedback and either end relationships or work around people?

There’s a point at which you (a) give up and fire the employee, (b) rotate him to a job where he can be more successful, or (c) get him moved off a project or account and then work with the people who remain. That’s an unfortunate reality.

But no matter the outcome, you can do the right thing by giving specific feedback in a timely way. If after a reasonable number of attempts you don’t see sufficient change, work with the people who will work with you. ●

Tips for Giving Feedback

Feedback conversations can strengthen your relationships and build trust. When you are willing to have a difficult conversation, you demonstrate that you care

about the person and the relationship. If you didn’t care, you’d say nothing, tell other people, cut the person off, or work around him or her.

When you have something difficult to say, sending an email or leaving a voice mail is easier than having a live conversation. You can hone what you want to say until your message is just right. You can manage your emotions and you don’t have to deal with the other person’s reaction.

But with an email, you can’t manage your tone, see the other person’s response or ensure she hears your message as you intended it.

Good Feedback Conversations Are Planned

Feedback conversations are stressful. To ensure you say everything you want to say, plan your conversations.

About 10 years ago, I had a manager who was often volatile, unpredictable and irrational. To describe Kathryn as difficult to work with was an understatement. Talking with her was beyond stressful. I would get so nervous during our meetings that I’d forget to discuss half the things I wanted to say.

Before each meeting I made a bulleted list of everything I wanted to talk about and practiced particularly difficult conversations out loud. When Kathryn became emotional and I became flustered, I would look at my list, check off the last thing we talked about and move to the next item. Having notes of what I wanted to say kept me calm and ensured that I got what I needed from our very stressful meetings.

What follows is a series of questions for you to consider writing down the answers to as you plan for difficult feedback conversations.

- What’s working?
- What’s not working?
- What’s most important for this person to know?
- What would you like this person to do differently?
- What are your requests?
- What do you want to say but know you probably won’t?
- What will you say first? ●

Dealing With Difficult Situations

The following strategies are for dealing with some of the most difficult situations that arise in the workplace. One note before we dive in: I wince every time I hear the term “dealing with difficult people.” We deal with situations, not people.

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SITUATION: You work for someone who doesn't provide enough feedback.

Managers are frequently promoted into management because they're good at their jobs. But doing something well and coaching someone else to do it are not the same thing. If all you hear from your boss is that you're doing a good job, and if you've tried the techniques for getting more feedback as outlined throughout this book and that hasn't worked, get feedback from a different source.

Simply ask your colleagues for specific feedback, and give coworkers permission to tell you. If the feedback isn't specific enough or you doubt its validity, ask someone else until you either get useful information or can validate the feedback you're questioning. While you deserve a boss who provides regular and specific feedback, you won't always have one.

SITUATION: You were promoted and now your former coworkers and friends work for you.

When you get promoted above coworkers and friends, I suggest having a one-on-one conversation with each new direct report and saying, "We were peers and friends, and now I'm your boss. It's awkward for me, and I have to assume it's awkward for you as well. I want us to have a good working relationship. The nature of our relationship will have to change. Before we go there, I want to give us both a chance to talk about how we're feeling. Want to start? What's this like for you?"

Choose your own words. The more transparent and willing you are to speak candidly about things people are thinking but not saying, the more respect you'll earn and the more solid your relationships will be.

SITUATION: Someone tells you about a problem but asks you not to say anything. Or someone gives you permission to pass the feedback on but doesn't want to be identified as the source of the information.

Being told something in confidence and then asked not to take action puts you in a very awkward position. When this happens, ask the person why he told you. Request that he not do it again unless he wants you to do something with the information.

There are times you simply cannot keep confidences. If this is the case, go back to the person who confided in you and tell her what you're going to do. Don't let her hear about it from someone else. The conversation could go something like this:

"Mary, I appreciate you telling me about the client's complaint. I know you asked me not to share it, and I want to respect your confidentiality. But it's a big deal

and I have to pass on the feedback. How can I share the information so that you're comfortable? Do you want to talk to the director of sales yourself? I'm sure he'll be receptive. Or do you want me to talk to him?"

SITUATION: Every time you give feedback to a certain person on your team, she cries.

Giving a crier feedback is uncomfortable. Some people say people cry to manipulate and get out of a situation. I don't think that's true. I think we have a natural reaction to feedback and stress. Some of us clam up and say nothing, some of us get angry, and some of us cry. You are not responsible for how the recipient feels or reacts. When the person is calm, resume the conversation. ●

Business Relationships That Really Work

It's safe to ask questions and tell people, at all levels and in all roles, the truth. CEOs don't have to hire consultants to find out what's happening in the organization. Employees willingly tell them. Projects are completed smoothly, and teams and departments work well together because employees understand what other departments and individuals do and how they impact each other. More gets done, in less time.

When you know what others expect and what your coworkers think of your performance — because you asked — you're able to manage your reputation and thus your career. Information is power, and power means control.

Changing an organization's culture starts with one person who is willing to do something differently. One person who asks more questions and tells the truth. Is that you?

The difference between relationships that work and those that don't is courage — the courage to make requests and tell the truth. One quality distinguishes people whose careers are on an upward trajectory. That, too, is courage.

You can say more than you think you can. Ask more. Assume less. Start today. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *How to Say Anything to Anyone*, you'll also like:

1. ***Speaking as a Leader* by Judith Humphrey.** Learn how to make the most of your daily communications, creating a presence on the job as a genuine and constant leader.
2. ***Just Listen* by Mark Goulston.** Goulston reveals how to get through to anyone, even when productive communication seems impossible.
3. ***Well Said!* by Darlene Price.** Price presents techniques, guidelines and checklists to help you present your message with clarity, credibility and confidence.