

Authentic Communication



This thought piece is our best thinking on effective communication.

We say *authentic* because it takes something—courage, commitment, a sense of purpose—to tell the truth. Speaking authentically and in ways that foster what we are wanting to have happen in our workplaces and in our lives requires something of us—a transparency and presence that allow for greatness to emerge among people.

We start with the building blocks of language, what teacher and philosopher Fernando Flores calls [The Speech Acts](#) —declarations, assessments, assertions, promises and requests. These make up the conversations we need to have to move our vision forward with our teams, managers, direct reports, children, partners, parents and neighbors.

With [Anatomy of a Conversation](#) (starting on page 11), we pick the five key conversations necessary for optimal effectiveness and point to the distinctions of body and mood that support and direct the conversations towards the qualities of ease and flow.

[Team Communication: Great Meetings](#) (starting on page 15) offers a list of guidelines for anyone facilitating or

leading meetings. It is even more than a list of guidelines; it creates a context in which to stand and offers facilitators a roadmap for taking great care of the people in the room and optimizing the time spent together.

[Conversation for Getting Complete](#) (starting on page 17) invites us to handle unfinished business with grace and dignity. We offer a conversation map based on some of the best communication research as a way out of upset and towards wholeness and resolution, so we may continue moving towards our vision and succeed.

We wish you the best on your journey into authentic communication.

– *Seven Stones Leadership*



The Speech Acts

Language is Power

"We will go to the moon."

Language happens to be of the most powerful tools leaders—and all of us—have at our disposal. It is what we say that distinguishes us from all other creatures.

Language is action. Fernando Flores is one of the thought leaders who distinguishes language as not simply a tool we use to describe a world that already exists, but rather *an action that produces a world and a future that would otherwise not have existed.*

Agency becomes possible. Speaking as creation is a profound shift in understanding our relationship to the world. It implies we are not describers of an objectively knowable world, fixed and the same for everyone. Rather, we are designers and authors of a world with which we interact. *Our speaking actually makes things so!*

The implications are staggering, as you might imagine. The reality that language shapes our world has been backed by the latest research in Quantum Physics and Philosophy. *For more on the underpinnings of the current thinking in leadership and management today, please [contact us](#) ↗*

The Speech Acts is the name Flores gave the five primary moves human beings make in language every day. Below we lay out a discussion, inquiries and practices for each of them:

- *Declarations*
- *Assessments & Assertions*
- *Promises*
- *Requests*

A Bit About Flores:

Flores was born in Talca, Chile. He became finance minister in the government of Chilean president Salvador Allende and then spent three years as a political prisoner after the military coup of General Augusto Pinochet. Forced into exile after negotiations on his behalf by Amnesty International, he moved with his family to Palo Alto, California, and worked as a researcher in the Computer Science department at Stanford University. He subsequently obtained his PhD at U.C. Berkeley under the guidance of Hubert Dreyfus, Stuart Dreyfus, John Searle and Ann Markusen. There he developed his work on philosophy, coaching and workflow technology, influenced by Heidegger, Maturana, John Austin and others. His thesis was titled "Management and Communication in the Office of the Future."



Declarations

"One day all men (and women) will be judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin."

"India will be free."

"I now pronounce you husband and wife."

Language and practice make it so. This last quote is a great example many of us have experienced directly or indirectly. Does marriage exist out there somewhere? Is it the piece of paper you sign? Can you go and find a marriage? NO! Marriage is a declaration made in language and backed up with a certain set of practices we all agree constitute being married. There is no marriage out there somewhere. It lives in language and practice.

Somatic Exercise: Read the above declarations out loud and feel into the effect they have.

*"The thought manifests as the word.
The word manifests as the deed.
The deed develops into habit.
And the habit hardens into character;
So watch the thought and its way with care;
And let it spring from love born
out of concern for all beings.
As the shadow follows the body,
As we think, so we become."*

– The Buddha

Often we are living inside of declarations we forgot that we made and that no longer serve or are in direct conflict with declarations we make in present time. Old forgotten declarations that are running the show will often interfere with our ability to fulfill on declarations we are making now. Declaring is an extremely powerful move to make in language. We can, and do, shift the course of history through a single declaration.

Assess Your Declarations, a Leaders' Inventory

Take stock of your relationship to how you speak, the declarations you make and have made and their effects on your life and work.

- What declarations have you made that now become context, and for which you have invented powerful practices?
- What declarations have you made that no longer serve you that still run your life? This is a way to look at what is old, in the background or in conflict with our current declarations.
- What is the biggest declaration you have ever made?
- What declaration is lurking in the background that you know needs to be made, and that will alter everything?
- What declaration, if made, would catalyze a huge breakthrough in your team, in your organization, in your life?

Leaders make declarations no one else will dare to make.

They are out on the skinny branches, going where others are afraid to go. They are willing to experiment, to learn in their mistakes and make new declarations.



Assessment and Assertions

Two Companion Speech Acts

"Language is an ACTION.

*It produces a future and a world,
which unspoken, would not have existed."*

Assessments and assertions are not the same thing, though most of us think of them as such, and use them interchangeably. This confusion can cause significant personal suffering and can cripple performance and team

coordination in an organization. We hold the power to create speech actions that move our communities and teams forward. Understanding how assessments and assertions differ offers us the key to unlocking that power.

We are assessment-making machines.

It is part of our hard wiring.

What is the difference?

ASSERTION	ASSESSMENT
<p>A statement that is either true or false.</p> <p><i>"Gravity keeps things planted on the earth."</i></p> <p>That statement is true. We can provide evidence to support the claim and prove its validity. If we can disprove its validity, the statement is still an assertion. It's just a false one.</p> <p>Assertions are statements that can be witnessed and can resolve a doubt opened by a question (implicit or explicit).</p>	<p>An opinion or judgment made for the sake of coordinating action or to justify a feeling.</p> <p><i>"That is an effective marketing tool."</i></p> <p>At first glance this might actually look like an assertion, but it is not! We might be able to provide evidence to support our claim; however, to declare something "effective" is actually an assessment made by an observer with a certain history and set of standards about effectiveness that do not match all other people's standards. There is no doubt you could find someone who refutes the claim and provides other supporting evidence for the assessment.</p>

"I can trust her with my life."

"He's not very competent when it comes to deadlines."

"Tomorrow will be a better day."

An assessment can be grounded or ungrounded.

"Grounding" means that you have a basis for judging that your judgment is useful, based on: 1) A history of past action; 2) Specified standards; or 3) There are not opposing assessments that are as well grounded.

Make the distinction. We are mammals capable of making assessments that will ensure our very survival—"The bear can't get into the house." That said, we are constantly churning out assessments about ourselves and others as if they were true assertions and then make decisions and take actions based on them. When we do not take time to

distinguish the types of assessments we are trafficking, we hinder our prosperity. Understanding the origins to our definitive actions gives us power.

Assessments and Powerful Leading. Leaders are paid to make powerful, grounded assessments—about the future, about their organizations, about their industry and about other leaders. The more powerful and grounded a leader's assessments, the more value she or he offers.

The mark of a leader lies in one's ability to discern which assessments are useful and which are not. Assessments are always made by an observer, and knowing who you are as an observer makes you more powerful. Knowing that assessments are born of thought and feeling is critical.



Assessments in action, a leaders' inventory

1. As a first step, take some time to be an observer, and watch and listen to the statements made by others. Can you tell the difference between an assertion and an assessment? Take notes and code what you hear around you.
2. Then, reflect on your relationships: can you think of the assessments you have made about your boss, your colleagues, your team, anyone else that are currently informing your actions? Do you hold them like assertions? Do you have grounding or "evidence" to support your assessments?
3. Use the following questions as fodder for this inventory:
 - Where are you making powerful, grounded assessments?
 - Where are you listening to assessments you ought to decline?
 - Where are you not paying attention to someone's assessments that you ought to hear?
 - What assessments are you withholding that would serve? And of whom?
 - What assessments are you harboring, about whom, that do not serve?
 - What assessments have you made that you now believe are assertions (true)?



Promises

"When [Mrs. Mallard and her baby ducklings] reached the pond and swam across to the little island, there was Mr. Mallard waiting for them, just as he had promised."

– Make Way for Ducklings,
by Robert McCloskey

To make a promise is a profound act, and we swim in a sea of them every day. Promises make and break reputations. They power businesses and organizations. Within each promise lies the possibility and vulnerability of trust, and the hope of a desire fulfilled. Therein also lies a key to our leadership challenge: to be responsible for our promises, to become skillful at negotiating and re-negotiating them and to manage our reactions. Because trust and hope are intrinsic to the nature of promises, when promises are broken, the costs are high.

So how do we manage these precious resources? How do we relate to our daily promises in ways that inform and strengthen our integrity, our trustworthiness, and consequently, our relationships?

Integrity is not about keeping all of our promises all the time. It is about what we say and do, and how we BE, when we break our promises. How do you BE when you break a promise? Do you get defensive? Do you hide out? Do you blame someone else? Do you apologize?

Things change. Life alters our path and we need to re-align our promises to match current reality. With that said, *how* we go about the re-alignment process is the key to maintaining trust in relationships and being in integrity with ourselves.

Somatic Practice. Connect to your body. Then think about Mr. Mallard and the baby ducklings in the quote above. What gets evoked in you? You may think: "Nice, a father who keeps his promises." You may notice you feel a sense of relaxation. Your heart opens. You may think, "Ah, that is so great."

Read the sentence again; maybe even out loud. What do you notice in your body? What is your automatic narrative that pops up when you hear that Mr. Mallard kept his promise to be there when he said he would be?

Noticing your reactions will offer a direct inlet to your own relationship with promises. When you observe the feelings evoked during a moment when promises are being made and broken, you can begin to sense where you feel solid about your word or whether you need to re-negotiate your promise to fit new circumstances. You will recognize the impact of broken promises others have made you, and be able to discern how to best manage your reactions.

Integrity

Integrity is at the center of our power—where we are out of integrity, we are leaking our power. Have a look at where you are out of integrity—where word and deed do not match, where you say one thing and do another, where you know you are not being honest, where you are selling yourself short. Our power comes from being able to get back into integrity, word and deed, body and story, when the alignment is off. Look at your relationship to yourself and to others.



There are three sub-moves related to Promises that we can make:

1. **Offers:** Making offers is one of the moves leaders make to push their agenda forward. The more powerful and well crafted the offer, the greater the possible impact.
 - What offers do you make every day that actually distract from your mission?
 - What offers are on the table that could be crafted to produce greater value for you and your interests?
 - What offers are you not making because you don't know how?
 - What offers do you accept that you ought to decline or delegate?
2. **Declines:** Saying NO or declining has such a bad rap in our culture. Yet a straight honest decline allows the energy to keep moving and clearly articulates promises you can be counted for and promises that are outside your competence or interest. The other party, once clear, can move on quickly, wasting minimal time and energy for all.
 - What do you chronically say yes to that you need to decline?
 - What do you chronically decline that you need to say yes to?
 - What difference would it make if you made these new moves?
3. **Counter Offers:** This move is part of making powerful, clear promises. You may need to decline one request, but if re-defined and well negotiated both parties can get what they want. That is making a counter offer.
 - Where are you accepting offers or requests that you need to STOP and actually counter offer instead?
 - This would require asking the question: what do I need, what do I feel, how do I want to use my resources?

Assess your promises, a leaders' inventory

Sink into your body as you read the following questions and observe your relationship to promises:

- What does the word "promise" evoke for you? Are you cynical about it? Are you trusting?
- What is a promise?
- Which promises do you make that you know you won't keep?
- What are your reasons for not keeping them?
- From whom do you accept promises when you know they won't be kept? Which promises are they? What is the impact on you?
- What promises are you currently living in that you are now breaking?
- What promises do you need to revoke or re-negotiate to get back into integrity with yourself and the person you promised?

Becoming masterful at managing your promises will dramatically improve your effectiveness, solidify your relationships and deepen your honor and dignity.



Requests

"Will you take out the trash before you leave for work?"

Requests, we make them every day. "Will you get that report from the boss's office?" "Will you drive the kids to school today?" "Will you ask Mary if she spoke to her client yet?" At home or at work, requests reside at the heart of conversations that empower action.

A request is an action made in language (and body) that creates a future that would not have existed previously.

You ask: "Will you marry me?", and whether the answer is Yes or No, you have created a future that would not have existed had the request not been made. Requests propel future action, and action is what makes things happen.

For example:

1. Requests lead people to make "promises" to fulfill on them.
2. Promises made and fulfilled build trust and forward critical action.
3. Promises made and broken breach trust and cost people and organizations time and money and heartache.
4. A declined request leaves the person asking in a position to complete the action herself or in need of asking someone else.

If you deconstruct each of these processes you can see that many, many breakdowns that occur between human beings begin with an unexamined understanding of what is happening when making a request of another person. So, what *is* in a request?

The Anatomy of a Request

A request must include:

- A speaker and a listener.
- A shared understanding of the request being made.
- A time by which the request must be fulfilled. (This is one element of a request we often miss and it creates a huge amount of wasted resources.)
- Clear conditions of satisfaction.

Assess your requests, a leaders' inventory

Since requests beget action, and leaders are in the business of causing people to take action on behalf of a mission, let us apply the rigor and distinctions that can have our requests be potent, effective, efficient and inspiring. Take some time with this Leaders' Inventory below.

- When we make requests poorly, what is the impact?
- What does it cost us to make requests? What does it cost us not to make them?
- What's the impact of making and not making requests on our ability to partner?
- What impact does it have on our ability to be authentic? At peace? To receive?
- What makes requests threatening to make or hear?
- What requests do you need to make—and of whom—that you are avoiding?
- Do you make powerful requests of others who are in condition to fulfill on that request? Do you ever make a request of someone who you know is not really able to fulfill on it?
- Do you make requests of those competent to fulfill, but whom you know will not because they chronically over-promise?
- If you make the request and you know they won't fulfill, are they responsible for the breakdown or are you?
- Do you make requests no one listens to or takes seriously?
- When you make requests, do you get a clear promise back from the other person with clear conditions of satisfaction (meaning that you clearly state what it will look like when the request has been fulfilled)? E.g. if they take the kids to school at 11:00am, is that fulfilling on your request?
- Do you make requests that cause people to go beyond who they currently know themselves to be?
- Do you make requests that empower others to be greater than they currently are? Do you make requests that lead people to discover something new?
- What requests do you accept again and again that you ought to be declining? What requests do you decline to make that, if you made, would force you to grow?
- What new actions you will be taking as a result of your reflections?

Not only can Requests be used to forward action, they create a new possibility for a person to live into, thereby providing access to their professional and personal development.



Anatomy of a Conversation

Designing conversations for effective leadership

In the Speech Acts, we discovered that language is power and action. How we *structure language* into conversations is critical for leaders to drive effective action. Getting clear about the type of conversation needed in a particular moment and then skillfully engaging is key to personal mastery and strong leadership. The most important conversations for business are:

- A conversation for relationship
- A conversation for possibility
- A conversation for action
- A conversation for assessment
- A conversation for intimacy

When we understand these distinctions, we can leverage the conversations we are already having and create new ones we need to have in order to forward our visions as leaders. We first take a look at basic anatomy, or the principals underlying conversations, and then study each one individually.

Underlying principles

- Conversations are actions and they make possible a future that otherwise would not exist.
- We coordinate action in language by making offers, promises and requests.
- All of these moves lead to a world that did not exist prior to the conversation.
- How we sit, stand and move can shape a conversation, and different types of conversations require different moves in language and in body.
- Conversations have moods to them, and moods are cultivated through our thoughts and habits.
- Conversations require certain states for them to be effective or optimally effective.
- In addition to understanding the underlying principles of a conversation, skillfully designing the conversation allows them to be optimally effective.



A conversation for relationship

This is the first conversation we ever have with someone. Hello, how are you? Who are you? Where are you from? It is the start of the interview process, sales meeting and weekly meeting.

In these conversations we ask questions from a stance of genuine curiosity: what occupies your time, what matters to you, etc. We look for common ground: do we know the same people, do we have the same interests, values or beliefs. We look to see if we can relax around them or not, do we feel heard and connected or do we wish to move away?

In building relationships we are collecting data, absorbing and usually judging the person or situation.

We walk away from these conversations saying things such as, "I like that person," or, "She was boring," or, "He wasn't a fit," or whatever fundamental assessment we have already made about the person. We either want more relatedness or we don't.

Once we choose to continue the relationship we can have conversations that deepen the relationship, keep it intact, repaired, enriched and thriving. When building relationships:

The body is alert and curious, leaning in and available.

The mood is one of open curiosity, interest and genuineness.

A conversation for possibility

Outcomes/Dreaming/Design/Future

This is the conversation we have when we are determining our future or whether to work, collaborate, merge organizations or even to live together.

The conversation begins with looking into the future, dreaming together and asking:

- Where do we/I want to be?
- What is next for me/us?
- What matters to me/you and us?
- Can being together produce something we could not produce alone?
- If we join forces can we create a shared future of which we both want to be part?

In these conversations we invent outcomes, we declare the future and we see whether we will go forward together. When speaking into possibility:

The body is alert, wide, listening, relaxed, and our eyes are pointed towards the horizon.

The mood is one of ambition and possibility.



A conversation for action

This is where we use requests, offers, promises, etc., to coordinate action.

A colleague requested that I give her some information about conversations. I accepted and promised to deliver that. All of a sudden I have a promise to fulfill. If I fulfill, she and I get one future. If I break my promise, we get another. I could have declined, as well, or counter offered.

All of these moves would lead us to some kind of action **observable in the world**. When we are creating action:

***The body** is centered, fully present, aligned and ready for movement, extended.*

***The mood** is ambition and purposeful.*

A conversation for assessment

Completion/Accountability/Trust Repair

This is where we take stock of where we are and do the work of maintaining health and workability in our relationships.

We may **evaluate progress, declare satisfaction or dissatisfaction**, determine where to take **responsibility** for ourselves, and we **repair when trust is damaged** in any way.

Being able to have these conversations effectively is critical to maintaining thriving, healthy, flowing, long standing relationships both in business and personally. (See [Conversation for Getting Complete](#) below for a guide to how to have these conversations.) For some, these are the most challenging conversations, and paying attention to body and mood is critical:

***The body** is sitting back, relaxed, centered and present.*

***The mood** is love, courage, gratitude and humility.*

A conversation for intimacy

A conversation for intimacy is also part of maintaining relational health in and out of the office. We have found if the above conversations are done skillfully, intimacy naturally emerges.

This conversation is specifically designed for intimacy building and usually happens more in the personal domain than professional. However, conversations for professional intimacy and team building are important. This type of intimacy is present in high performing teams when colleagues can share and the others listen and

simply stay fully present, or "get you." It is when we really center ourselves and receive another human being. In these teams, feelings can surface without losing face and people do not react, they can just be. (See *Team Communication: Great Meetings* below for a guide to how to have these conversations.) When developing intimacy:

***The body** is open, soft and receptive.*

***The mood** is love, acceptance, compassion and generosity.*



A conversation pitfall

Looking for right/wrong, good/bad, agreement/disagreement

Our mindset can stop us from creating the mood for an effective conversation. Be on the lookout for how seeing through this dominant lens can cripple your power. Using right or wrong, good or bad, or determining whether you agree or disagree are not the place to look when in conversation and making powerful choices. In fact, using these criteria cripples your effectiveness and ability to be innovative and skillful. Take a look at how often you are

determining your moves through this lens. How often do you evaluate whether to move forward based on whether you agree with something or think it is right? There are clues to see if you are in this conversational pitfall:

The body is closed, contracted and agitated.

The mood is judgment and distrust.



Team Communication: Great Meetings

Simple guidelines to create meeting flow and safety

It used to be that hanging out by the water cooler got us all the “real” information about the goings-on in the office. People warned us about changes coming down the pike from promotions to new products to the company’s progress. As organizations have become more nimble, innovative and diverse to keep up in an increasingly competitive environment, there is a growing mandate

for leaders to communicate openly, effectively and with transparency to inspire creative thinking and problem solving. Managers and team leaders are discovering the need to facilitate meetings that are satisfying, safe and open. And of course, there just isn’t time to linger at the water cooler anymore.

Here are some guidelines to use when creating a meeting structure and ethos for the participants:

1. Understand **why** this particular group of people needs to meet. (Do we have the right people in the room?)
2. Publish an **agenda** before any meeting (How are we going to spend our time together?) and have meeting **outcomes** clear before starting. (What is the purpose of spending this time together?)
3. Consider creating **context**, to design the staff meeting to reflect the values to which you say you are committed and to be the enactment of those values. These then lead to meeting norms and ground rules that we all work from. (What are the rules of the road? E.g. is it acceptable to send text messages during our meetings?)
4. Make the opportunity to share **facilitation**. (Who is going to guide us through today’s process?)
5. Meet regularly to check-in from the **personal domain**, and report out any **work progress**, projects accountable for and other information the team would benefit from hearing.
6. Understand what **type of conversation** we are having. (Is this a conversation for action, opportunity, completion or relationship?)
7. Make **clear requests** to move projects and conversations forward. (What do we need completed and by when?)
8. Make clear promises with deadlines and **accountabilities**. (Who will accomplish what and by when?)
9. Ensure to allow for **pauses** in the conversation so introverts can process and contribute. (Are we allowing for all voices to be heard?)



10. Remain cognizant of each other's circumstances and avoid making assumptions. Once we realize an assumption has been made, name it and check in about any impact.
11. Name specific **interpersonal communication guidelines**, such as:
 - No talking to a third party about anything you need to say directly.
 - No protecting anyone by warning them that something is coming their way.
 - No going to another member of the team to vent. Take it outside work, take it to the team leader or take it to the person with whom you have the difficulty.
 - No *meeting after the meeting*, say everything that needs to be said where all can hear and discuss.
12. Encourage each team member to **speak directly** to the person with whom they have a breakdown. (Who can I talk to who can make a difference?)
13. Review **commitments and next steps** (What will happen when we all leave here?)
14. **Schedule** the next meeting if appropriate. (Does this group need to meet again to fulfill on our commitments?)
15. **Team leaders** strictly adhere to these guidelines her or himself. (E.g., Do not let members of the team know about things coming down the pike. Share only in open meetings. Do not process anything in a one-on-one interaction about a team member, ever.)



Conversation for Getting Complete

What we can do when we have unfinished business

What does it mean to be complete with oneself or another individual or even with a larger entity?

We all know this phenomenon: we see someone from our past in the grocery store and quickly switch aisles. Or, every time we have to interact with a family member, we think, I wish I did not have to see this person. Or, we still have not let go of something that happened at a meeting or maybe even at our last job. Every time we are reminded of the situation, we feel our anger or grief or left over emotion rise to the surface.

That is what we call being incomplete.

Being incomplete has a big impact on our ability to be effective and to be in relationships with others in the present moment.

At work and in the office, being incomplete looks like gossip about a boss or colleague, ongoing discontent we didn't handle with a subordinate, or resentments we harbor about the raise or promotion which we feel we deserved. In place of directly dealing with these situations to our own and others' satisfaction, we harbor, complain, gossip, get resigned and slowly but surely, we distance ourselves. Our passion dries up, and we tell ourselves it does not matter. We check out.

The practice of getting things completed that are lingering effects our mental, emotional and, some would even say, our physical health and overall well-being. It certainly impacts our performance. When we are incomplete, our energy can stagnate and we become encumbered, bogged down and, for some, even sick.

Why do we often avoid these kinds of conversations?

Fear of a negative outcome, lack of training on how to address conflict skillfully, or we have seen it gone badly for others. In many ways, we are a conflict avoidant culture and many families, teams and organizations struggle to create an environment where conversations like these can occur safely.

We can start with ourselves and get into condition to face each other with courage and dignity so we can all move forward without these long held feelings, thoughts and stories holding us back and impeding our health and our performance.

There are several elements to completing. We need to be willing to:

1. **Speak the truth** as we see it.
2. **Listen to the other** with the intention to understand; not to blame, judge or prove we are right.
3. **Be responsible** for our part in the matter. Or said another way, it takes two to tango.
4. **Let go** of what we are holding onto. Not so easy, but nonetheless critical for completing anything.



Specifically, we can follow a conversation “map” when we are afraid to say something that feels difficult. We follow a pattern of expressing what we **observe, feel, think and request** and this allows us to share openly and be responsible for our own feelings and thoughts, while at the same time attempting to find out what is occurring for the other person. We recommend trying this out first and practicing with someone we feel comfortable with and about something that is not too charged. Then it can flow more easily during a more challenging moment.

This format comes directly from Radical Therapy and Transactional Analysis work initiated in the 1970s and carried forward most prominently by Marshall Rosenberg and now called Non Violent Communication and we encourage you to visit the websites of these innovators for the rich resources they make available.

In general, we speak these statements in this order, but it is not necessary to be exact.

5. **When you...** (facts we observed)
6. **I feel...** (feelings *only*) This part can become a major pitfall in the pattern. Often we will say, “I feel *like* you...” When we say that, or something like it, we are framing a thought inside of the disguise of a feeling statement. Instead of expressing a vulnerability of feeling—which includes, sad, mad, hurt, anxious, afraid, etc.—we are making an assessment of the other person and typically this causes defensive reactions and begins a new cycle of communication breakdown. For this reason, the distinction of *feeling* matters a lot when we wish to understand deeply how communication was run amok.
7. **My interpretation/thoughts/read/paranoia/story is... because I saw/observed you...** (thoughts) It is here we express our assessments, true or not, and then include our observation and state the evidence if we haven’t yet.
8. **The grain of truth in what you said is...** (acknowledgment) This may require some stretching on the part of the listener. At first pass you may say nothing about what they think is true, but in this model we stand behind the idea that no matter how triggered and distorted things can get between parties, there is some grain of truth that can be acknowledged by the other party that will have the upset person feel acknowledged, understood; like what they are feeling and thinking makes sense even if it’s being colored by leftover material from the past littering the landscape of this current conversation.
9. **What is not true about what you said is...** This is where the person who is being confronted can update the upset person about the truth in present time. They may not, for example, “be out to get you,” but are in fact trying to get ahead of themselves and are very scared about their own future, which has them pay less attention to others. If the confronted party can acknowledge both what is true and not true, both people can have real data, real current information and deepen understanding.
10. **My request for the future is...** This is the bridge into a new reality, out of the upset and into a new pattern of behavior.
11. As the speaker of a difficult communication, we benefit when we listen deeply to the response of the other person and allow their full expression. In fact, we may have several points we need to make in a conversation, and we can cycle through this pattern for each one.
12. In this way, combining these elements in a conversation will allow you and others to let go and move on. When we engage in this practice regularly and with some rigor, we will experience a clean house and ease in movement forward towards our vision. Mastering this conversation for completion is critical to our success.



In conclusion

As you know, many books have been written on the subject of powerful/masterful/transformational communication, difficult conversations and effective negotiations. Many researchers and practitioners make their living analyzing language transactions between and among people and ask how these communications relate to power and authority, which parts of us are speaking at any given time, and more. This topic of *how we speak* is vast, and this booklet is by no means comprehensive.

In offering this thought piece, it is our intention that it both provides you with practical tools to use immediately as well as ignites in you an interest in digging deeper. Language is the currency of leadership. Language, including both verbal and non verbal (mood and body posture), is the overarching domain in which leaders and teams (and families and communities) are conducting business. It benefits us all to develop our skill, our sensitivity and our understanding of language and its power to move us to great things. We look forward to more conversation with you along the way.

ABOUT SEVEN STONES

Seven Stones is a leadership journeys company founded by Gina LaRoche and Jennifer Cohen in 2009. Our learning programs, coaching practice, organizational consulting engagements and groundbreaking thought leadership work are all designed to help bring about a world that is loving, courageous and just. We pursue this vision primarily by shifting the paradigm from one of scarcity to one of Sustainable Abundance® in the individuals, organizations and communities with whom we work.

