# The Knowledge Project Keypoints — Relationships, Influence & Communication

The Knowledge Project Keypoints

Episodes in this pack: 8

# The Psychology of Power | Michael Ovitz

Guest: Michael Ovitz
Date: 2026-02-03 · Duration: 1:33:06
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wp1Wn6QkkKU

## KEYPOINTS

**• Knowledge is power — and the pressure to always have an answer turns people into liars.**
When Michael Ovitz started CAA in 1974, lying was an 'industrial problem' in entertainment because agents felt they had to answer everything and made things up more than half the time. CAA's rule was 'simpleton logic': if you don't know, say you'll find out. He found it shockingly revolutionary, and notes the same reflex exists in most organisations.

**• Teamwork with no ego meant CAA never lost a client.**
For 75 years agencies ran one client, one agent. CAA gave every client multiple agents, all current on the career, so clients who tired of one person simply moved to the next. Staff had to answer colleagues before clients or buyers. The clients were in the ego business, not the agents — a big reason CAA attracted most working talent.

**• Tell clients the truth, and only pitch what you believe in.**
Agents traditionally told actors they looked great in bad dailies. CAA banned recommending material you didn't believe in. Ovitz held Friday open-door sessions where agents had about two minutes to sell him a script; he applies the same test to tech founders — if you can't say what the business does in 20 seconds, you can't market it.

**• The first way people go wrong is believing things that aren't true about themselves.**
Believing your press, good or bad, or that you're superior is the common failure across industries. Paul Newman told Ovitz he didn't believe the praise, 'but after a certain amount of time, it starts to get to you.' Ovitz dismissed power lists as nonsense: power is ephemeral, 'like a lease' with a closed end, never a good one.

**• Build breadth deliberately so you can connect with anyone.**
Hollywood was a closed ecosystem of gossip, so Ovitz flew to New York weekly for art, theatre and intellectual circles. CAA kept a 200-line bibliography of magazines and books; he took 200+ magazines a month, thumbing 10–15 daily. Car magazines let him bond instantly with Paul Newman; reading the New England Journal of Medicine let him talk to UCLA's 20 department heads.

**• Don't fight your job: if you dread going to work, you won't stand out.**
The most common calls he gets are complaints about a colleague, a deal gone wrong, then disliking the job. Work you love lets you perform to capacity; otherwise run a 'pilot's checklist' on why you're unhappy or find another job. At his age he can't wait to get up every morning.

**• Failure is a badge of honour in American business, and that's its edge.**
At a London lunch on why American businesspeople outperform, a man in his 40s said he was leaving London in shame after his company went bankrupt and he fired some 800 people. Ovitz ended the lunch — that was the answer. The man cancelled his move and started another business. Michael Crichton's advice: 'There's always another rodeo.'

**• Study failures, not successes.**
Patrick Collison invited Ovitz to lunch with his book full of Post-its marking every mistake, then spent three hours asking the conditions behind each decision, what Ovitz might have done differently and what would have happened. Ovitz calls that not just smart but wise, and says this tech generation wants to know what you failed at, not what you did.

**• Momentum is the most underused force in life, and it's built like a train leaving a station.**
It doesn't happen instantly; you lay foundations block by block, and you can't quit while building it. Michael Bloomberg as mayor took time to get up to speed but never stopped. Momentum comes from industrious work, deep knowledge of your field and its peripheries, and knowing your competitors.

**• Loyalty and confrontation are both tools.**
Ovitz calls himself 'the world's best friend and the world's worst enemy.' Confrontation is just a tool; sometimes necessary. He's a self-described monopolist in Thiel's mould — CAA held about 70% of the market — and didn't go into business to win a popularity contest.

## EXAMPLES

**• Packaging The Natural in one afternoon.**
Literary agent Amy Grossman pitched Roger Towne's script about a washed-up ballplayer's comeback. Ovitz knew Robert Redford wanted a baseball movie and believed in Barry Levinson, whom he'd signed in 1969 and whose debut Diner had worked. He sent both the script at once, took Levinson to Sundance, and they packaged it that day, adding Kim Basinger, Wilford Brimley and Glenn Close.

**• A list of nearly 400 people who'd helped CAA.**
CAA tracked every executive who helped it in its first years and later fell on hard times, finding them jobs or money. When a top 1960s TV writer couldn't get work, Ovitz told staff to 'legislate a job' — not a cheque, his dignity — and they placed him within two weeks, using confrontation when buyers resisted.

**• Marc Andreessen in a Hawaiian shirt.**
Ron Conway insisted he meet Andreessen; Ovitz budgeted an hour and stayed three. Andreessen and Ben Horowitz wanted him on LoudCloud's board in 1999 because he wasn't beholden to Silicon Valley and would fight other board members. They told him packaging talent and packaging startups were 'exactly what we do.'

**• An NFT pitch that became anti-piracy tech.**
Pushed by Stanford's Chris Ré, he took a call with Walter De Brouwer and was trying to hang up until he heard about neural fingerprinting. 'Can you do that with songs?' 'Elementary.' They pivoted to IP protection; Lucian Grainge at Universal and Sony signed on. A Premier League contact cited 750,000 illegal downloads per team per game.

**• His morning information diet.**

New York Post for quick news, TechCrunch and The Information, a two-minute scan of Drudge for the opposing view, then FT, WSJ, NYT, LA Times and Washington Post. He reads editors' 'tells' — placement, headline size, photos — never cover to cover, and like Buffett reads for facts, not the writer's opinion.

## OTHER RELEVANT

- **Take the meeting when someone you respect insists.**
  Ron Conway's 'shut up and meet the guy' led to Andreessen; Chris Ré's push led to a new company. He also recruited about 80% of executives by asking every meeting who beat them recently.
- **Don't badmouth anyone; settle conflicts behind a closed door.**
  A manager he knew at 22 trashed everyone out of insecurity, which made him look weak. CAA banned badmouthing even non-clients' work: take it to someone's office, fight it out, shake hands.
- **Book your free time and reclaim 10%.**
  His regret: he could have cut 10% of business time, let momentum and colleagues carry it, and spent it on family, art and reading. He now blocks free time on his calendar, conceding it's hard when you're feeding on the dopamine of getting things done.

# Top Dating Expert: Only 1% of Daters Do this

Guest: Logan Ury
Date: 2025-03-18 · Duration: 2:05:49
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9CWf-y3vBo

## KEYPOINTS

**• A first date is an experience, not an interview for the role of spouse.**

Logan Ury, a behavioural scientist and dating coach, says people sabotage first dates by asking 'could I spend my life with them?' and running a job interview: five-year plans, college majors. Spend 50 years with someone and the day you met is 0.55% of your time together. People who keep getting second and third dates aren't the tallest or hottest. They're fun — a funny story, a silly moment with the bartender — so their date feels like an experience.

**• The spark is overrated; look for the slow burn.**

She names three myths. First, no spark means it can't grow — yet only 11% of people feel love at first sight. Second, a spark is always good — often the 'butterflies' are anxiety from someone running hot and cold, or a narcissist; she and friends once found they'd each felt a 'unique' connection to the same Sparky guy. Third, a spark means the relationship is viable — a great 'how we met' story can fizzle. A slow burn is someone you like more as you know them. That's not settling; it's seeing love in a different package.

**• Use the Post-Date 8, especially: what side of me did they bring out?**

Rather than defaulting to second dates, she suggests eight questions afterwards. Did I feel stiff or relaxed in my body? Did they make me laugh, feel heard, make me curious? The most important: what side of me did they bring out? Whoever you are with that person is who you'll be for much of your life. She describes a career contact after whom she'd collapse on the couch feeling small, and a friend, Michaela, who makes her feel hilarious and creative.

**• Date like a scientist: treat deal-breakers as hypotheses.**

Only 14% of US men are 6 feet or taller, so a height filter eliminates 86% of men — for a client who'd been dating for 12 years without success. Picture a 45-minute soulful conversation at a bar; he stands up at 5'7" and you'd still give him your number. Test the filter: maybe what you want is confidence, or intellectual curiosity rather than a graduate degree.

**• Looks and money matter less than you think; loyalty, stability and shared decisions matter more.**

We adapt to beauty and wealth; even celebrated beauties get cheated on. You don't need shared hobbies, just support for each other's, and complementary personalities often work better than matching ones. Gauge loyalty by whether someone keeps friends from different life phases or trades up. Watch emotional stability under frustration, and how you negotiate even small choices like where to meet. A relationship is 'the music you make together.'

**• Break the anxious–avoidant loop by learning to see secure partners as safe, not boring.**

Attachment theory, from John Bowlby's work about 60 years ago, describes anxious daters who chase and avoidant ones who fear being smothered. They often date each other and reinforce each other's fears. About 50% of people are secure, and they get snapped up. Around 25% of people shift attachment over time. Anxious types can pause, text a friend and look for disconfirming evidence. Avoidant types should notice 'deactivating' nitpicks and simply ask for space.

**• Match momentum, and get from app to meeting fast.**

Dating is a dance: step forward, wait for them to step forward; ten steps at once overwhelms. Our brains fill gaps in a profile positively, like flattering black-and-white photos, building a fantasy no real person matches. After about three days of chatting, suggest a short phone or FaceTime call, then meet. Open in medias res — 'my sister called with a work problem, what would you do?' — and share stories, not facts.

**• Commitment brings satisfaction; endless options erode it.**

Dan Gilbert's photography study found students who couldn't change their chosen print were happier than those who could. 'Orbiting' — keeping people on a back burner, including exes you sometimes sleep with — saps the drive to find someone new. Hinge's Your Turn Limits stops new matches once you owe eight replies.

**• Decide, don't slide, through relationship transitions.**

In one study, coloured wax paper inserted between cookies made people pause and decide whether to keep eating. Exclusivity, moving in, marriage and kids are all decision points — so don't assume exclusivity without talking. She and her husband reached a 'break up or get engaged' moment and talked through three values: travel, knowing her friends, and living in community. Years later they'd done all three.

## EXAMPLES

**• Swiping left on her future husband.**

She swiped left on an 'unsmiling bro' in tank tops and a backwards hat. They later sat together at a Google alumni lunch, where he offered to tutor her in R. Meanwhile she was anxiously chasing a man from Burning Man. A coach asked how she wanted to feel; the tutor came to mind. They've been together nearly 10 years.

**• Digital body language.**

In her Gen Z research at Hinge, one woman read 'K' as anger and wanted 'okayyy.' Broadly agreed cues: a double text is fine, and one-word replies read as uninterested. Know the most texting you'll give and the least you'll accept.

**• Rate invitations from 0 to 100.**

An economist friend's couple scores how much an event matters. Asking for what you want beats hoping a partner reads your mind; even her mentalist ex-roommate didn't unload the dishwasher.

**• Other significant others.**

Northwestern research finds couples with more people to lean on are happier. Her 30-friend WhatsApp group is called 'OSOs'; they lived communally during her husband's cancer treatment.

## OTHER RELEVANT

- **Reject clearly and kindly.**
  86% say they'd rather be told than ghosted. A short, warm 'not a romantic match' text is enough; you don't owe feedback.
- **Your profile is a billboard.**
  Show three big things about yourself; mix humour and vulnerability; avoid clichés, sunglasses and group shots; show your real Saturday night.
- **The thing you think makes you unlovable often makes others comfortable.**
  A glossy, perfect exterior gives people nothing to hold. Vulnerability is how connection forms.

# Dr. Becky Kennedy: The Parenting Secrets That Will Make Your Kids Love You When They're 14 and 40

Guest: Dr. Becky Kennedy
Date: 2024-02-06 · Duration: 1:51:31
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TREQI5G7v0

## KEYPOINTS

**• A boundary is something you tell someone you will do, and it requires nothing from them. Everything else is a request.**

'Please be home by 7 for dinner' is a request, because its success depends on the other person. A boundary sounds like: 'If you're home by 7, I'd love to cook together. If you get home at 9, you'll probably find me with a bowl of cereal, reading in bed.' Either way you have a path within your control, so resentment doesn't build. Said warmly, it's not a threat. It tells someone what you need to keep feeling good in the relationship, which invites closeness.

**• With screens, set boundaries you can enforce rather than relying on kids' willpower.**

'You can play Fortnite for X minutes, then turn it off' sets everyone up for failure, because games are built to absorb you. Instead: 'If you're still playing, I'll come in and turn it off. Let's set a five-minute warning so you're not mid-game.' Or use parental controls that shut the device off. Kennedy says neither kids nor adults can self-regulate with phones, and that changes which interventions make sense.

**• Get on the same side of the table before you say anything.**

In conflict you either see the other person as the problem, or sit beside them looking at a shared problem. The mindset beats the script, because people feel adversarial intent. Your own words are a clue: 'he doesn't respect me' versus 'I miss him; he's overloaded at work'. When she asked her 12-year-old what got in the way of picking up his towel, he said he never even saw it, then suggested a Post-it on his door. He now picks it up 'massively more often'.

**• Teens are explorers, and explorers need a home base.**

Adolescence means forming an identity by separating from parents, and most teens overshoot by rejecting even sensible rules. What separates an explorer from a nomad is a home base to return to. Parents shouldn't 'take the bait' of 'get out of my room' and withdraw. But always being there has costs too: Kennedy says her ever-present mother, who'd drive over a forgotten lunch, made it harder for her to learn self-trust.

**• Confidence is self-trust, not feeling good about yourself.**

When a child says they're the only friend who didn't make the football team, parents rush to a 'sunnier bench': 'but you made varsity basketball!' That teaches the child the feeling is wrong and too much even for the parent. Instead, sit beside them on their bench. Everyone will face disappointment, and how we cope as adults is wired in childhood.

**• Kids shirk responsibility when a bad outcome feels like a verdict on who they are.**

A child who thinks 'a 70 means I'm stupid' can't bear that, so they blame the teacher. Shame is behavior collapsed into identity, and it acts like a freeze response, so lecturing can't get through. Lower the shame first: 'Ugh, I hate when that happens', or a story about a similar test from your own childhood. Once a child feels like 'a good kid who got a bad grade', they can take responsibility. Lead with connection because it works, not because it's soft.

**• Your anxious inner voices are passengers; keep them out of the driver's seat.**

Imposter syndrome, 'it's all my fault' and 'everything will go badly' ride along with all of us. Mental health isn't throwing them out of the car. It's talking to them: 'Oh, there's the I-messed-up-my-kid-forever voice again. Hi. You can stay in the back seat.' Once you're in a relationship with a part of yourself, it can't take over.

**• Regulate emotions with AVP: acknowledge, validate, permit.**

Acknowledge ('hi, annoyance' or 'I'm about to explode'), validate ('that makes sense, whining is annoying'), permit ('I give myself full permission to feel this'), and optionally add 'and I can cope with it'. Curiosity about what's happening inside you replaces 'what's wrong with my kid'. Practice in calm moments with a random daily phone reminder, the way you'd practice free throws before the NBA finals. A stranger once stopped her in Times Square to say AVP had changed his life.

**• Repair is the most important relationship skill, and it starts with repairing with yourself.**

After a blowup, a child alone has only two coping tools: self-doubt ('did that really happen?') and self-blame. As psychiatrist Ronald Fairbairn put it, 'better to be a sinner in a world ruled by God than to live in a world ruled by the devil'. Events don't harm kids as much as the stories they encode. Kennedy sits on a closed toilet lid, holds up two hands, and says: 'This is who I am; this is what I did.' Then she names what happened, takes responsibility ('it's never your fault when I yell'), and says what she'll do differently.

## EXAMPLES

**• Three lines to memorize**

When someone shares something painful, say: 'I'm so glad you're telling me about this.' Then 'I believe you', which validates without agreeing. Then 'Tell me more.' And then nothing more is needed. Shane notices the three lines mirror AVP.

**• Replacing 'I'm sorry you feel that way'**

Shane admits he uses the phrase to avoid accountability when he disagrees. Kennedy reframes a partner's complaint, like going two days without texting while traveling, as a 'bid for connection'. 'I disagree' usually means 'I wouldn't feel that way', and you don't need to agree, only to get curious.

**• The pilot who lands in Denver**

Parents can change rules at any time, just as a pilot diverts despite groans from the cabin. Her script for a 17-year-old: from tomorrow, the phone goes in a box until homework is done. 'Not because you have bad willpower', and 'if you're mad, it's still happening'. Record yourself reading it, and rehearse with a partner playing your teen as 'emotional vaccination'.

**• Would you do it to an adult?**

If her husband said 'you have a listening problem, I'm taking your phone' because she didn't fetch him water, it would look like

gaslighting. People cooperate because they feel close. Fear wired next to love teaches kids to seek fearful relationships, and rewards make the relationship transactional.

- **The 14-year-old who stopped going to school**

  His parents had spent years on time-outs, sticker charts and power struggles, and so 'missed out on 14 years of having a relationship with him'. Real repair started a different trajectory.

## OTHER RELEVANT

- **Let natural results teach**

  When her son forgot his swimsuit, she didn't drive it over. 'Age does not teach skills': as long as you do the remembering, your kid won't.

- **Watch your own unlived dreams**

  Parents bring old insecurities to the sidelines. Andrew Solomon's Far from the Tree: there's no such thing as reproduction; parenting means being 'forever cast into a relationship with a stranger'.

- **Success is living in line with your values**

  Doing that depends on emotional regulation, strong relationships and curiosity about why we act as we do.

# The Non-Verbal Expert: These Behaviors Tell You Everything You Need to Know About Someone

Guest: Blake Eastman
Date: 2024-01-09 · Duration: 1:37:37
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrMiKxPV_Ig

## KEYPOINTS

**• Reading people starts with mapping how wrong you are.**

Blake Eastman says everyone carries a mental model of behaviour built from past interactions, pop science and cultural biases. Before you can get better, you have to see where that model fails. The next step is behavioural awareness: noticing shifts rather than rushing to assign meaning. A head nod, for example, is usually just social coordination — 'I'm listening' — not proof of interest. Only by watching someone's nods over months could you tell genuine interest from politeness. He says the real work is video work: breaking a 20-second clip down frame by frame until people see where their snap judgments came from.

**• Know whether you're a literal or a contextual reader.**

'Shane, how are you?' can be said three ways. Some people hear no difference; others over-read every tonal shift. Eastman is the second type: his team isn't allowed to send him a one-word reply, because a bare 'yes' reads to him as anger. He needs a 'yes' plus an emoji or GIF. Clashes in organisations often come down to hyper-literal and hyper-contextual people misreading each other. That's why he likes personal 'operating manuals' that lay out your quirks up front.

**• Trust lives on a bell curve of expected behaviour.**

Behaviour far outside what society expects reads as untrustworthy: eyes darting constantly, or staring dead-on while recalling an emotional memory, when glancing away first would look more genuine. Eastman aims for conversations three standard deviations to the right — topics people rarely discuss — with behaviour that matches the interest. Trust triggers are also personal. One executive never trusted anyone who didn't shake his hand first, because his father taught him that at 12.

**• Most people only update when shown they were wrong.**

In training, he has executives predict someone's behaviour, then reveals they were completely off and why. After enough of those misses, they start questioning their lens. Leaders often don't see their own impact. One loves a direct report but delivers feedback that rips them apart. His fix is the funeral exercise: imagine everyone you've worked with at your funeral. What stories do you want told? Then he holds you to behaviour that matches.

**• Record yourself — and record your audience.**

Arguing couples remember the same event wildly differently, and video lands 'somewhere in the middle.' He says the observer effect fades in about ten minutes. For three years he recorded the audience at every third presentation he gave. 'How did my presentation go? Let's see the audience.' His coaching starts by getting people as comfortable as possible, because people are reliably at their best when most at ease. Only then does he layer in technique. Without work video, he suggests recording yourself with a friend who shows unconditional positive regard — that's how you should be at work.

**• On dates, tell stories rather than ask questions.**

In 2008, Eastman paid Craigslist volunteers $50 each for 30-minute recorded dates in a New York restaurant and got about 300 applications. The dates that looked best to viewers weren't the best. The slightly awkward ones with more depth produced deeper connection. Viewers also projected their biases: when the woman was more conventionally attractive, they assumed she wasn't interested. A story like 'the craziest thing just happened' creates far more threads of connection than question-and-answer. He warns against 'performance storytelling,' as opposed to telling a story the way you would to friends.

**• Expose bluffers with fake information.**

Deception is the hardest non-verbal problem, and he doubts any system will reliably detect it. With academics he suspects are bluffing, he invents a study — say, a 'Dillington study' from 2014 — and asks about it. When someone claims to have read it, he doesn't call them a liar. He notes that they'll trade accuracy for looking informed. Real experts say 'I don't know,' and volunteer, unprompted, when they've been wrong.

**• Machines will read behaviour, judged by perception, not meaning.**

His first big study involved 70 people manually coding 550,000 blinks, at a cost of maybe a quarter of a million dollars. Now his systems do it automatically. His company Behavioral Robotics maps facial wrinkles and movement against every spoken word. It can flag when someone shows little facial reaction at a moment that called for it. He's noticed exactly that since his father died of ALS two weeks ago, with people who don't react when told. The goal is to reveal blind spots, not to push people toward normal.

## EXAMPLES

**• The cheater on the double date.**

Within minutes Eastman was '100% confident' a new acquaintance was cheating: a predatory, lingering gaze at passing women and hints testing whether Eastman was 'one of us' — he knew about a certain poker game.

**• His uncle's divorce test.**

Couples who talk only in transactions — groceries, diapers, errands — and never ask each other questions are a huge red flag. Eastman says it has predicted every divorce, and it's let him check in with friends early.

**• The J.Crew pants.**

Teaching at CUNY, he wore the same pants daily and worried. A month in, he asked 140 students what hadn't changed about him. One noticed — a J.Crew employee. No one cares as much as you think.

**• 'I need a nose job.'**

After one of the flattest presentations he'd ever seen, he played a client her video. Her first comment was about her nose, not her delivery — that's where our attention goes.

**• The Rockefeller method.**

From Titan: Rockefeller asked why workers used nine or ten pieces of tar on each oil barrel and had them test how few would

do. Each quarter Eastman asks where he's using more than he needs, such as SaaS bills that can be renegotiated.

## OTHER RELEVANT

- **Ask predictive questions.**
  'Would you invite this person to dinner with your closest friends?' gets honest answers where 'rate them 1–10' doesn't.
- **Five passages per book.**
  A professor's only assignment was five highlights and why they matter. Eastman still uses colour-coded Kindle highlights.
- **Make it about others.**
  Like carrying the crew's stands in unasked: you can never measure the return on a social interaction — just don't expect one.

# Simple Things You Can Do to Become a Better Listener | Carolyn Coughlin | Knowledge Project Podcast

Guest: Carolyn Coughlin
Date: 2023-01-24 · Duration: 1:32:57
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNyaaUF0hwE

## KEYPOINTS

**• Adults keep developing — in how they make sense of things.**

Developmental coach Carolyn Coughlin describes adult development theory as a map. Its big insight, introduced close to 60 years ago, was that people who look fully grown keep changing how they construct meaning. A child sees an angry face and asks, 'Am I in trouble?' Later, an adult asks, 'Have I hurt someone? Am I bad?' Later still: 'I wonder what's going on for that person' — no longer fused with the face. The map helps when we find ourselves, in Robert Kegan's phrase, 'in over our heads' and need to grow into our context. That growth happens better in company.

**• 'Have to' versus 'want to' changes the experience.**

About ten years ago, Coughlin was travelling the world during the most exciting stretch of her career while her husband, a teacher, was home with their three children. She felt torn. A friend noticed she always said 'I have to get home' or 'I need to check on the kids.' Language doesn't just express meaning; it shapes it. She felt a tightness in her body when 'have to' was coming, and deliberately switched to 'want to.' It seemed almost silly, but it changed her relationship to her role in her family and helped her tell apart what she actually wanted. Shane's version: 'I choose to.' Speaking as if you're choosing eventually becomes seeing it as a choice.

**• Balance is a static scale; a mosaic shifts.**

Work-life balance implies one static, sustainable point on an old-fashioned scale. Shane notes that it's out of balance the moment you reach it. Coughlin pictures standing in the middle of a seesaw, balancing constantly with your legs. A mosaic holds health, community and family too, with pieces growing and shrinking. Rather than impose a new metaphor, she asks clients how the scale feels, then nudges. The catch: you have to step back to see a mosaic's beauty. When life is pressing, all you see is the mess.

**• Watch for identity habits of language.**

Phrases like 'I am just this way,' 'I'm the sort of person who answers within five minutes,' or 'So-and-so is always like this' quietly limit us. In a dispute with a neighbour building next to her house, Coughlin caught herself saying 'I would never do that.' It reinforced an identity — transparent, other-focused — that serves her well. It also stops her standing up for herself. Shane adds that 'I'm not the type of person who…' builds an arbitrary hierarchy that separates us from others. Coughlin argues that separation severs exactly the trust that hard, unpredictable problems require.

**• In complex systems, create conditions rather than force change.**

People, teams and families are complex adaptive systems. Push directly and the system pushes back, as families do when one member changes. First understand the current patterns, then nudge: family dinners create conditions for conversation. Clear the fridge of temptations, or keep light hand weights by your computer. A gym membership is a direct intervention that often fails — which is why gyms sell 12-month memberships in November and December. The people around you are conditions too, but no guarantee.

**• Listening to win, to fix, and to learn.**

Listening to win means making the other person wrong: 'That's not true, you look great.' Listening to fix means taking their problem and solving it. Listening to learn means getting beneath the words and reflecting them back. When her twins fought, Coughlin would say, 'It looks like you're really upset because he's relying on you for everything — is that right?' and watch her daughter's whole body breathe out. Listening is contagious. Feeling truly seen is one of the most extraordinary experiences a person can have, and it's itself a condition for learning to listen.

**• Listen for what's subject and what's object.**

Coughlin trains coaches in Kegan's subject–object theory. 'Subject' is what you're fused with — the water you swim in. 'Object' is what you can hold out and examine, like a value you can see shaping your choices. That means hearing every word or phrase and wondering what the person actually means, assuming your interpretation is probably wrong. For the body, a coach can simply ask, 'Where do you feel that?' Fifteen years ago she'd have made something up. Now she knows tension in her jaw signals stress or something she's dreading.

**• Ask 'How could I be wrong?'**

It's her favourite perspective-taking habit. Most of the time we don't even consider that we might be wrong. This question assumes we are, at least about another person's view, and turns that into curiosity. Asked as a group — 'How could we be wrong?' — it works like a premortem. Seeing the world as it is also means practising discomfort and resisting the 'action urge' to escape it, like training a muscle in a safe setting.

## EXAMPLES

**• Shuffling around waiting.**

A client trying to let go of achievement-driven worth described not adding value as 'shuffling around aimlessly' waiting for a prescription, as she had while injured. Exploring who she was when shuffling around became the work.

**• Why admin staff resisted the office.**

One office head pushing a return found the resistance came from administrative staff with commutes of over an hour each way, while professionals took short Ubers across Manhattan and worked en route.

**• The remote firm's check-in.**

Fully remote since 2011, Coughlin's firm starts every meeting with each person answering a question. Then the group steps back to scan for themes, outliers and what wasn't said. Clients adopted it. She asks how often a meeting leader stops to ask, 'What's not being said?'

- **'Why do I do this?'**
  A coach noticed her habitual question sent her hunting for what was wrong with her, often to a dead end. Questions direct attention, so she now borrows better ones, including children's.

## OTHER RELEVANT

- **Polarities need both poles.**
  Following Barry Johnson's work, centralise versus decentralise, or my needs versus others' — over time you need both; unlike the highway-or-back-roads choice.
- **Being on top of everything steals presence.**
  Inbox zero and a clean house were partly about wanting to feel 'done' and seeming reliable — she conflated answering every email with respect.
- **Success is presence.**
  Not great ideas, but that in her presence, others could be more fully themselves.

# The Influence Expert: 7 Ways to Get People to Do What You Want (Even When They Don't Want To)

Guest: Robert Cialdini
Date: 2021-10-19 · Duration: 1:08:46
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aO4RC70qU1U

## KEYPOINTS

**• Influence points to principles that are really there; manipulation fakes them.**

Cialdini's seven principles work because they usually point people in a sensible direction. If genuine experts endorse something, or many people like you are choosing it, that's a reasonable shortcut to a good decision. Ethical influence simply highlights a principle that already exists in the situation, which Cialdini calls not just ethical but commendable. Manipulation counterfeits it: lying with statistics to suggest a crowd is behind something, or presenting a celebrity as an authority. The levers are the same; whether they're real decides the ethics.

**• Reciprocation: give first, and make it meaningful to the other person.**

Every human society teaches that we must repay what we've been given, which is what makes giving first safe. In a study at McDonald's restaurants in Colombia and Brazil, children who got a balloon on the way in, rather than on the way out, came with families who bought 25% more food. In another fast-food test, a free key ring raised spending 12%, but a small cup of yogurt raised it 24%, because hungry customers valued it. Gifts work best when tailored to the person's needs and given close to the request. Free useful information is the cheapest gift, but if it's really a pitch for your product, people see it as a device, not a favor.

**• Concessions get reciprocated too: ask big, then retreat.**

Asked to give blood every six weeks for two years, almost everyone refused. When researchers then retreated to 'would you give one unit tomorrow?', agreement rose from 33% to 55%, and observers confirmed people actually showed up. Simply offering both options side by side didn't work as well; the person has to say no so you can visibly concede. Cialdini says the Cuban Missile Crisis was resolved the same way. The public story was that Khrushchev blinked, but archives at the Kennedy Library later revealed a secret trade: Soviet missiles out of Cuba, US missiles out of Turkey. He thinks the false 'never compromise' lesson misled a generation of leaders.

**• Liking rests on real similarity and genuine compliments.**

In email negotiations, 30% of pairs deadlocked and walked away with nothing. When negotiators first shared personal details like hobbies, hometown and college major, deadlocks fell to 6%, and what mattered was how many things they had in common, not how much they shared. Today's public profiles let you find real common ground ahead of time. Joe Girard, named the world's greatest salesperson by Guinness for about 12 years, sold an average of six cars a day. Every customer got a card every month that said only 'I like you.' We like people who like us, and Girard meant it.

**• Social proof is strongest when people are uncertain, and trends beat snapshots.**

In Beijing restaurants, labeling dishes as 'one of our most popular items' raised their orders 13–20%. First-time visitors, the most uncertain diners, were influenced the most. Seeing peers act also signals that something is achievable: Opower showed households their energy use compared with similar neighbors, and Cialdini says it prevented 30 billion pounds of $CO_2$ emissions. A rising number (market share going from 30% to 35% to 40%) persuades more than a static one, because people project the trend forward.

**• Be an authority, not just in authority, and put the evidence first.**

Pulling rank gets compliance but provokes workarounds; that's power, not influence. Genuine expertise persuades. Testimonials from audio experts raised sales of a Bose music system 15%, measured through the phone number printed in the ad, and Cialdini's team moved them from the bottom of the ad to the top so their credibility colored every line that followed. Peer testimonials work the same way and also belong up front.

**• Scarcity works through loss aversion, and you can frame what people stand to lose.**

Losing something weighs about twice as much as gaining the same thing. For the Bose ad, the word 'New' at the top signaled uncertainty and a reason to wait. Changing it to 'Hear what you've been missing' raised sales 45%, and adding the testimonials took the total to 60%. A study of 6,700 e-commerce A/B tests found the top three drivers of conversion were limited supply, social proof and limited-time offers. Without artificial scarcity, highlight what's truly unique, even if it's only a combination of features no rival offers.

**• Commitment and unity: get an active yes, and invoke a shared identity.**

Gordon's restaurant in Chicago had 30% no-shows. The receptionist changed 'Please call if you have to cancel' to 'Will you please call…?' and paused for a yes; no-shows fell 67% and stayed down. Managers can end meetings by asking 'Will you be able to complete this by next time?' Unity goes further than similarity; it means being 'of us.' A student who said 'I'm a student here too' before asking for United Way donations raised 400% more.

## EXAMPLES

**• Ask for advice, not opinions.**

Asking for an opinion turns people into critics. Asking for advice makes them partners: they like the idea more and give more constructive input.

**• 'Tim.'**

A grumpy colleague refused to share data for Cialdini's grant application due the next day, citing 'your poor time management.' Cialdini replied, 'We've been in the same psychology department for 12 years.' He had the data that afternoon.

**• Exploiters should be exploited.**

When a free fire-safety visit with a gift extinguisher turns into a hard sell for an overpriced alarm system, reframe the gift as a trick. Show them the door and keep the extinguisher.

**• The doctor who isn't.**

'I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV' sold medicine anyway. Ask two questions: is this person a real expert, and do they gain

from recommending it?

## OTHER RELEVANT

- **Defend against liking.**
  If you like a car salesperson more than 30 minutes warrants, notice the free drinks, compliments and claimed common ground. You're driving away the car, not the salesperson.
- **Spot fake reviews.**
  Watch for heavy storytelling and lots of verbs with little about the product itself. Ratings between 4.2 and 4.7 convert best; above that, people get suspicious.
- **Help people change course without losing face.**
  Tell them their earlier choice made sense with the information they had, then offer the new information. Use the same test on yourself.
- **Punish cheaters.**
  When a company is caught faking popularity, say so publicly so manipulation costs them at the bottom line.

# Secrets to Healthy Relationships | Esther Perel | The Knowledge Project #71

Guest: Esther Perel
Date: 2019-12-10 · Duration: 1:18:04
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atXKntdX2UY

## KEYPOINTS

**• There's a difference between surviving and living.**

Psychotherapist Esther Perel grew up among Holocaust survivors in Belgium, and saw two groups. Some were afraid, untrusting and weighed down by survivor guilt — they hadn't died, but they weren't living. Others seized life 'with a vengeance' as if to say, 'I didn't survive for nothing.' To her, they understood the erotic as an antidote to death. Hope requires imagination: the ability to project yourself into something better and anticipate it, whether in a camp or a relationship. Perel admits to a chronic sense of dread that everything can stop at any moment. She turns that into a reason to savour the present.

**• Trading passion for stability trades one fiction for another.**

The West believes in permanence and predictability. Philosophies of impermanence see life as constant flux, making stability itself a fiction. Seen that way, both passion and security are products of our imagination. That gives couples far more flexibility in keeping their relationship alive. The stories we tell shape what we experience: 'things never change' and 'things always change' create different ways of loving, working and living.

**• Change the story and you change the relationship.**

Perel's goal for a first session is that a couple leaves with a different story than the one they brought. One couple arrived with her as the problem — mean, abusive, cursing. He turned out to be 'the little prince' who could do no wrong, so any request from her felt like an indictment. His fragility had been shaped by years of being good to a sad mother. Her homework for him was simple reflective listening: when she asks for oranges, say 'I know you'd like me to bring oranges' instead of 'When did you last bring me strawberries?' Acknowledging a request isn't admitting fault. Stories are embodied: change the story and people breathe, sit and listen differently.

**• The form of a fight matters more than its content.**

Arguments follow three choreographies. Fight-fight: both partners attack, in chronic bickering. Fight-flee: one pursues while the other withdraws or stonewalls. Flee-flee: both close their doors and stop talking for two days. A couple that attacks will attack about everything, so the work is on the rigidity of the dance, not the topic. Couples grow apart either through high conflict — a blame-and-defend loop where each holds the other responsible for their misery — or through disengagement, with no bids for connection. The difference itself isn't the problem; a secure partner can live beside a vegetarian without needing them to change.

**• Behind every criticism is a wish.**

'Why don't you ever ask about my day?' means 'I wish you would.' Saying the wish means putting yourself out there, where you can be refused, so in an insecure relationship we name what the other didn't do instead. Shane suggests that's selfish. Perel says it's closer to feeling unworthy: 'I'm not sure I deserve this, or that you love me enough to want to.' Criticism is a protective device against being hurt.

**• Honesty is contextual — it can be caring or cruel.**

Ask what honesty means in this relationship, at this moment, and what the other person can do with it. 'I'm not attracted to you anymore' or 'I'd leave but I like our lifestyle' hands your partner a problem they can't fix. Intimacy as truth-telling — 'into-me-see' — is a recent Western idea. 'I think you're a slob' may be true but useless. 'You may be right, but you are alone,' Perel tells clients. Remember what you actually want: to be close, or to shrivel your partner?

**• Love seeks closeness; desire needs mystery.**

Love thrives on knowledge, predictability and narrowing the gaps. Desire is about owning the wanting, and thrives on curiosity, the unknown and freedom. For most of history, marriage was an economic enterprise and passion lived elsewhere; 'passionate marriage' was a contradiction. Modern couples run a grand experiment, seeking security and adventure in one place. Sex fades less from the act stopping than from a breakdown of imagination: it becomes the last chore on the list, like cutting a tomato instead of cooking a thoughtful meal. Waiting for it to be spontaneous doesn't work; long-term desire requires intention.

**• Invest in the couple to protect the family.**

For the first time in history, Perel says, the quality of the couple's relationship determines whether the family survives. Yet couples often come last, getting the 'leftovers' after work and children, while saving their best attention for friends at lunch. Studies show couples with rituals — a weekly drink, a monthly night away — fare better. And therapy works when each partner commits to doing something new regardless of the other. Like ping-pong, if the ball goes to a different corner, the other person has to move.

## EXAMPLES

**• Her mother surrendered to a camp.**

After a year hiding in the woods at 18, stealing eggs and potatoes, terrified of barking dogs, Perel's mother walked into a male labour camp so she'd at least know where she would wake up. Her father, who was in 14 camps, ran a potato-peel black market in the kitchen. They met on the road on liberation day and stayed in Belgium as illegal refugees for five years.

**• Conversation number 197.**

A couple stuck in the same rigid argument switched seats and played each other for 15 minutes. They knew each other's words by heart, and only then began to feel the other's experience.

**• IVF as a values clash.**

One partner wanted every medical option; the other, more religious, accepted fate. Framed as values about agency versus acceptance, it shifted from 'you bad' to 'you different.'

**• The lovers' email address.**

Some couples create a separate email account just for songs, jokes and sweet thoughts — nothing about kids, money or logistics — to keep seeing each other as lovers.

## OTHER RELEVANT

- **Security is a harbour and freedom to play.**
  Like a child resting on a parent's lap then running off to play hide and seek, a secure partner can come back for anchoring and leave without worry.
- **Ask how they played as a child.**
  Hearing her husband describe a different character every day in childhood games showed Perel how revealing — and rarely asked — that question is.
- **End relationships consciously.**
  Longevity isn't the only marker of success; parting with goodwill and owning your share shapes how you start the next relationship.

# The Negotiating MASTERCLASS | Chris Voss and Shane Parrish

Guest: Chris Voss
Date: 2019-10-14 · Duration: 1:23:04
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHjUApypNsU

## KEYPOINTS

**• Let the other side go first; it's faster.**

Voss's biggest surprise about real negotiation is that leading with what you want creates chaos and wastes time arguing point and counterpoint. Letting the other side talk first gets you information you'd otherwise be guessing at. He reads Stephen Covey's 'seek first to understand' less as warm advice than as a 'mercenary's tool' for reaching your outcome faster. The only reason not to go first is a fragile ego. If there's any strength in your position, 'you've got to let the other side go first.'

**• Control your emotions with curiosity, a deliberate tone, and trust in a process.**

Genuine curiosity about why someone is acting 'crazy' instantly stops your own negativity from taking over. Saying 'you've got this' out loud in a calm voice can actually calm you down. Voss describes three natural styles, matching fight, flight and make friends. Assertive, 'direct and honest' types like him come across so bluntly that a colleague said dealing with him was 'like getting hit in the face with a brick.' Analysts use the calm late-night-DJ voice. Accommodators smile as they talk; negotiator Charlie Beaudoin wrote 'smile — they can feel it in your voice' on the team board.

**• A yes means little without a plan for how to carry it out.**

Fake yeses are easy to give. Voss learned that a telecom company he pitched found 50% of the deals it signed never got carried out. So aim for the other side to propose the solution. Push back on bad terms with 'How am I supposed to do that?' and close with 'That was brilliant, let's do that.' People follow through on their own ideas with fewer reminders. Treat time as the resource at stake in every negotiation, including ones with colleagues.

**• Your fallback plan becomes your ceiling, and opening high backfires.**

Harvard's BATNA, your best alternative to a negotiated agreement, is sound in theory. But people stop pushing once they beat it and leave money on the table, and those who think they have no fallback freeze up before they start. Hostage negotiators never had one. Instead, set a lofty goal and challenge yourself to beat it. Anchoring high starts with a lie: one of his Georgetown students demanded a big jump from $85K to $110K, got it, then learned a peer hired at the same time earned $125K. A founder Voss coached opened with 'I've got a lousy proposition for you' and won a third of the business for her husband.

**• Clear away deal-breakers first by naming the accusations against you.**

Voss says fear blocks deals three to nine times more than benefits make them, and cites a figure that 70% of buying decisions are about avoiding loss. His preparation sheet starts with a no-spin summary of the facts that the other side would agree with. Then list their unspoken fears and say them aloud: 'I'm sure we seem like bullies.' Real estate agents insist 'nobody's ever accused us,' but buyers routinely warn each other that agents only want the commission. Make a list of what you'd like to deny, and name each item instead. Denial makes it worse; naming it clears their heads.

**• Labels open people up more than questions do.**

A question makes people stop, think and phrase a careful answer; analysts may reply 'let me get back to you in a week.' A label like 'It seems like you have some next steps in mind' seems to bypass that, and one student called it 'unlocking the floodgates of truth-telling.' In his Georgetown MBA classes, labels proved the most widely useful tool, raising effectiveness 30–33% by Voss's estimate. 'Sounds like there's more here than meets the eye' draws out problems that 'What's the problem?' doesn't. Use empathy not because you're soft but because it 'saves time.'

**• Look for the loss, and ask questions people can answer with no.**

Hostage negotiators were trained to 'look for the loss' before Kahneman and Tversky showed that losses weigh about twice as much as gains. People aren't afraid to fail; they're afraid to fail in a new way, which is why nobody got fired for hiring IBM. Saying no makes people feel safe. Rephrase 'Would you like to try this?' as 'Are you against this?'; Voss says one client reported a 100% success rate. His son learned that saying no relaxed his father: Voss would refuse before the sentence was finished, then ask him to explain again.

**• Mirrors and calibrated questions make people think, and that includes your kids.**

Repeating someone's last one to three words makes them restate what they meant, often hearing for themselves how unreasonable it sounded. When a teenager asks for the car on Friday, Voss suggests a label and a question: 'It seems like you think you don't have to earn that privilege… How can I give you the car on the weekend if you're not responsible during the week?' His son went straight to the vice-principal whenever he broke the uniform rules and listed his own faults; he was waved back to class with a free pass. Voss's view is that these are human-to-human skills, not parenting tricks, and they work for good relationships when used to understand rather than manipulate.

## EXAMPLES

**• The suicide hotline review.**

A year after training, a caller thanked Voss for doing a great job. His supervisor called the call horrible: if they're congratulating you, you're way off track. Negotiation skills fade, so Voss recommitted to practice.

**• One black shoe, one brown.**

After a merger, two firms split the difference: they bought a $200 million building worth $800 million but only for a learning center, keeping the old headquarters for the sake of image. Voss says it wasted hundreds of millions and drove away executives who never agreed.

**• Never be mean to someone who can hurt you by doing nothing.**

Even a licensing clerk who just quotes a price decides whether your request goes on top of the pile, gets walked down the hall, or ends up in the trash.

**• The power of deference.**

Voss cites an older, richer New Yorker who calls Donald Trump 'Mr. President' and gets listened to. Deference works up, down and sideways because the other person knows you don't have to show it.

## OTHER RELEVANT

- **Replace trust with predictability.**
  Past behavior predicts future behavior. The frog should have towed the scorpion on a twig.
- **Pay at the high end of expectations.**
  Underpaid people stay anxious, and overpaid ones take it for granted. ‘Run to trouble’ to work on a company’s biggest problems and grow fastest.
- **Advice to his younger self.**
  Keep your positions but say them more nicely, the way Reagan was firm but likable.
- **Get back into flow.**
  Ten minutes of meditation, moving around, or even a forced laugh can reset a tired mind.