Mel Robbins Keypoints — Communication & Influence

Mel Robbins Keypoints

Episodes in this pack: 13

Former CIA Spy: How to Read Anyone, Think Clearly, and Protect Yourself

Guest: Jonna Mendez
Date: 2026-08-17 · Duration: 1:05:39
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duWUa9Md_tU

KEYPOINTS

• A life you think is "cast in stone" can change almost overnight

Jonna grew up in Wichita, Kansas, expecting to marry, have kids and work with books. A friend's wedding in Germany turned into never going home: she cold-called American banks from a Frankfurt station phone book (four calls; Chase Manhattan said come in), then married a CIA officer. Her summary: nobody else is going to change your life but you.

• Being excellent at a job is what gets you permission to do bigger work

She joined the CIA as a secretary, the role it hired women for, and rose to the director's secretary, a dead end with "no up." When she mentioned leaving for the Smithsonian, her boss steered her into agency photography training. Her rule from a male-dominated field: if you can do the work excellently, they will let you do the work.

• A mid-career pivot isn't starting over, because you carry every skill with you

Falling for India on a temporary photo trip, she took the only opening there, in disguise. The switch looked unwise but made her someone who could do photography, disguise and some forgery, the path to Chief of Disguise. Mel's point: each pivot built on the last. Jonna admits changes that cost salary or a move are genuinely hard, but calls change "the most refreshing thing any of us can do."

• People betray their country for four reasons: MICE

Recruiters (all nicknamed "James") had to find a flaw before the pitch. Reasons boil down to Money (in her experience, Americans), Ideology (Soviet recruits whose families were broken by Stalin), Compromise (blackmail, rarely used because it worked poorly) and Ego, "the big one": people passed over, sure their boss is stupid, nursing grudges.

• Charisma alone doesn't make a good spy, because the job offers no applause

The agency wanted officers who could charm a stranger at a bar, but those who needed constant praise didn't flourish: there were "no attaboys," no thank-yous, only the next job. Her top lesson from 30 years: you never accomplish anything alone.

• Good disguise is about changing every small detail, not just a wig

Her team described a target in fine detail (hair, makeup, ring, watch) and changed every element. Men were harder, so they added cologne, a gold chain or an extra open button and removed the ring. Officers wore a hated shirt from the back of the closet with a written character sketch, then were tested by eating lunch unrecognized beside their bosses in the CIA cafeteria.

• Courage isn't a trait you're born with; it comes from confidence built by preparation

Courage comes from knowing what you're doing and how you can affect a situation, which in the CIA meant near-constant training. "If I can have courage, anyone can." You build it by confronting things that scare you, including conversations.

• Intuition sounds like a clear statement; fear sounds like a stream of what-ifs

Jonna tracks hunches about people "like a newspaper story" to check if she was right. Her and Mel's rule of thumb: intuition gives a clear direction that pulls you; anxiety is questioning and noise. In the alley, fear said turn back; intuition said walk.

• Liars tend to try too hard, but eye contact is not a reliable tell

Her signs: nervousness, trying too hard to convince you, bouncing around in the story, refusing to let it go. Eye contact often breaks down, but she doesn't treat it as a lie detector. These are an officer's observations, not a validated test.

• When the world feels overwhelming, breathe and take small steps on one fight

Jonna worries about the planet and next generation: ingenuity exists, the will doesn't, and "nobody is calling balls and strikes," so individuals must pick a fight to support. Mel counters that most people are good and want to work together.

EXAMPLES

• The Mont Blanc pen camera and the microdot

A Mont Blanc-style pen took about 100 photos, letting an officer taking notes capture a Soviet meeting's agenda, the intentions satellites can't see. A microdot shrinks a page about 800 times to the size of a period; the agent reads it through a rice-grain lens held to the sun.

• Fooling President George H.W. Bush and the Secret Service

Wearing a colleague's face as a full-face mask ("I dropped 20 years"), she briefed Bush, a former CIA director, after softening him up with photos of his own old disguises. He circled her chair and couldn't spot it. The mask is now in the CIA basement and featured at the International Spy Museum; the tech made "twins" to shake surveillance in Moscow and could change ethnicity or gender.

• The real Argo operation

Six Americans escaped the 1979 Tehran embassy takeover and hid with Canadian ambassador Ken Taylor. Tony Mendez obtained genuine Canadian passports and built a fake LA film company, with ads in The Hollywood Reporter and Variety and staff answering phones, so the six could pose as a location-scouting crew. George Tenet declassified it about 19 years later; George Clooney bought the rights after Brad Pitt's interest made Tony "raise the price."

• The Billy Joel tape at a controlled border

A smuggler drove a key defector across a border, with the man and his 5-year-old hidden under a modified back seat and his wife in the middle front seat. The guard liked the Billy Joel tape playing in the car and asked for it for his girlfriend. The driver handed it over and they drove through.

• Walking through 20 armed men in a Latin American alley

After a cigarette run and a shortcut, she met a group of drunk, armed young men who probably took her for a narcotics agent. Her training said turning back would signal something was wrong, so she walked through them showing confidence, and later couldn't even light the cigarette.

- **The "mattress box" in hostile-interrogation training**
  In a 3-day course at the Farm, on half a cup of rice and a cup of water a day, the claustrophobic Jonna stood in a box too narrow to turn her shoulders. Using advice from Vietnam POWs, she escaped in her mind to the Flint Hills tallgrass of Kansas, and that got her through.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Build an "escape hatch" place in your mind before you need it**
  Jonna thinks anyone can use the POW technique, even for everyday stress. Pick a vivid real place with warm associations. Her invented sandy beach didn't work, but a real memory did.
- **If you've hit a ceiling, aim higher than you think you can**
  Her advice to women who feel underestimated: you know yourself better than anyone, so aim high and climb one step at a time, even if you might not get there.
- **Practice courage deliberately**
  Make a list of what scares you, including people and hard conversations, and approach them one at a time. Courage is exercised, not found.
- **Reinvention has no age limit**
  Jonna remarried at 46 and had her only child at 47, mid-career; at 81, Mel insists she still has another chapter to write. Her view: you end up where you're supposed to if you keep building confidence in your own ideas.

How to Master Any Conversation, Communicate with Confidence, and Deal With Difficult People

Guest: Oz Pearlman
Date: 2026-07-06 · Duration: 1:06:42
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dz23H7Cgylw

KEYPOINTS

• Skip the three autopilot questions.
Mentalist Oz Pearlman says 'Where are you from?' and 'What do you do?' put people's brains on autopilot because they've answered them a thousand times. Instead, notice something specific and ask about a choice they made: 'Those glasses are so unique, where did you get them, and what made you pick those?' People get to tell you something no one else thought to ask.

• The people you remember are the ones who made you feel interesting.
Think of the one person you clicked with at a party of 20 or 30. Usually they made you laugh, told good stories, or went past the surface to a shared interest. Mostly, they drew things out of you rather than talking about themselves.

• Turn nerves into preparation, and research the person beforehand.
'It's not cheating. It's called being prepared.' Oz says he wasn't especially nervous before performing at an event where President Obama spoke, because he converts nervousness into homework. He'd spent years thinking about his 'elevator pitch' for a moment with a president.

• In the first seconds, answer the other person's silent questions and get rid of the tension.
As a 14-year-old strolling magician in a restaurant, he noticed diners asking themselves in a split second: Who is this? Does he work here? Is he any good? Will he embarrass me? Does he want money? His job was to check off each one in as few words and actions as possible, then flip the dynamic so they didn't want him to leave.

• Frame your ask so a 'no' is hard to give.
With Obama he didn't say 'Can I show you a trick?' He asked, 'Are you ready for the most amazing thing you've seen? Not today, not this week, but this month. Do you have 30 seconds, sir?' That set a high bar and asked for a tiny amount of time. Once someone says '30 seconds,' you're already in, and it runs longer.

• Lead with what's in it for them.
He calls this inverting the value proposition. Don't tell a busy person 'I need time with you.' Walk with them down the hallway: 'I know you're really busy. Can I walk with you for 30 seconds? There's something important I want on your radar.' Better yet, use benefit language: 'I want to save you a gigantic headache because I see an issue brewing.' You don't need a 30-minute Zoom to make your case.

• Fear of rejection stops more people than rejection itself.
Oz was told 'Get out of here, kid' at table after table, and he says it crushed him. What he learned at 14 was to separate himself from the role. 'They don't know me.' They knew 'Oz the magician,' so the hurt went to that persona. He argues most people never actually get rejected, because fear stops them before they try.

• 'Fast-forward your feelings' to get through dread.
Dread usually feels worse than the task, and a day later you barely remember it. Feelings fade with nothing but time passing. So before something you dread, rate it 1–10, picture how you'll feel in 24 hours (about a 2), and decide to feel that way now. He says doing this a few times shows you 'all it is is perception.'

• Remembering names is a learnable three-step habit: listen, repeat, reply.
Repeat the name twice right away ('Caroline? Did I say it right?'). He says that alone makes you about 90% less likely to forget it in the next 15 seconds. Then lock it in by replying with a compliment tied to a visual ('Mel, I love your glasses'), a spelling question ('John with an H?'), or a link to someone you already know with that name.

• Trust your first instinct about whether someone's being straight with you.
There's no special lie-detecting trick. Oz says his first read has been right often enough to be 'a statistical advantage.' People talk themselves out of it, for instance about a first date that feels off. Mel calls intuition pattern recognition. Oz agrees, and says acting on it and gathering results is what improves the pattern.

EXAMPLES

• How 'President Obama opened for me'
Oz walked up and thanked Obama 'for the gift.' Obama asked 'What gift?' as 99 of 100 people would, and Oz said that since he performed 15 minutes later, Obama had technically opened for him. Obama laughed, recognized him from his Aaron Rodgers bit, and agreed to 30 seconds.

• 'Say hello to Marty for me'
Oz handed Obama a business card and asked him to think of someone he'd talk to in the next week, then told him to change his mind, so he'd later say 'how could he have known?' The back of the card read 'Say hello to Marty for me.'

• The landscaper call
Oz demonstrated with a dreaded call to a landscaper: rate the dread (a 9), set a phone alarm for 24 hours labeled 'dread talking to landscaper,' use Mel's 5 Second Rule to make the call, then check the rating when the alarm goes off. It's a 2, 'a one if I even remember it.'

• From teen restaurant magician to pro
He needed money for expensive magic tricks, talked his way into a strolling magician job half a mile from home, and hand-cut his own business cards. That led to kids' birthday parties and corporate events. Repeated rejection at tables built his resilience.

• Reading Mel's page number
In a live demonstration he narrowed Mel's chosen page down to 217, standing for February 17, the date she was thinking of. He's clear that his act is 'tricks' and that the illusion isn't the useful part. The people skills behind it are.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Better openers**
  Notice one specific thing, compliment it, and ask about the choice behind it. Save job and hometown questions for later, if at all.
- **Contact notes for names**
  After events, Oz writes notes in his calendar or an app about the people he met. Make a contact for your coffee shop or restaurant and describe staff so you can greet them by name.
- **The 24-hour dread alarm**
  Rate it, set the alarm, do it in five seconds, re-rate it tomorrow. Repeat until your brain trusts that dread fades.
- **Hallway pitch**
  'I know you're busy. Can I walk with you for 30 seconds? I want to save you a headache.' State the benefit to them first.

How to Become More Confident, Influential, and Communicate Better with #1 Harvard Business Professor

Guest: Dr. Leslie K. John
Date: 2026-05-04 · Duration: 1:08:54
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5R7EOZ5AbHg

KEYPOINTS

• Undersharing is a bigger risk than oversharing for most people
Dr. Leslie K. John, a Harvard Business School professor and behavioural scientist who studies honesty, disclosure, trust and regret, says the usual advice to keep things private is backwards. She describes the undersharer's life as one of missed opportunities: friendships that never blossom, colleagues who never quite trust you, romances that don't deepen. Her book is Revealing: The Underrated Power of Oversharing.

• People trust the person who reveals something bad over the person who hides
In her studies, the majority preferred 'the devil they know' over someone who refused to answer, even when the answer was unflattering. The reason was distrust of the hider. Revealing something sensitive signals that you trust the listener not to make a fool of you, and people reciprocate that trust.

• Opening up is good business, not just good therapy
She starts executive classes by showing how revealing slightly sensitive things makes others trust you more, which helps in negotiations and hiring. When leaders admit difficulties, she says, people don't think they're incompetent; they trust them more and want to work for them.

• Expressing feelings helps you process stress
In an older study, preschoolers watched a mildly scary film while researchers filmed their faces and measured palm sweat. Children who showed more on their faces were physiologically calmer. By kindergarten, boys had begun holding feelings in, which she frames as cultural conditioning to be stoic.

• Being talkative is not the same as being revealing
She calls it the 'extroversion illusion'. John describes herself as introverted but forthcoming, while one of her most extroverted best friends struggles badly with vulnerability. A useful audit: how much of your conversation with someone is feelings versus logistics?

• Secrets aren't neutral; they're an open loop in your mind
Mel reads from page 85 of her book: the more often people think about their secrets, the more they report inauthenticity, lower relationship satisfaction and worse physical health. John says secrets keep you constantly ruminating on 'should I say it or not?'. She stresses some secrets should be kept.

• Every unspoken moment is a missed opportunity
Her example: your boss says 'great job on the presentation' and you say 'thanks'. You could say 'You have no idea what that means. I was super anxious, I'm proud of myself, and I'd love more chances to speak.' She isn't saying voice every thought, which 'would be chaos', but notice the disclosure decisions you make by default.

• Not opening up reinforces the story that everything is on you
Mel says a demonstration in the episode made her feel the weight of believing 'it's all up to me', a story she's working to change. John told her husband she was exhausted by daily small decisions and asked him to just decide; she mentions a friend whose Mother's Day request was to make zero decisions. Doing this well takes self-awareness.

• We weigh the wrong side of the disclosure decision
People almost always list only the risks of revealing and the comfort of staying quiet. They rarely consider the risks of not revealing or the benefits of speaking, so the decision is badly imbalanced from the start. Her matrix forces all four onto the page.

• Leaders who reveal can destigmatise
She points to Magic Johnson's HIV announcement at a time it was highly stigmatised; studies comparing testing before and after concluded he likely prompted about 900 additional people to get tested.

EXAMPLES

• The STD dating thought experiment
Choose between two dates: one admits to having had many STDs, the other refuses to answer. Across thousands of participants, about 65% chose the one who admitted it. Mel's instant reaction to the refuser: 'that's because you have an STD.'

• Hiring the person who admits failing
Asked about their worst grades on an application, one candidate admitted failing and another opted out. About 89% of people chose to hire the one who admitted it.

• Mel and Chris in couples therapy
After about 26 years of marriage, Mel and her more introverted husband started therapy four or five years ago. Learning to share what he was thinking and feeling brought them much closer; she realised they'd had 'completely different experiences' while 'just doing life together'. When Mel says she feels unattractive, his reassurance makes it lose its grip.

• John cried mid-talk and called out the room
Facing belligerent questioning while presenting her research, she stopped and said she was crying because they were being rude, adding that they had a reputation and it had to stop. It wasn't career suicide: a faculty member who was there wrote a supportive letter for her promotion about 10 years later, and friends who presented there afterwards found the group reasonable.

• The relationship that has run its course
Working the matrix live: the risks of revealing are hurt and pain. The risks of not revealing are staying where love isn't mutual and keeping both people from finding the right partner. The benefits of revealing are self-efficacy ('I can do hard things'), kindness, honesty and self-respect. Seen together, staying quiet looks unkind.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **The 'I feel… I need…' rule, and banish 'fine'**

  When someone asks about your day, complete two sentences: 'I feel ___' and 'I need ___'. 'I feel' matters most because a feeling invites care and isn't debatable the way a thought is. If you're too tired, defer honestly: 'I'm exhausted and don't want to talk yet, but thank you for asking.'

- **The four-part disclosure matrix**

  For a big decision, list risks of revealing, risks of not revealing, benefits of revealing and benefits of staying quiet. She teaches it at Harvard and says practising on mundane decisions first makes it easier.

- **Turn and reveal**

  When something triggers a feeling, such as watching your kids' sport, say it and ask a question back. Mel: 'I really miss being on a team. Did you play team sports?'

- **The regret research**

  Cornell psychologist Tom Gilovich found 76% of life regrets are things people didn't do or say. Palliative care nurse Bronnie Ware found 'I wish I'd shared my feelings more' was the third most common deathbed regret.

How to Communicate With Confidence & Ease (From Harvard Business School’s #1 Professor)

Guest: Dr. Alison Wood Brooks
Date: 2025-10-30 · Duration: 1:12:49
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yCqhY1D-VE

KEYPOINTS

- **Every relationship is a repeated series of conversations, so small improvements add up.**
  Harvard Business School professor Alison Wood Brooks frames conversation as 'a series of tiny choices' you make in every moment. If each conversation gets a little better, your love life, parenting, friendships and work all improve. It isn't about you alone. It's 'you plus the other person and what you can build together.'
- **Her framework is TALK: Topics, Asking, Levity, Kindness.**
  It grew out of her years teaching negotiation at HBS and research on emotions in conversation. She notes that even people at a school with an 11% acceptance rate find conversation hard, because it's cognitively overwhelming: you're listening, processing and coming up with something to say all at once. Prepping ahead reduces that load.
- **Topics: prep a few before you go.**
  We spend time showering, dressing and booking the restaurant, but only about 10% of people think ahead about what to talk about. In her research, people who brainstormed possible topics for even 30 seconds had better conversations than those who didn't, even if they never used the topics. Prepping also makes hard conversations easier to start. Most days you know who you'll see, so you can personalize.
- **Small talk is a launch pad, not the destination.**
  Small talk isn't 'evil or bad,' just often unrewarding. Aim to climb the 'pyramid' to more tailored conversation: personal disclosure or something the other person is excited about. A good launch question: 'What are you good at that you really hate doing?'
- **Asking: more and better questions, especially follow-ups.**
  Our inability to understand others' perspectives is a huge barrier to connection and to resolving conflict, and questions are the antidote. In her 'never-ending follow-up questions' exercise, each question builds on the last answer. Brooks also calls it a 'gigantic red flag' if a date asks you nothing after two or three dates.
- **Get credit for listening by saying what you heard out loud.**
  Listening has three steps: take in their words, voice and body language; think about it; then show them you heard. Nodding and eye contact are 'Listening 101' and can be faked. 'Listening 201' is using words: 'I heard you say this, and it seemed like you feel anxious about it. Can you tell me more?' She says this is where real charisma, competence and influence come from.
- **Levity is the antidote to boredom.**
  Levity includes humor but also 'unfunny moments of warmth.' Conversations fail not only through conflict but often by being dull. Laughter and lightness keep people engaged.
- **Admitting you don't understand can raise your status.**
  Saying 'You've lost some of us. Can you back up and define this?' shows confidence, signals you'll be honest when you don't know something, and brings everyone along. Brooks reminds people with low status in a room that everyone's status shifts constantly.
- **Kindness is effortful and constant, especially with people you live with.**
  Being kind to the person you see every day is a 'big ask' because stress drains your resources. It means getting past self-centeredness to consider what they want to talk about. With colleagues, ask 'What are you excited about lately? How can I be helpful?'
- **Interruptions aren't all bad, and nobody knows when to end a conversation.**
  On-topic interruptions, like finishing each other's sentences, are engaged and fun. Off-topic interruptions that hijack the conversation give interrupting a bad name. As for endings, people are almost always dissatisfied, wanting it longer or shorter, so accept the awkwardness: 'This was great. I can't wait for the next one. Bye.'

EXAMPLES

- **The never-ending follow-up demo**
  Brooks asked Mel what she had for breakfast (a smoothie), what was in it (protein powder, honey, two squeezed lemons, water), then what her dream breakfast would be. Mel said it depends on her mood: some days scrambled eggs, avocado and kimchi. Each question built on her last answer.
- **Topic prep help for aging parents**
  Mel says her calls with her parents are always 'How'd it go? How was golf?' A sister brainstormed better questions for people in their 70s in upstate New York with nine grandchildren—using an AI chat tool for ideas—then used those prompts to prep warmer conversations with their parents.
- **Mel's 'Are you listening?' fight**
  Mel turns her back while Chris talks, then repeats what he said word for word. He replies, 'I didn't ask if you heard me. I asked if you're listening.' Brooks says the issue is that her body language didn't match the listening she was doing in her head.
- **Walking out after 20 minutes**
  Brooks once excused herself to the restroom mid-date, looked in the mirror and decided she couldn't be with someone who, within 20 minutes, made her furious by showing no interest in her.
- **Eye-gaze experiment**
  People tend to look at the highest-status person, which makes others feel invisible. When group leaders deliberately spread their gaze evenly, lower-status members spoke up more later, without being cold-called ('Hey Sarah, we haven't heard from

you'), which Brooks calls mortifying.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Daily topic prep**
  Before the day starts, jot one or two topics for each person you'll see: your kids, your partner, colleagues. This is Brooks's single top takeaway.
- **Taming the person who holds court**
  For the 'Uncle Paulie' at family gatherings, use questions to pass the floor to others and an inclusive gaze to invite quieter people in. Brooks admits that as a big talker she has to work at giving others space.
- **When emotions run hot**
  Reframe or change the situation. It can take about 20 minutes for your body to calm down before a productive talk.
- **Colleague check-in questions**
  'What are you excited about lately?' 'What are you struggling with that I might help with?' These work by email and text as well as in person.

How to Talk to Difficult People: Proven Strategies to Stop Arguments & Feel Connected Again

Guest: Charles Duhigg
Date: 2025-07-03 · Duration: 1:03:16
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1AEf83W2W8

KEYPOINTS

• Every conversation is really one of three kinds.

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Charles Duhigg, author of The Power of Habit and Supercommunicators, says researchers can now watch the brain during conversation. They've found that most discussions mix three types. Practical conversations are about plans and problems, and the goal is a solution. Emotional conversations are about feelings, and the goal is empathy. Social conversations are about identity, how we see ourselves and others, and the goal is acknowledgment. All three are legitimate, but if two people are having different kinds at the same moment, they can't really hear each other.

• Social conversations are the most common, and hot topics live there.

Duhigg says statements like 'the way I see this as a mom…' or 'what's going on with Jim? He seemed weird in that meeting' are social conversations. Politics, religion and family opinions usually fall into this category too. Because the goal is acknowledgment, you don't need anyone to admit they voted wrong. You need to hear 'I hear that this matters to you and plays an important role in your life,' even if they then disagree.

• Super communicators ask far more questions, and deeper ones.

According to Duhigg, the best communicators ask 10 to 20 times as many questions as the average person. They're usually what psychologists call deep questions, which ask about someone's values, beliefs or experiences: 'This seems really meaningful to you. What is it about it that matters?' The answer also reveals whether the person is in an emotional, practical or social frame of mind.

• Loop for understanding to prove you're listening.

The technique has three steps: ask a question, ideally a deep one; repeat back what you heard in your own words; then ask, 'Did I get that right?' Duhigg says that last step asks permission to acknowledge that you were listening. Because of what he calls social reciprocity, people who feel heard become automatically more likely to listen in return. It feels awkward at first, but the brain quickly turns practised skills into habits.

• More evidence makes opinions more entrenched.

Duhigg says study after study shows that the more evidence you throw at someone, the more ingrained their view becomes, and shouting means nobody is listening. Most people don't believe anything 100%. Asked honestly, a Mets fan will admit they were terrible two seasons ago. The aim is to reach that gray area, where you can start to influence each other.

• Arguments turn toxic when we try to control the other person.

When we feel threatened, Duhigg says, we instinctively grab control of the person in front of us. We dictate topics ('I'm not talking about your mother'), timing ('I've got five minutes') and even their emotions ('you shouldn't be upset about that'). Better options are to control things together, such as when and where to talk and what's on or off the table, and to use the urge for control on yourself. Holding back a jab feels good and virtuous.

• Three rules for a hard conversation.

First, acknowledge upfront that it might be uncomfortable. Duhigg says research shows naming the discomfort lessens it, because we mostly avoid conversations out of anxiety about the unknown, the way 'I have some bad news' helps someone prepare. Second, state your goal, which is often to protect the relationship, and ask what the other person wants from the conversation. Third, loop for understanding. If either of you gets riled up, that doesn't mean the conversation is failing. It means it's working as expected.

• Small irritations are rarely small.

Duhigg says that if something bothers you, it isn't actually small. He's genuinely unbothered that his wife signals turns earlier than he does. Who walks the dog, by contrast, may really mean 'you see my time as less valuable', which turns a practical complaint into an emotional one. That often requires a conversation with yourself first: why does this bother me so much?

• You never have to have a conversation you don't want.

Choosing topics is part of being a good conversationalist. Duhigg's neighbour has a different political sign on his lawn, but they talk about the pothole they both want fixed. You can say plainly, 'We're going to get bogged down, so let's talk about Thanksgiving instead.'

EXAMPLES

• Venting to his wife

Duhigg's book began with a recurring fight. Working at the New York Times, he'd come home complaining that his boss didn't appreciate him. His wife would sensibly suggest taking the boss to lunch, and he'd get angrier because he wanted outrage on his behalf. He was having an emotional conversation while she offered a practical one. The fix is to say 'I just need to vent', or ask, 'Do you want help solving this, or do you just need to get it off your chest?'

• Mars versus Venus

To keep politics out of it, they role-play an angry relative convinced Venus is better than Mars. Rather than calling Mel wrong and dumb, Duhigg asks what makes it so meaningful to her. He then loops it back: Venus represents self-improvement and agency, values he shares, even if they disagree. His stated goal is understanding, not winning.

• Megan's divided family

A listener named Megan wrote that her Democratic kids and nephew call her Republican mother, sister and brother-in-law's views 'unforgivable' and want her to intervene. Duhigg suggests starting with the kids by asking why this issue matters so much to them. Their answers may show the real hurt, such as feeling Grandma doesn't accept them. Teachers are trained to ask a similar question: 'Do you want to be helped, hugged or heard?'

• Dad's new girlfriend, Cindy

In a role play about a divorced dad whose girlfriend is taking over, the opening names the awkwardness and says the goal is their relationship. When asked, the dad wants them to stop judging Cindy. After looping his feelings back, the child explains that the parents' marriage was their model. The divorce rocked their world, and they already have a mom. Duhigg says feeling heard calms fight-or-flight and lets the prefrontal cortex do the thinking.

• Guns and shared goals

Duhigg's book describes bringing gun-control advocates and gun-rights enthusiasts together using these skills. They kept their positions but found common ground: both were worried about their kids' safety, and a hunting enthusiast agreed guns don't belong in schools.

• 'What was your dad like?'

When Duhigg's father died about seven years ago, he came back to New York from the New Mexico funeral and people offered condolences, then moved on. He wishes someone had asked what his dad was like. Now he tries to lean in when people share something vulnerable, rather than shying away.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Name emotions without the word 'emotional'

Telling a parent 'you seem really emotional' backfires. 'What I hear is that you're really offended by how we're treating her' does the same job.

• Avoid 'kitchen sinking'

This is when a fight about one thing becomes a fight about everything. Agree upfront to set side issues aside, like Mom or money, and decide only the Thanksgiving plan.

• Move the 2 a.m. fight

Suggest picking it up at 10 a.m. after sleep and breakfast. That's controlling the setting together.

• Anyone can learn this

Duhigg says super communicators often struggled at first, studying how kids talked in high school or playing peacemaker between divorcing parents. Wanting to connect and practising is what makes the difference.

How to Get What You Want Every Time: 3 Steps to Negotiate Anything With Anyone

Guest: Kwame Christian
Date: 2025-05-22 · Duration: 1:22:24
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MV8xSekK-KE

KEYPOINTS

• A playground rejection created a people pleaser

Kwame Christian, founder of the American Negotiation Institute, grew up first-generation Caribbean American in Tiffin, Ohio, the only Black kid in his school, with an accent. One recess, three groups refused to let him play, and he burst into tears. He vowed people would always like him and became the popular basketball captain who knew everyone by name, while agreeing when he disagreed and never standing up for himself.

• Being liked is not the same as being respected

A mentor told him that personal and professional success requires engaging with conflict. Christian calls himself a recovering people pleaser and says confidence is a learnable skill he built. The first difficult conversation is the internal one: working through the fear, self-doubt and overthinking that make it feel easier to put everyone else's comfort above your own.

• Negotiation and conflict are broader than you think

In his book Finding Confidence in Conflict, negotiation is any conversation where someone wants something, and conflict is one where there's also emotion, nervousness or attitude. Mel's team listed everyday examples: asking siblings to help with aging parents, raising marriage or kids with a partner, an adult child spending rent money on new outfits, a mother-in-law's passive-aggressive comments.

• Their reaction is a relationship test

We avoid speaking up for fear of anger, guilt-tripping or tantrums. Christian argues that if someone reacts with name-calling or immaturity, that reaction may be exactly why the relationship needs to change or end. Raising the issue tells you where that person belongs in your life, and the hurt you're swallowing matters as much as their feelings.

• Fear regret more than a momentary awkward talk

Strong emotions push us into short-term thinking, so we 'just eat it' day after day while resentment builds. He swaps fear of failure for fear of regret by asking what his life looks like in 10 years if the behavior continues. His four questions: what happens if you don't have the conversation, if it goes poorly (could you recover?), if it goes okay, and if it goes really well?

• Name it to tame it

Christian describes the amygdala as the fast, primal source of emotion and the frontal lobe as the seat of reasoning, and says that the more emotional we are, the less clearly we think. Labeling feelings helps because the part of the brain that accepts or rejects the label sits in the frontal lobe. Anger is usually secondary, so keep asking what else is there, such as disrespected or disappointed.

• Compassionate curiosity: three steps, used on yourself first

Step one: acknowledge and validate emotions. Step two: get curious with compassion through open-ended questions. Step three: joint problem solving, 'you and me versus the problem.' Internally, step three means reconciling what would feel good, like a furious text, with what would actually solve the problem. He calls it ethical because he uses the same method on himself.

• Open with situation, impact, invitation

Don't text 'we need to talk.' After some small talk, state the facts stripped of judgment, then the impact on you personally, which nobody can deny. Then invite them to solve it together: 'This morning at 5:30 your alarm went off and woke me up. I had a hard time getting back to sleep. I love living with you, and I'd love to talk about how we can make this work for both of us.' It takes 10 to 15 seconds.

• Politics and religion need longer on step one

These topics are heated because they touch identity and morality. Using the parable of the blind men and the elephant, he avoids right versus wrong. He summarizes their view ('so in your perspective...') without endorsing it, then asks hypothetical questions that show another side of the elephant, so they gain the full picture instead of being told they're wrong.

EXAMPLES

• The seatbelt standoff

His parents gave him a car with one rule: everyone wears a seatbelt. Friends refused, and he wouldn't drive for 15 painful minutes while they called him a baby. Afterward he asked his best friend, 'Why is it that you are my best friend, but it seems like you're the one who respects me the least?' The friend went quiet, explained and apologized, and they remain best friends who treat each other as equals.

• Mel's decade-long misunderstanding with her mom

When Mel got engaged to Chris, her mom said he wasn't who she'd have picked and refused to pretend otherwise. Mel quietly resented it for years without asking why. When she finally did, her mom was simply sad Mel had fallen for someone who lived far away, fearing she'd never move home, which she didn't. Her mom and Chris now joke about being each other's favorite in-laws.

• The roommate role-play got real

Playing the early riser, Mel pushed back: 'Why didn't you just go back to sleep?' Christian reflected the emotion he sensed, offered to postpone, explained his insomnia, and said honestly he'd have to move out if nothing changed. Then he asked whether a quieter alarm could meet the same goal. Mel said the fake scenario still triggered real emotions.

• Taking notes to buy calm

In business conflicts, Christian says, 'You've brought up a lot of good points. Mind if I take a few notes?' Often he writes nothing for the first few seconds, then quickly names his feelings and the reasons for them. When unsure what to say next, he asks a question, such as what someone means by words like 'fair' or 'respect.'

- **Dishes as dragon-slaying**

  Married 14 years to Whitney, his college sweetheart, he recently realized how much invisible work she did while he traveled. Framed as right versus wrong, chores felt like his mother scolding him. So he reframed them: if there were a dragon he'd slay it, so he'll protect his wife from the stress of the dishes.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Ask a landlord to describe the perfect tenant**

  Landlords want easy money: on-time rent and no damage. Ask what their ideal tenant looks like, promise to be that, then ask what it would take to lower the rent. They may trade a lower rent for an 18-month or two-year lease, and references from past landlords back up your claim.

- **Employers expect you to negotiate a job offer**

  Research market data, then aim above your target: if offered $100,000 and you want $110,000, make the case for $120,000. In roles like law, consulting or sales, not negotiating can cost respect. They've chosen you, so you have more leverage than you think.

- **Start a promotion ask three to six months early**

  Ask your manager for feedback, document it, report back on your improvement, then ask what it would take to be promoted. Mel's hard truth: doing a good job is why you get paid, not why you get promoted.

Communicate with Confidence: The Blueprint for Mastering Every Conversation

Guest: Jefferson Fisher
Date: 2024-09-26 · Duration: 0:58:59
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUCB3M_1Qp4

KEYPOINTS

• What you say is who you are.
Trial lawyer Jefferson Fisher argues that most people experience you almost entirely through your words. Calling someone 'nice' really means they said nice things to you. That's why he says you can't be a kind person without saying kind things. He also stresses that more words don't mean better communication, so introverts and shy people aren't at a disadvantage.

• Arguments are knots to untangle, not contests to win.
Fisher says the most common mistake is treating an argument as something to win. When each person pulls their own way, the knot gets tighter. He'd rather say 'help me with the knot'. He adds that anyone promising to teach you how to win every argument is just selling you something.

• Miscommunication happens because what's sent isn't what's received.
His image is two people with their radios tuned to different stations, one playing '90s country and the other 2000s R&B, each enjoying their own song. You know what you meant, but the other person only has what they heard. So when someone challenges what you said, the better reply is 'What did you hear?' rather than defending what you meant.

• Swap 'why' for 'what'.
'Why did you say that?' sounds like an attack on someone's credibility and invites a defensive 'because I said so'. Fisher suggests 'What was going through your head?' or 'What made you say that?' instead. Mel sums up the difference as judgment versus curiosity.

• Deliver hard news directly; don't use the compliment sandwich.
Rambling small talk before bad news, like asking about pickleball and family, only makes the other person panic. Fisher prefers a short warning, such as 'This isn't going to be a fun conversation', followed by the news. In his view, tiptoeing around the truth tells people you don't think they're strong enough to handle it.

• Name the quality you want someone to show, and they tend to rise to it.
Lines like 'I'm telling you this because I know you can handle it' or 'because I know you have an open mind' prompt people to live up to the description. Fisher compares it to giving someone a backpack for the journey ahead. You can also set the tone for a room: 'I want to make sure this is a place where I can be entirely honest. Are we good with that?'

• Frame the conversation: the topic, how it should end, and agreement.
Before a hard conversation, say what you want to discuss and where you want to end up, then get the other person to agree. If you try to cover everything, you end up covering nothing, which is why so many meetings feel pointless.

• Take the fun out of insults and disrespect.
When someone belittles you, Fisher suggests asking them to repeat it ('I need you to say that again'), or asking about their intent ('Did you say that to embarrass me?'). Either way they don't get the reaction they wanted. For outright disrespect, he recommends roughly 10 seconds of slightly awkward silence followed by 'That's below my standard for a response.' With someone you dislike, stay neutral, stick to facts and keep it brief. Remember that onlookers are judging you too.

• Separate the person from the problem.
Say 'the presentation could use a few changes' rather than 'your presentation'. At home, try 'I see the room still isn't clean. What should we do about it?' rather than 'your room is a mess'. Fisher pictures putting the problem on the table and pulling your chair alongside the other person, so you become teammates rather than opponents. Framing it around needs helps too: 'I have a need for help with the dishes. What's your need?'

• Let your breath be your first word.
Nervous speakers water down their message with filler and apologies. Fisher's example compares a rambling 'I mean it's not really a thing, but' with a pause followed by 'This is not something I'm comfortable with.' Slowing down also helps you stand your ground, because nobody can make you say something you don't want to say.

• Have conversational goals and conversational values.
A goal is where you want the conversation to end up, and it keeps you listening to understand rather than to reply. Fisher compares this to weak trial lawyers who plan their next question regardless of the witness's answer. Values guide how you behave on the way there. His are: if I can't be a bridge, be a lighthouse; if there's room for kindness, use it, which he learned from his mother; and tell them who I am without telling them my name.

EXAMPLES

• Mel's Uber ride after her mother-in-law's 87th birthday dinner
Mel said something at Judy's birthday dinner that she instantly wanted to take back. In the Uber afterwards Chris asked why she had said it, and she felt attacked. Fisher's script for that moment is 'What did you hear?' In hindsight Mel realised she hadn't actually meant anything bad.

• 'Is that new?'
Mel realises she belittles her daughter in Los Angeles by asking 'Is that new?' about clothes she doesn't recognise, when what she really means is a question about how her daughter manages money. Her daughter's answer is that she thrifted them. Fisher says that responding with 'Are you trying to insinuate something?' would throw the question back at Mel.

• Fisher's grandfather at Walmart
When his grandfather was rude to every employee, Fisher deliberately thanked each one warmly, then set a firm boundary: if this is how you talk to people, I can't come with you. He says the people we love need us to be honest mirrors, and that his grandfather did change.

• Kindness with an opposing lawyer

When a lawyer on the other side was boasting about his case, Fisher chose kindness and told him, 'Howard, you're great at your job and you really care about your clients.' The lawyer warmed up and agreed to the Rule 11 request on the spot.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Better answers to 'How are you?'

Talk about what you're looking forward to rather than how your day has gone, because people tend to be more negative about the past. If things are rough, use a weather metaphor such as 'a bit overcast today' or 'thunderstorms'. At events, have one real conversation instead of many shallow ones, and ask 'What are you most excited about today?'

• Be a well, not a waterfall

Oversharing often comes from wanting to be believed. Fisher's warning is that the more words it takes to tell the truth, the more it sounds like a lie. Give people a bucketful they can draw from instead of flooding them.

• Ask: who do my words say that I am?

Ask yourself, and someone who loves you, whether you rush, speak too fast or come across as anxious. Before you walk into a room, decide how you want people to describe you when you leave. Mel learned this as a public defender by asking what she wanted the jury to say.

• At work, have something to learn, not something to prove

Gossip attaches to your reputation. Authority words like 'direction' ('I'd like to set the direction of this conversation') make you sound like the captain.

• With family, say 'I'm learning too'

In hard conversations, say 'I'm telling you this because I love you'. To calm things down with a spouse or child, try 'This is my first time being a parent; I'm learning too', and apologise from a position of strength.

Secret Service Agent Explains Psychological Tricks To Read Anyone & Spot A Liar

Guest: Evy Poumpouras
Date: 2024-07-04 · Duration: 1:18:43
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekPDLDgz7pQ

KEYPOINTS

• Start by getting someone's baseline

Evy Poumpouras, a former Secret Service agent and polygraph examiner, says a few minutes of watching shows how a person normally moves, stands and makes eye contact when nothing is at stake. In an interrogation she gets it with easy questions like name, birthplace and address. Then she watches how the person changes when recalling a memory and when emotional. Departures from the baseline are what matter, not any single gesture.

• Look for harmony between words, body and energy

Within seconds of arriving, Evy noted that Mel came straight over with open arms instead of letting staff greet her, and that her warm words matched her body language. That match signals sincerity. When words, posture and the 'energy' a person gives off don't line up, she says to note it rather than dismiss it.

• When someone seems off, don't make it about you

Evy's rule is to observe first and not spiral into 'they don't like me.' Most of the time someone's coldness has nothing to do with you. Mel, who mentioned being exhausted from hosting her parents and a late-night call with her daughter, says the trap is letting someone else's mood knock you off yours. Asking simple questions like 'how was your morning?' often lets people explain themselves.

• Never call people out on their body language

Evy says the cues are for you to gather information, not to show off. Pointing out "you just looked away" makes people feel analyzed and talked down to, so she keeps what she sees to herself unless asked.

• 'Liars look away' is a myth

Evy calls the eye-contact rule 'BS' and marketing. How a person makes eye contact reflects their whole history, such as shyness, being called stupid, being hit, ADHD or autism. She breaks eye contact herself to search her 'mental Rolodex.' She separates two things: when reading others, let them look wherever they want, but when you want to build trust, hold eye contact, because people are wired to read it as trust and respect.

• Body orientation tells you a lot

Squaring up with someone shoulder to shoulder signals interest. Leaning or angling toward the door is what investigators call the 'fleeing position', which many suspects took because they wanted out. Mel notes kids in trouble at the kitchen island do it too. Evy adds that you are the other half of the equation, so check what your own posture says.

• Verbal red flags

Evy shares cues her unit noticed while admitting there's no research behind them: 'divine props' like a Bible or rosary beads, and oaths like 'I swear to God' or 'on my grandmother's grave.' Her point is that the truth is usually simple and doesn't need selling. She also flags stalling ('Who, me? Homework?'), shifts in possessive language ('my car' versus 'the car'), and above all whether the person actually answered your question. A dodge, a subject change or an attack is information too.

• Watch out for the over-eager charmer

Evy recalls Canadian detective Jim Smith, who got a confession from serial offender Russell Williams, saying the person to watch is the very charming one working hard to win you over. She notes that this trait appears in some, though not all, people with narcissistic or antisocial personality disorders.

• People show you the truth even when they won't tell you

Evy doesn't need a confession. Behavior is the answer. Mel adds that a refusal to give a direct answer is itself an answer. In interrogations Evy collected small 'admissions' that formed a picture like a puzzle. With one fraud suspect she asked, 'You don't have to tell me if you did it. What are you worried about?'

• Deal with problems while they're small, or create space

With people you can't avoid, like teammates or family, address issues early before resentment builds, and remember that kindness is clarity, since others don't automatically know your expectations. If someone's name on your phone turns your stomach, minimize exposure: let calls go to voicemail and text instead of calling back. Cutting people off is something she saves for when it's really needed.

• How you say it matters more than what you say

Paralinguistics means your tone, pitch and pace. Evy learned it doing news segments after leaving the Secret Service. Her advice is to cut down to a few 'greatest hits' talking points, speak lower and slower, use pauses, and never rush, because hurrying signals your words aren't important. Fewer points also lighten your mental load so you can pay attention to how you sound.

• Bravery comes from action and mission focus

Evy says you don't need to feel brave, confident or motivated first. Waiting for those becomes the obstacle. Before a high-profile child-murder interrogation she told herself 'Evy, you don't matter' and focused entirely on the goal of getting information. She says losing and messing up made her braver than winning ever did.

EXAMPLES

• From AIG cubicle to Secret Service

A few weeks into an underwriting job at AIG, Evy saw a cop through the subway doors and thought 'I can do that.' She called NYPD recruiting that night, later applied to the FBI, DEA, CIA and Secret Service, and the Secret Service hired her first. Mel's takeaway: knowing what you don't want is often enough to start.

• Watching presidents absorb criticism

Starting under Clinton, Evy watched presidents stand next to TV screens of commentators calling them idiots without falling apart. From them she learned resilience, 'mental armor', losing with class, less is more, and delegating, because a president isn't expected to know everything.

• The polygraph unit she didn't want

The Secret Service had only about 30 examiners, who handled the hardest cases. Evy put in her name 15 minutes before the Friday deadline, was surprised to beat more senior and military candidates, and was sent to the Department of Defense polygraph institute at Fort Jackson. There she took graduate-level biology and psychology on tight timelines, plus lessons from pharmacists on how drugs affect people. She later earned a master's in forensic psychology.

• The manager who didn't care

Meeting a potential manager in LA with her husband, also a former interrogator, Evy could tell within seconds he was only there as a favor to her entertainment attorney. She ended the meeting quickly and didn't follow up, reasoning that if he wasn't excited now, he'd never work hard for her.

• 'This guy's dead because of you'

In simulated attacks at the training compound nicknamed 'Tiny Town', instructors would point out a mistake and move on immediately. Evy contrasts that with how we beat ourselves up over forgetting the milk. Her husband's rule: nobody says 'I should have', because you made the best decision you could with the information you had.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Hard conversations with someone struggling with addiction

Mel and Evy suggest going in to assess, not to force a confession. Put your feelings aside, watch tone, dodges and past behavior, and remember lying can be a coping mechanism. You may hope to get them into help, but you're only half the equation and they may not be ready. Plan your next step either way.

• Use baselines anywhere

First dates, job interviews, meeting the in-laws, pitching a client, hiring a babysitter: slow down, observe, and let people be themselves so their behavior shows.

• Make mistakes into lessons applied

Getting fooled sometimes is inevitable. What matters is correcting course without beating yourself up, which Evy says only makes you more insecure.

Body Language Expert: 6 Psychological Tricks to Turn Awkwardness into Confidence

Guest: Vanessa Van Edwards
Date: 2024-04-25 · Duration: 1:20:22
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73SHFFpm4J4

KEYPOINTS

• Burnout isn't a badge of success

Vanessa Van Edwards, founder of the Science of People behavior lab, says high achievers stretch their comfort zones, not their schedules, and don't compete over who's busiest. What sets them apart: they say no to difficult people more easily, enjoy the process as well as the result, and know who they are and share it.

• Track social energy and work energy separately

Social energy is spent on conversations, pitching ideas and managing conflict; work energy goes into tasks. Smart people plan only their tasks and forget how much interactions cost them. Van Edwards gains energy from one-on-one talks and teaching, and calls herself 'allergic to small talk,' drained even by weather chat with an Uber driver. High performers assertively claim tasks that energize them and decline or box in the ones that drain them.

• Ambivalent relationships drain more than toxic ones

Like an app running in the background, the 'kind of' friend wears you out: you consider canceling, leave tired, can't remember what you talked about and wonder if they even like you. Her exercise: list everyone in your life. Star people you'd rearrange plans for, minus-sign people you dread (fine if obligatory, just own it), and question-mark people you wouldn't miss. Pause the question marks and see if you miss them. Mel adds that you may be someone else's question mark.

• Use the Pygmalion effect with labels

Named for the myth of a sculptor whose statue came to life, research shows that expectations tend to come true. High achievers label people positively ('You're a magician with presentations,' 'thank you for cooking, you're so good at it') and use motivating labels on themselves.

• The most liked kids liked the most people

Van Edwards describes a study across multiple high schools and grades comparing athleticism, GPA, attractiveness and humor. The one consistent pattern: the most popular students had the longest lists of people they liked, and acknowledged everyone in the hallway, often by name. Her mission is to be 'first liker': invite people to sit with her and tell people outright that she likes them.

• Real warmth is contagious; faked warmth just falls flat

In Dr. Barbara Wild's research, people who viewed genuine smiles had improved moods afterward, while fake smiles produced no change, though not a worse mood either. Van Edwards doesn't love 'fake it till you make it,' but says faking with genuine hope that a relationship improves is okay.

• Small mistakes make you more likable

In a Richard Wiseman study, an actress demoing blenders at a mall was rated more likable when she spilled the smoothie than when she made it perfectly. Since nobody is perfect, polish can look like a cover-up. Van Edwards, a 'recovering awkward person,' found real connection once she admitted feeling awkward. Small vulnerabilities work too: 'I'm starving,' 'my feet are killing me.'

• Read a room by people's toes

We angle our bodies, especially our feet, toward whoever matters most to us, so she guesses who the boss is from where toes point. Feet shifting toward the exit mean someone wants to leave. Sometimes it reveals crushes.

• Maximize the distance between your ears and shoulders

Citing University of British Columbia research on winning athletes across genders and races, she says pride posture is universal. Hunching protects the neck, an evolutionary threat signal, which she says raises cortisol, causes dry mouth and blushing, and drops your voice into vocal fry. Mel saw her go from renowned researcher to 'middle schooler' just by turtling. Phone posture is the culprit: hold it 'up and out' before a date or presentation.

• Keep space between your arms and torso, and hands visible

Pinned arms and crossed-arm self-hugs make you feel anxious and speak in shorter sentences; she says research links closed posture to saying no more often. Choose a chair with armrests over a slouchy couch and swivel to face whoever's speaking. In a study of leaders on video, the steeple (fingertips touching, palms apart) was rated most charismatic. Rubbing your hands signals excitement. People believe gestures over words; try saying 'three' while holding up five fingers.

• One word can change behavior

In a study where the same game was called 'the Community Game' or 'the Wall Street Game,' Wall Street players shared about one third of profits, Community players about two thirds. In another, sprinkling achievement words like 'master,' 'win' and 'success' into instructions improved performance, doubled time on task and increased enjoyment. Her calendar blocks say 'Vanessa winning morning,' not 'writing block.'

EXAMPLES

• Stand where people exit the bar

Tracking foot patterns at her speed networking events, Van Edwards found the worst spot is the 'start zone' by the door, check-in or coats, where arrivals are wide-eyed and want a drink or bathroom first. The longest conversations and most card exchanges happened where people exit the bar, drink in hand, turned to the room. Or stand in the host's eyeline. Mel's wedding spot: the caterers' door, where she befriends other hungry guests.

• Sit within 25 feet of a high performer

Research she cites covering 58,000 working hours across 11 companies found that sitting within 25 feet of a high performer improved performance by 15%, while sitting near a low performer cut it by 30%. A separate study found people who smelled 'fear

sweat' from first-time skydivers showed fear-center activation on fMRI, versus treadmill sweat.

• 'What's your story?' split her data

In an experiment with 500 speed networkers across three events, that opener got either fives or ones: extroverts loved it, introverts and ambiverts hated it. Top-rated safe questions: 'What personal passion project are you working on?' 'What was the highlight of your week?' 'Any fun plans coming up?'

• Mel's ABCD list

Mel's A work: ideation, motivation, closing deals (she claims a 100% close rate in meetings), recording on the fly and coaching; her top social A is dinner at home. Her C and D: organizing, punctuality and spreadsheets, which she hands to teammates who love them. Van Edwards warns busy leaders often give away their A work, and that a week of dinners out could quietly burn Mel out.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Do the alphabet work exercise

Make four columns. A: tasks you're better at than most, where you hit flow, plus your most energizing people and settings. B: things you're pretty good at (where smart people get stuck). C: average and slightly embarrassing. D: worse than most, plus people who drain you. Maximize A, give away C and D, and partner with people whose A is your C. Unavoidable D work? Make a team 'D work day' with a 10 a.m. start, favorite lunch and music.

• Break autopilot conversations

Retire 'How are you?', 'What do you do?' and especially 'Been busy?', which triggers complaints. Try 'What's good?' or 'Working on anything exciting?' Don't go too deep too fast. If you hear vocal fry, speak louder. Replace sterile invites like 'Follow-up' with 'collaborative session' or 'power-through day.'

• Set goals you enjoy pursuing

Avoid 'if I achieve X, then I'll be happy' thinking. Reframe as 'find workouts I love and partners who make me laugh so I can lose 20 pounds.' Have a quest, big or micro, for meaning, and pause at night to notice how much A work you did. Her closing message: if you're burnt out, you're probably trying very hard; try differently, not harder.

How to Speak So That People Listen: #1 Rule for Getting the Support You Need

Guest: Lisa Bilyeu
Date: 2024-03-28 · Duration: 1:27:46
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMwmcVmsqrg

KEYPOINTS

• Everyone acts from a 'frame of reference'

Lisa Bilyeu defines a frame of reference as the lens, built from upbringing and experience, through which a person interprets words, actions and behavior. Yelling sounds like danger to someone from a verbally abusive home, while to Lisa, from a loud Greek family, it sounds like everyone's happy and excited. When someone reacts in a way you didn't expect, she takes it as a sign your frames differ.

• Ask 'what would have to be true?' before you judge or defend

Borrowing from screenwriting, Lisa asks herself what would have to be true about someone's background for them to say what they just said. This lets you understand someone without condoning harmful behavior. It is not an excuse for abuse, but it keeps you from getting emotionally hooked. Lisa does this with family and close friends, not strangers, because it takes real time and energy.

• Sometimes the criticism is simply true, so mine it

When her dad asked what she knew about movies, the honest answer was nothing. She had no contacts, no visa and no training. Instead of taking it as an attack on her self-esteem, she now responds with 'why?' and treats the list of reasons as practical problems to solve.

• Examine your own frame too, then challenge it

The second use of the tool is turned inward. Lisa grew up thinking a good catch meant a car with rims and heavy cologne. Tom showed up in a dirty, half-broken car full of junk, opened the door for her, and asked sincere questions about God on their first date. That started her questioning rules she'd never chosen.

• Don't tell people what their frame of reference is

Most people aren't aware of their own frame; Lisa suggests assuming they aren't. Explaining it to them invites 'you think you know me better than I know myself?' Do the analysis privately so you know how to show up and communicate, not as a weapon in the conversation.

• At the 'collision,' decide for your own story and ask 'what if it does work out?'

Lisa notes that, in the natural course of things, her father would die before her. She didn't want to be 50 and living with a choice made for someone else. She committed in advance to being proud she tried even if the marriage failed, which kept a possible failure from becoming 'Dad was right.' Mel's insight: when someone says 'he's not right for you,' they mean he doesn't fit their story about your life. A failed choice doesn't make the other person right.

• Do the inner work before the hard conversation

Lisa knows she rambles when she lacks clarity, and that without it she's permeable to other people's expectations. So she works out what she wants and why before bringing anything up. For any big change, picture 'an average Wednesday' under each scenario to see the real logistics.

• 'When' keeps people stuck in a mundane purgatory

For eight years as a bored, insecure housewife, Lisa swallowed her dreams with 'when' statements: when we have money, when Tom has made enough. Her breakthrough was asking what happens if the 'when' never comes. She thinks far more people are stuck in a life that's 'fine' than ever hit rock bottom. Money is often an excuse: you can start a YouTube channel with a phone or a library computer.

• Clarity means a granular mission plus 'what, how much, by when' goals

'I want to help people' is too vague. Lisa's mission is to create content that helps women build confidence, and it is the North Star that gets her out of bed on bad days. Goals that serve the mission must be concrete enough that you either did them or didn't, such as four 30-minute YouTube videos published by the end of the month.

• Confidence is a byproduct of action

Lisa says no one is born confident. Confidence is a skill that weakens without practice, and you build competence, then confidence, by taking action little by little.

EXAMPLES

• Lisa's father's frame: a village in Cyprus

After two weeks of arguing about film school, her father said, 'Study film; you're going to be a stay-at-home wife anyway.' He grew up in a mountain village with no running water. Around age 12, a few boys were sent away for schooling and girls weren't, because without contraception they were expected to marry and have children. Seen that way, his remark was his belief system, not an insult.

• Her dad said no to Tom, and Tom proposed anyway

Tom flew to London on an emergency passport with his mom's pink suitcase. Her father barely questioned him, assuming it wouldn't last. When Tom later asked for his blessing, the thousand questions came, about religion first and then how he'd provide, and the answer was no. Tom told him respectfully he'd propose anyway and promised the man he saw that day wouldn't be the man married to his daughter. Her father still paid for the wedding and attended.

• 'How am I doing now?'

Five years into Quest Nutrition, by then named the second fastest-growing company in North America with a 300,000-square-foot facility, 3,000 employees and 1.2 million bars a day, her father toured the plant. Tom asked if he remembered asking how he'd take care of his daughter, and how he was doing now. Her dad burst into tears and hugged him.

• Mel's mom: 'I didn't pick him for you'

As Mel's wedding approached, her warm mother turned cold toward Chris and his family. Asked to act as if she'd picked him,

her mom said she hadn't and wasn't happy, though the request alone softened her. In hindsight, Mel's parents had moved away from their families and rarely saw them again, so her mom feared losing Mel to the East Coast.

• Quitting cooking and cleaning, gradually

Lisa told Tom she loved him but was unhappy cooking and cleaning and wanted a purpose. His reply: 'What kind of husband would I be if I would rather you be unhappy and have clean underwear?' She proposed tapering from six days to five, four and three. Months later he ran out of underwear and cheerfully went commando, because she'd treated him as a teammate.

• Choosing not to have children

Relatives assumed her marriage was unstable or she was infertile. Lisa examined each reason for having kids: legacy (achievable in other ways), not dying alone (unfair to a child; build friendships instead). Picturing an average Wednesday settled it. Mel decided on a third child by asking whether, 50 years from now, she'd want to see two adult children or three.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Repairing a parent's mistake (listener Patty)

Lisa suggests telling your daughter you love her, that you think you made a mistake, and that you want to hear how she feels, without seeking relief from your own guilt or making her console you. Hold a high view of her resilience, and remember you aren't solely responsible for anyone's confidence.

• Introverts don't have to get loud (listener question)

Start with what success means to you, not other people's comments. Mel adds that research shows recognition of contributions is what tends to drive women's promotions and raises, so if pay matters, advocate visibly at work.

• Bring people along respectfully

Everyone wants to be seen and heard. Prepare a 'cheat sheet,' affirm the person's support, explain your why, and offer a transition plan. Accept that there's no guaranteed response, and that no adult does anything they don't want to do.

How to Read Body Language to Get What You Want | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Janine Driver
Date: 2023-05-11 · Duration: 1:28:02
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06qk0mxg3GA

KEYPOINTS

• Three groups are naturally good at reading people

Body language expert Janine Driver, who spent 17 years at the ATF and trained with law enforcement, names three groups. First, kids who were abused and had to read when a parent's mood meant a bad night. Second, people like the Secret Service, who are trained daily to look for anomalies. Third, people whose right brain takes over after a left-brain stroke. Teachers, therapists and judges, she says, aren't good at detecting deception, because nobody trains them to.

• A 'yes' plus a head touch is a nonverbal maybe

She calls it a high-level pacifier: someone nods yes while touching the back of their head (more common in men) or lifting hair at the nape of the neck (more common in women). It signals something unspoken, like 'I just went vegan' when you suggest a steak dinner. She says the higher on the body the pacifier, the more stress it signals.

• Open the hidden file with 'Maybe I'm wrong here'

Her 'MIW' formula, short for Maybe I'm Wrong, sounds like 'Maybe I'm wrong here, but it seems to me there's something you're uncertain about.' It invites the person to say what's behind the gesture without accusing them. She also uses it when someone breaks eye contact or covers their eyes, which she calls eye blocking.

• Always compare against someone's baseline

A single cue means little until you know how the person normally behaves. When Gwyneth Paltrow was sued, she pressed her lips in throughout her testimony, which Driver says usually shows we dislike what we see or hear. But old interviews showed it was part of Paltrow's normal behavior, so Driver discarded it.

• Communication grows like a tree: roots, trunk, branches

Roots are what you believe, the trunk is body language, and the branches are thought. She claims body language shows up as much as five seconds before conscious thought, which gives an observer an early read. And because the roots come first, confident gestures layered over a belief that you're a 'loser' will read as fake.

• Shoulder shrugs broadcast uncertainty

She describes a common pattern: one employee says firmly, 'My mother's coming, I'm taking four days off,' while another asks with shoulders up by her ears. She attributes the boss's yes-to-Bob, no-to-Jane answer partly to that shrug, which mirror neurons pass on as doubt. She acknowledges a real gender double standard, but says this piece is within our control. Try saying 'Can I have the Fourth of July off?' with your shoulders raised and notice how your whole body questions the words.

• The word 'left' often signals strife

'I left my husband,' 'I left my job,' or even a minimizing 'I just left the house' often points to a problem, she says. Hearing it before a sales pitch or meeting is a cue to pause and ask, 'Is everything okay this morning?'

• Eye contact and eye touching carry status and stress

High-status people hold eye contact both when listening and when talking, while low-status people break it when they speak. Mel, who has ADHD, said she looks away when searching for words. Driver says touching the eye under stress is soothing and cited an fMRI finding about a nerve and dopamine. She points to Putin and to Mexico's president, who touched his inner eye while saying the US could help curb the cartels.

• Watch where belly buttons point

She calls it 'naval intelligence': people face their belly buttons toward those they like, admire and trust. Count the belly buttons in a meeting. If half face someone else, that person may be your rival, so meet with them first. Keep your three 'power zones' open: the neck dimple, the belly button and the groin.

• Priming and embedded commands get more truth from kids

Borrowing from hostage-negotiation mentor Jim Cavanaugh, she suggests saying 'Whether you tell me the truth or you don't, (pause) tell me the truth, I know more than you think.' Assigning a trait also helps: 'Everyone says you're a truthful person, is that true?' Getting a yes creates cognitive dissonance about lying. She claims this pushes truth-telling in 8- to 13-year-olds above 80%.

EXAMPLES

• Escaping a would-be kidnapper at 16

At 5:30 a.m. in 1986, a man in a car tried to get her to put her bike in his trunk. She says her alertness, shaped by being molested at six, kicked in. Instead of riding the 2.8 miles home, she rode to a nearby BayBank hoping for a camera, slipped through a cut fence and down an embankment, and called 911.

• Claiming expertise overnight

After a Dan Kennedy marketing video, she announced to an ATF colleague that she was the media's go-to deception expert. She soon appeared on Fox News, launched lyintamer.com and pitched every upcoming Rachael Ray segment. On the show, Rachael Ray sat on her lap, which prompted a literary agent's call, a bidding war and a Random House deal worth half a million dollars.

• Steepling past a bully boss

At 25, working at the World Trade Center, she dreaded a boss who pointed and summoned people. Her mother, a nurse, taught her to press her fingertips together the way doctors did with her. When called in, Janine walked in steepling, and the boss only asked how she liked New York. Driver says a low steeple in meetings quiets people who talk over you. She adds that Indra Nooyi's chin grab makes you look like 'you're about to win.'

• Jim Cavanaugh and David Koresh

She says Cavanaugh got Koresh to agree he was 'a man of his word,' then got women and children released 'two by two'

after Koresh's message was read on Christian radio. After the FBI took over negotiations, she says, no one else came out alive.

- **How detail people drink water**

  Detail-oriented people watch the glass all the way from the table to their mouth and back. Before a Paylocity keynote, she spotted two executives doing exactly that. Both confirmed they would fix a crooked coaster. For readers like that, give lots of detail. Big-picture people need three must-knows at the top of an email.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Iron Man posture, not 'shoulders back'**

  Superman and Clark Kent differ by about two inches of posture. Imagine a light in the center of your chest and aim it at the line where the wall meets the ceiling, with your shoulders relaxed.

- **Sit 30 degrees off center on dates and in interviews**

  Sitting directly opposite someone is a 'fighting pose.' Move the chair off center so you both have a visual way out, then put it back when you leave.

- **Toe push-ups instead of announcing your nerves**

  Never tell an audience you're nervous. Discreetly press your toes up and down inside your shoes to burn off the stress.

- **Treat criticism as a 'good to know'**

  She learned this reset from Andrea Quinn. When a woman told her 'I don't like your personality,' Janine answered 'Good to know, anything else?' and moved on. Her son later used it after a breakup. She also ends each day with her kids by asking for their 'up-down-ups': something good, something not so good, and something good.

Difficult Conversations: Why You Need Them and When to Have Them | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Date: 2023-03-27 · Duration: 0:59:35
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTs4nJu_QgU

KEYPOINTS

• Three reasons we avoid hard conversations

Mel's diagnosis: you don't know what to say (like a family member unhappy with a bonus after his boss said profits were down); you think it's not your responsibility (her own unease about who was left out of a women's weekend planned in a group chat); and the big one, the need to be liked and keep the peace. Knowing which one is stopping you helps you choose a strategy.

• Conflict avoidance is often trained in childhood

If you grew up with unpredictable, yelling or silent-treatment parents, conflict felt dangerous, so you learned to freeze and keep the peace. Mel describes a close friend whose mother gave her the silent treatment for weeks, acting as if she didn't exist; as an adult she avoids conflict at all costs. Recognizing that pattern, as Claudia does, lets you act as the person you want to be now.

• Avoidance doesn't make the discomfort disappear — it creates it

We tell ourselves that skipping the talk keeps things comfortable, yet the unspoken issue sits inside you every time you see the person. Mel says that in many of her own hard conversations, the other person didn't even know she was upset; speaking up relieved her and let the situation improve. If something bothers you, even in someone else's group chat, raise it — just think about tone and who to say it to.

• Know your why before you start

Your reason for having the conversation anchors everything else. It might be speaking up at work, improving a friendship, sticking up for yourself or protecting your peace. Mel shows how the why changes the tone: going in to 'protect my peace and remove the drama' lands very differently from 'repair this friendship'.

• Anchor on one specific, factual example

Pick something recent with a time and place and describe it without adjectives. Then shift to how it made you feel, because the other person can argue about what they did, but not about its impact on you. From Harvard Business Review, Mel adds: don't assume your point is obvious, and don't exaggerate with 'you always' — one example usually stings enough.

• Mel's six steps

1) State your why. 2) Give one specific example. 3) Say how it made you feel. 4) Listen with your mouth shut. 5) Validate what you hear, since it's their lived experience — that turns an argument back into a conversation. 6) Restate your why and any boundary or request. Do it in person or on Zoom so faces add humanity; never over text or email.

• Your goal isn't to fix the other person

Mel tells Carla that hard conversations are about improving dynamics that leave you feeling disempowered, worried or afraid, and about your own self-expression and boundaries. With a family member who hasn't taken care of themselves, speak about your feelings, fears, and what you will and won't do any more; then they choose. Sometimes everyone walking on eggshells keeps a person stuck.

• Distinguish anxious attachment from abuse

When Candace's relatives turn combative after she asks for a pause, Mel first checks that the behavior isn't abusive — if it is, get help. Clinginess and pressure for an immediate answer can reflect anxious attachment, which Mel says she has herself. She also notes that when you change a long-standing dynamic, people often get more triggered at first.

EXAMPLES

• Claudia and the friend who raged over a missed call

Conflict-avoidant from childhood trauma, Claudia had walked on eggshells for over a year with a friend tied to her larger friend group, who flew into a rage when Claudia didn't call back fast enough. Mel suggests she stop calling her a friend and script it: I want to protect my peace; last week, when you got upset I didn't return your call, I felt like the kid getting in trouble again. Then listen, validate ('you needed me, I can see why that upset you') and close: I don't return calls on demand — text if it's urgent.

• The party Mel wasn't invited to

During Chris's restaurant crisis, after she'd lost her job, Mel was secretly drinking and they were $800,000 in debt with liens on the house. A longtime friend felt used for babysitting and left Mel out of a big birthday party. Mel called, left a voicemail saying 'I know I've done something wrong', and heard hard truths. The friendship was off for years, but now she trusts that friend more than most.

• Erica and her husband's ex

Her husband's ex of over 12 years insists on joining every family visit. Mel suspects the real frustration is the husband not handling it. Tools: 'gray rock' (from narcissism expert Dr. Ramani) — be so boring and unreactive that pettiness drips off you — or picture the ex as a seven-year-old tantruming in a party dress inside a snow globe. A bigger why: his daughters are watching.

• The coworker Mel stopped listening to

In her 20s, Mel watched a work friend's disordered eating worsen after a breakup. She finally said she loved her, was worried, and wouldn't keep listening to the venting unless she got help — but would hang out and talk about work or books. The friend cut her off and changed jobs; 10–15 years later she messaged on Facebook that the conversation was a tipping point into treatment.

OTHER RELEVANT

• When someone pushes back on your pause, build a bridge

Say you need a pause and promise when you'll return — in an hour, in the morning — like telling an anxious child at daycare you'll be back at five. Name what must change: not that tone, and trust me when I say I need time. Mel uses this with her

husband, who shuts down when she erupts.

• If they explode, restate and exit

Calmly say you're not blaming them, just explaining how something made you feel; if they can't hear it, thank them for letting you say it, restate your why and leave. Either they rise to meet you — even apologize — or you've 'dropped a grenade' that may land later.

• Sometimes downgrade instead of ending

When you can't leave a shared circle, you can be cordial without being close. A friend of Mel's told a dramatic member of their kids' friend group, 'We're never going to be best friends, but for the sake of the group and our kids, let's rise above this.'

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRICKS To Boost Your Influence, Income, and Impact TODAY! | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Vanessa Van Edwards
Date: 2022-12-01 · Duration: 1:40:19
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVmTeH0uK5k

KEYPOINTS

• Charisma means signaling warmth and competence together

Behavioral investigator Vanessa Van Edwards says research finds charisma has nothing to do with being extroverted, attractive, athletic or even intelligent. Highly charismatic people consistently signal two things: warmth (trust, likability, friendliness) and competence (capability, power, effectiveness). When both come through, the other person can quickly conclude 'I can trust you' and 'I can rely on you.'

• Under-signaling hides how good you really are

Van Edwards draws on Dr. Susan Fiske's Princeton research: without enough warmth, people don't believe your competence. Her students are often brilliant overachievers who assume their smarts will speak for them, but if they don't send the cues, 'the world literally cannot believe them.' Mel highlights the claim that warmth and competence make up about 82% of how people evaluate you. Van Edwards says that judgment happens again on every Zoom call, email and LinkedIn profile, not just at first meeting.

• There are four types, and charisma works like a dial

The rare sweet spot is high warmth with high competence. Her example is Oprah, who gets guests to share their darkest secrets but asks the hard questions, as in her Lance Armstrong interview. Steve Jobs is her example of high competence with almost no warmth: brilliant, but seen as cold and not a team player. People who are mostly warm are empathetic cheerleaders who give too much to be liked. The fourth group under-signals both.

• The need to be liked and the need to be right both backfire

If you lean too warm, especially at work, your need to be liked gets in the way of your need to be respected. If you lean too competent, your need to be right gets in the way of being liked. Signs you lean competent: people call you intimidating, you fact-check people on Google mid-conversation, and you try to fix a partner's bad day when they just want you to listen.

• Awkwardness looks different in introverts and extroverts

Van Edwards calls herself a 'recovering awkward person' and an overthinker who replays every conversation in bed at night. Introverts tend to shut down out of fear of being judged. Extroverts tend to over-talk, show off or turn into a drama queen. She says telling yourself to 'just be confident' doesn't work, so she aims to be purposeful about the cues she sends instead.

• Cues come in four forms

Verbal cues (your words) are what people prepare most. There are also nonverbal cues (gestures, face, body), vocal cues (volume, pace, cadence, tone), which she calls the most overlooked, and 'ornaments' (jewelry, background, nails, hair, glasses). Her research also tracks 'danger zone' cues, the negative signals that undercut you.

• Up-talk makes listeners doubt you

Ending a statement on a rising, question-like inflection shifts the listener, she says, from listening to scrutinizing. Her example is a salary ask: 'I'm really looking for a range of over $100,000?' That invites negotiation. She calls it permission-seeking behavior, more common among very warm people and among women, who are often taught early to be liked. The fix is to speak on the out-breath with a downward inflection, and to re-listen to your own voicemails.

• Gestures and words have to match

When words and gestures conflict, she says the brain believes the gesture. Saying 'big idea' while pinching your fingers together reads as a small idea, and Mel's attempt to say 'five' while holding up three fingers felt wrong to her right away. Purposeful gestures, like holding up two fingers for 'two things,' make you seem competent and easier to remember. She stresses this isn't interpretive dance.

• Fake smiles leave people cold, so use other warmth cues

Van Edwards cites Dr. Barbara Wild's research. Real smiles reach the upper cheeks and create crow's feet, muscles she says only about 1 in 10 people can move on purpose. People who looked at real smiles felt happier, while fake smiles had no effect. Her advice is to 'smile purposefully, not more' and to use a neutral expression or a full real smile in LinkedIn and dating photos. Another warmth cue is a slow triple nod, which she says makes the other person speak 67% longer.

EXAMPLES

• The muffled doctor voices and malpractice lawsuits

In a study she describes, doctors recorded 10-second introductions, which were then muffled so only tone, pace and volume came through. Doctors rated lowest on warmth and competence from these clips had the highest rates of malpractice lawsuits. The most common pattern among the low-rated voices was up-talk.

• Coding thousands of hours of TED Talks

Her lab counted cues in TED Talks against view counts. The most viral talks averaged 465 hand gestures in 18 minutes, compared with 272 for the least popular, almost half.

• Lieberman's fear-face experiment

Van Edwards cites UCLA's Matthew Lieberman: seeing a fearful facial expression activated people's amygdala in an fMRI scanner, meaning they 'caught' the fear. Labeling the emotion as 'fear' calmed the amygdala again. She uses this to argue that both good and bad cues are contagious, and that noticing them gives you some control.

• Achievement words doubled people's persistence

Two groups got test instructions of the same length, but one version included words like 'win,' 'succeed' and 'achievement.' Three or four of those words improved performance and, by her account, doubled people's desire to keep working. She applies the idea to email: words like 'collaborate' encourage collaboration, and 'let's power through' encourages getting things done.

• Neil deGrasse Tyson's eyebrow test

She says Tyson tries space facts on airplane seatmates and only puts in his books the ones that make people raise their eyebrows and say 'really?' An eyebrow raise is her silent cue for 'I'm listening, tell me more.'

OTHER RELEVANT

• Run a 360 on your charisma

Take her free quiz at scienceofpeople.com/charisma as your real self, not your ideal self. Then have a partner, friend and colleague take it as you and compare the results. Many people come across differently at home and at work. Also record an important Zoom call and code every cue: gestures, fidgeting, vocal power and word choice.

• The first 10 seconds of a call

Show your hands right away, with a wave or a 'hey everybody.' She says hidden hands put the brain on alert, a holdover from checking strangers for weapons. Sit at least 18 inches from the camera, since closer than that is the 'intimate zone.' Say your name without up-talk.

• Read nervous tells in clusters

Common tells include mashing the lips together, touching the face or stomach (she cites Cornell research on this), purposeless gestures like wringing hands or playing with a necklace, and pauses in the middle of sentences. One cue alone means little. When she spots three on a team call, she checks in gently: 'Rob, any hesitations?'

• When someone is dismissive

Resist going on offense or defense. First send warmth and competence and hope it rubs off. If that doesn't work, name a likely emotion ('you seem frustrated'). People often correct you ('no, disappointed'), and that gives you something real to talk about.

• Silent cues for introverts

Subtly mirror the other person's energy, the way Oprah matches high- and low-energy guests. Use eyebrow raises, nods and head tilts. Reflect a friend's sadness on your face so they can see you're sharing the weight with them.