5 Social Skills Every Entrepreneur Needs to Master

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When I was younger, if I had to give a presentation at school, I'd barely sleep the night before. Instead, I'd lay awake half the night, agonizing over all the ways it could go wrong. Before my name was called, I'd be sweating.

Once in front of the class, I'd stumble through my presentation, and by the time I was back at my desk, I'd be exhausted from the stress of it all. Embarrassing side note — my crush nicknamed me "tomato mode" because of my incessant blushing.

Even if I was more informed than the next presenter, my communication sure didn't convey it. These fault lines in my communication were corrected eventually, but what still keeps me up at night is that my story isn't unique.

As someone who traveled the world for years interviewing all kinds of people, I've met entrepreneurs, executives, academics, public figures… you name it. And a large percentage of them lacked strong social skills.

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Imagine how much more successful these people would be if they could communicate better. How about you? Imagine how much more successful you could be with better communication skills.

That’s why I started Talking The Talk. Most of us are never taught social skills like proper listening, accurate self-expression, how to deal with personal or professional rejection, or even how to quiet those anxious thoughts we feel when we’re about to talk in front of a group.

Now, those skills are more critical than ever. Let’s take a look at a few actionable takeaways from our latest social skills checklist.

1. Reframe your anxiety as excitement.

Dr. Amy Cuddy, an executive education teacher at Harvard University, wrote about this phenomenon in her New York Times bestselling book *Presence*.

She says “by simply reframing the meaning of the emotion we’re experiencing – by nudging ourselves from anxiety to excitement – we shift our psychological orientation, harnessing the cognitive and physiological resources we need to succeed under pressure. We effectively transform our stage fright into stage presence.”

So, the next time you’re feeling anxious before sharing your message, give yourself a nudge, and reframe your anxiety as excitement.

2. Listen, don’t pseudo-listen.

We think we know what it means to listen. When we’re hearing urgent news, we ask clarifying questions. We paraphrase. We shift our eyes and bodies towards whoever is speaking and away from distractions. We give our full, undivided attention. But sometimes we *think* we’re listening when we’re really:

- Sparring, debating, or disagreeing

- Comparing or passing judgment
- Rushing to find a character flaw
- Thinking of your next response
- Filtering or listening only for what you want to hear

The problem with all of these listening alternatives is that there's no real benefit to be had – for the speaker or for you, the intended listener. One side isn't heard, and you, the listener, aren't informed or challenged. This is how the stage for miscommunication is set. Be conscious of when you're pseudo-listening, so you can correct it and refocus.

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3. Make your inner thoughts clear.

Nobel prize winner George Bernard Shaw once said that "the single biggest problem with communication is the illusion it's taken place." Proper communication skills are essential for leaders and entrepreneurs, and even more so during times of uncertainty. It's what keeps everybody together, while dysfunctional leadership leaves teams fragmented and misaligned.

Here's how to make sure you're properly communicating:

- Be immediate, direct, and clear about your thoughts and feelings.
- Don't let negative (or positive) feedback simmer; speak up now.
- Focus on being heard, not provoking, calling other parties to arms.
- Don't send mixed messages; align your words and tone of voice.
- Distinguish between facts and your feelings about a situation.

4. Focus on what you say and how you say it.

Did you know communication is only 7 percent verbal? Meanwhile, 38 percent is nested in your vocal delivery, like articulation, pitch, and tone. And, much like the moon on the tides, vocal delivery exerts a hidden power on what you say and can turn your ordinary speech into an incantation.

- Believe in yourself. You're not an imposter. You deserve to be here.
- Breathe and speak from your diaphragm, not your chest or throat.
- Don't speak with your mouth shut. Open up your body and mouth.
- Ground yourself with an erect posture and plant yourself firmly.
- Don't be afraid to use your hands and gestures to add emphasis.

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5. Speak slower and embrace the silence.

William S. Burroughs, the second Commandant of the Marine Corps from 1798 until 1804, once said that "silence is only frightening to people who are compulsively verbalizing." Yet most people fear silence. Fear not. Instead, embrace it and leverage it to drive your point home.

Much like the first tip on reframing anxiety as excitement, step into silence with confidence. Remember the following:

- Speaking fast can make you seem nervous or anxious, and will undercut your message.

- Use the silence as a time to compose yourself, collect your thoughts, and continue speaking.
- Take it as a time to listen, ask clarifying questions, and increase your understanding.

To summarize, it’s okay to be anxious or nervous before sharing news. If you didn’t care, you wouldn’t feel that way. But reframe that anxiety as excitement, and into an opportunity to be strong.

Challenge yourself by listening attentively, so you can expand your understanding of the facts – and remember, people who never listen never learn. And, when it’s time to speak, speak your mind with clarity.

Prepare beforehand if need be, and focus equally on what you’re saying and how you’re saying it to maximize impact and retention. Check out Talking The Talk to learn more.

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