How Preparation and Role-Playing Can Help You Become a Brilliant Communicator

May 11, 2020 5 min read

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Most of us are willing to put in some planning before we take a trip. You might purchase a plane ticket, make a hotel reservation, and have some sense of your itinerary. That doesn't mean there's no room for spontaneity; it just means you won't be stranded in a foreign city with no place to sleep.

Planning is just as vital when it comes to having a critical conversation with another person. Yet, strangely, very few people put in the time or effort to prepare before they jump into important conversations.

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For the love of all things dark chocolate, *do not wing tough conversations.* Do not just say to yourself, *I'm a pretty good communicator. I can just wing asking for this raise. I can just loosely navigate this conversation with my in-laws about their lack of boundaries. I can just tell my partner that our sex life stinks.* Yeah, that'll go over well.

When conversations go badly, we spend time thinking about all the things we should have said. You'll be much better off if you take the time to think about those things beforehand. Prepare! Practice! Put yourself in their shoes and consider what their responses might be. A little role-playing now will

save you from kicking yourself later.

The most important conversations in our life require respect for our wants and the wants of others, and we show respect by preparing. Here's how you can use preparation and role-play to make it through even the toughest conversations.

Prepare with questions and keep some funny lines handy

Before you enter any tough conversations, set yourself up for success by making sure you can answer these questions:

- Do I know my key "lines," questions, and flow so I can keep the conversation on track?
- What might they say or do in response to each of my main points?
- How will I respond to each of these possible scenarios?
- How might I best respond if I get blindsided with new information or a very unexpected response?
- Have I rehearsed enough to feel as confident and prepared as possible?

It's also a good idea to keep some funny lines handy because jokes are great for defusing tension. Humor can work really well for helping you get what you want, as long as it's self-deprecating, unifying, and never at someone's expense. Having a few good lines stored away will help you avoid the disappointing scenario of thinking of the perfect retort too late — often hours later at a bar or right before you fall asleep.

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French philosopher Denis Diderot coined the famous phrase *l’esprit de l’escalier*, meaning “staircase wit.” As the story goes, Diderot was so flustered by an argument at a party that he stomped away, only to think of the perfect witty response once he arrived at the bottom of the stairs. Being armed and ready with some wise and funny responses will serve you well.

Role-playing

If you want to have a profitable conversation and get what you want, one of the best ways to prepare is to role-play. Be the scriptwriter, play the various parts, and direct. You don’t literally need to act it out, but you might want to at least perform a casual role-play in your mind. Fight back a little. Throw yourself some shade. Blindside yourself with possible responses. Rehearse in front of your bathroom mirror.

If those options aren’t comfortable for you, then at the very least, curl up on your couch, close your eyes, and play the scene out. Walking through various scenarios in your head helps you develop well-constructed, strategic responses. It can also prevent you from saying or doing something that places you in a new scene you were hoping to avoid.

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Picturing the scene on a movie screen and playing a friendly devil’s advocate director will help you plan your moves, find your mark, and deliver your lines in one take. Which is good, because in real life, you get exactly one take for your upcoming conversation.

Naturally, life happens. You might blow your lines, miss your cues, and need to do it all over again tomorrow, but it’s not the same conversation. It’s the second conversation.

Accept the role and win the award

Before any tough conversation, take the time you need to strategize your responses. If you jump into a conversation because you are emotionally triggered or because someone is insisting you respond immediately, you are likely to make mistakes. Curb the impatience and take a few minutes to prepare your framing and flow.

When you prepare and practice for a tough conversation, you’re taking on an important role. You’re accepting responsibility for your life, and you’re accepting the assignment to care for and manage yourself. Thoughtful responses vastly improve the odds that you’ll have a successful conversation.

Knowing your lines, both what to say and where to draw them gets easier with practice. Rehearse enough and, over time, your performance as a brilliant communicator will be naturally award-worthy. The award, of course, will be getting precisely what you want.

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