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How to avoid the career cost of talking too much



Strong communication requires clarity, honesty and listening. Talking is less important — a lot less important.

We've all been forced to listen as someone drones on and on. But once that talker stops talking, it's your turn. And now you're the one who won't cease and desist.

How to overcome this babble-on? Try this: Stop talking. While you're at it, don't try to solve problems. Respond with weakness. Take things off the table. Lose the argument. Don't be

yourself.

Sounds contradictory, but that's the advice of leadership expert Geoffrey Tumin, as detailed in his insightful new book "Stop Talking, Start Communicating: And Other Counterintuitive Secrets to Success in Business and in Life."

In Tumin's view, the key to effective communication, especially when you're angry, is simple restraint. He believes the encroaching digital era has unleashed our worst instincts, giving free reign to the more primitive, impulse-laden Neanderthal region of our brain.

The irony, he claims, is that we pay too little heed to our frontal-lobe reflective brain, which is what guided us out of the cave in the first place. As he writes: "When a lack of restraint jerks the blanket of civility away from an interaction, damage is imminent."

Thus, don't just "be yourself."

That often morphs into an excuse for inexcusable behavior, not only in the well-chronicled case of social media misdeeds, but in every-day conversation as well.

"We have come to believe that it is our right, as citizens of the digital age, to say what we want, when we want," he adds. "This is a terrible communications habit to learn."

To soothe the primordial beast, he suggests these basic precepts:

- 1) Practice not talking: “Choke back unhelpful comments and ill-chosen words.”
- 2) Delay your responses: “Restraint inserts itself between what you feel like saying and what you actually say.”
- 3) Resist the urge to prove someone wrong: “Avoid the temptation to say, ‘I told you so.’”
- 4) Eliminate witty comebacks, put-downs and insults: “They may make you feel good for a few seconds, but cause heartburn down the line.”
- 5) Give yourself credit for the things you don’t say: “Restraint isn’t flashy or glamorous, but it won’t blow up your relationships or torpedo your goal.”

His advice has a compelling role to play in job interviews, where many prospects talk themselves right out of the job. Next time, try talking less and listening more.

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