



How to Communicate More Effectively with Team Members, Colleagues and Loved Ones

Elizabeth [00:00:00]: Hello, and welcome to Everyday Unicorn, the podcast that helps you harness your magic for greater success in work and life. I'm your host, Elizabeth Hope Derby. I'm a mom, a recovering perfectionist, and a longtime leadership and business coach. In this podcast, I'll teach you the secrets of everyday leadership and how to leverage your brand of magic to supercharge your clarity, confidence, and joy.

No more trying to fake it till you make it or twisting yourself into knots so you can fit inside other people's expectations. Whether you're running a business, evolving your career, or just trying to find balance between being a parent and an actual person, it's time for you to start living your version of success in the office, on the playground, and beyond.

Starting now, you get to make every day a bit more magical just by being you. [00:01:00] So let's get to it.

Hello and welcome to another episode of Everyday Unicorn. I am so glad you're here. Today I'm going to talk about one of my most favorite topics to talk about, which is communication. In case you can't tell by the number of times I've said talk in the last 10 seconds, I am a talker. I am a writer, I am a communicator, I have spent, 15, 20 years helping people communicate more effectively and finding ways to communicate myself more effectively.

Today, I want to give you a very simple framework that you can practice going into any conversation, Whether you're leading a meeting or you're having a one-on-one with a direct report or you need to talk something through with a colleague [00:02:00] or a client, or you're having a conversation with a loved one. You know, often when people are coming to me for communications advice or consulting, they're typically feeling a little uncomfortable, right?

Most people don't ask for help communicating unless they're uncertain if they're communicating clearly or effectively. And I get it. I think the value of another person to bounce ideas off of and to get fact checks and listening checks from is

very valuable, especially if it's a sort of a high-stakes situation that you're going into, or feels contentious for any reason.

I always think it's good to get some support with that ahead of time if you want it. However, I know that's not always possible just because you have to have a difficult conversation with someone or you need to bring up something that maybe makes you uncomfortable or your concern will make someone else uncomfortable. You don't necessarily have time and luxury to [00:03:00] consult with a person ahead of time. So here is the framework that I want to share with you because in my experience, the more effectively and compassionately and confidently that you can communicate with other people, the more they will hear what you intend, as opposed to, maybe getting lost in the weeds or confused by things that are unsaid.

I think one of the challenges of clear communication is that we're all coming into each one of our relationships with backstories, with expectations, with our own set of beliefs and the way that we see the world. And so you can never really know what another person is thinking. And when you, enter into a conversation with a clear structure in mind that can really support you in leading the conversation so that it's clearest and most effective for both of you so that you can reach a place of mutual understanding and regardless of [00:04:00] what it is you're talking about or if you're whether you're trying to reach a solution or you're just trying to get everyone on the same page, it is really valuable to approach communication with some forethought and to know how to do that.

So that's what I want to share with you now. So the short version of the framework is this context, clarity, and curiosity. I am going to break each of those down. Let's imagine that you are about to have a conversation with one of your team members who has been assigned to handle something. You feel like something about it isn't working and you don't know why it's not working.

You've given them this assignment. It's just not going well. Maybe, you know, you have some mutual issue, but you're just not on the same page about it. Let's just assume something weird is in the water and you have to figure out what it is that you can both solve for it. So you can [00:05:00] accomplish this task or get this project moving forward, whatever.

And so you just need to talk about it. Well, let's apply these three C's, this three C framework to that example. So, context to begin. Get really clear on what the context is for this conversation. Here's what I mean by that. If you're having a conversation with your spouse or partner or a, you know, a dear friend, that's different than a conversation with a professional colleague.

This often gets muddy and confusing for folks who are friends with the people they work with, or if you've hired people who you're friends with, you may feel like, Oh, we're friends. So I don't know. Is this a friendly context? Is this a professional context? You know, if one of your skills is being personable and [00:06:00] relatable, then you may feel like there may be some confusion on your part about what the context is for the conversation.

And you may not even be aware you have that confusion. So basically what I want to point out to you is that it's totally fine to be friends with people you work with. In fact, I think in many, especially peer-to-peer relationships, folks are friends with folks they work with, and that actually can make your working relationships. And then you have friendships baked into where you show up every day.

Right? But just because you're friends doesn't mean you have to have a conversation in the context of friendship. And that's what you need to get clear on ahead. First things first, right? First things first, is this a professional conversation or is this a social conversation? If it's a social conversation, is it a romantic conversation?

Is it, is it related to a romantic interest of yours? Are you relating to [00:07:00] someone that you're in a romantic relationship with? Is it friendship? I mean, maybe this is a DTR and you're trying to define the relationship, so you don't know. Are you friends or is it romantic? But you're probably not listening to this podcast if that's you, but maybe, who knows?

In any case, you want to get clear. Is this a friendly conversation or is this a professional conversation? If you can't answer that question really quickly, if you say, well, you know, we're friends and I want to give them some friendly advice, but it's at work, what I'm going to recommend and what I typically recommend to my clients is that you approach it as a professional conversation, but do it in a friendly way, right?

Be a normal human being when you talk, but just contextualize it, ground it in the reality that you're talking about a work project. This is related to everyone's career. It's related to moving a business or a company or an initiative forward. There [00:08:00] is a shared agreement on why you're even talking about this in the first place.

And it's professional, right? You wouldn't be having this conversation if you were just friends, like out on the town, but you're coworkers and you're trying to solve a professional problem. It's a professional context. So, you know, I can't get into the weeds with whatever specific thing you may be thinking of if you have a difficult conversation coming up.

But generally, that's the biggest question I get from folks is like, well, if I'm friends with people I work with, how do I approach them in a professional way? And so to me, it's like, well, listen, you just be yourself, be a normal person, be your usual personable self, but put it in the context of work. And when I say put it in the context, what I mean is figure out what this conversation relates to.

Why are you having this conversation in the first place? And [00:09:00] the example I gave up front was, imagine you've assigned someone to work on a project and something about it just isn't clicking or working. Well, that's obviously, that's professional context. Why are you having this conversation? Now we're getting into step two, clarity.

You have to understand why you're having the conversation. Once you identify the context, then understand what your motivations are for having the conversation in the first place. What are you trying to accomplish? Is there something you need to be different at the end of this conversation? And if so, what?

Now, I want to caution you here. Be aware of what you can control and what you can't control. You may say, "well, I feel like this person, I feel like this colleague is dragging their feet, and I need them to be more motivated." Okay, that's an aspirational goal for the conversation, but you can't force another human being to be more motivated, right?

You can't do it. [00:10:00] You can support them in overcoming whatever strategic hurdles they may be facing. You can get curious about why they're not more motivated and help them find new reasons to get motivated, but only if they're willing to go there. So it's often most effective to decide what the goal is of your conversation in that, and make it your goal.

Meaning what do you want to be different at the end of this conversation that does not hinge on another person doing what you want. Does that make sense? Let's say someone is dragging their feet on a project and you would love it if at the end of this conversation, they were like, I'm going to tackle this.

I can't wait. It's going to be amazing. I'm all in. Eh, that's not realistic, right? If they're already dragging their feet, then that's not a realistic, clear focus and goal for the conversation. What could be a realistic and clear goal? Focus and goal for the conversation be something like, I want to [00:11:00] understand what's challenging them and reiterate the deadlines and ask how I can support them in meeting those deadlines, even though they seem to be lacking motivation, right?

Because all of that is stuff you can control and you can do. So that's step two. Once you've identified the context, am I talking to a buddy of mine about buddy stuff? Are we talking about work? Is this a strategic conversation, or is this a romantic conversation? Is this a friendly conversation? Like, what is this?

You're in that energy. Get clear on what your goal is for the conversation. Or for the meeting, as the case may be if you're running a meeting, and then once you know what your goals are, you want to get curious about the other person. You want to be very inquisitive and wondering and have a blank-slate attitude.

Because, you know, [00:12:00] you may have a lot of assumptions about what another person already knows, how they feel, what they're thinking, but the truth is you don't know any of those things for certain because you can never be certain what another person is thinking unless you have asked them directly and gotten their yes or no on that.

So when I say curiosity, let's go back to this, Okay, something is off about this project, but I don't know what it is. You could sit there and be like, well, maybe they're mad at me. That's right. That could be a place where your brain goes

“maybe this person's mad at me.” And this can also happen, by the way, if there's extra complications between social professional relationships like, let's imagine one of your employees is a good friend of yours and you're like, you have to get this done.

Oh no, was I too firm with them? Like, are they mad at me? You know, that's where all of that like overthinking can get in, which is why I say context first, then clarify your intention for the call [00:13:00] or the conversation, and then get curious about what is the truth for them, right? You don't know that they're mad at you.

That's a projection that a lot of people have. It's just totally unfounded, but a lot of people will walk on eggshells or have really backward twisted conversations because they're trying to avoid upsetting someone because they think that person's feelings are hurt when they haven't even confirmed that the person's feelings are hurt in the first place.

It causes so much extra confusion and delay. I totally just had a flashback to my son who really loves to watch Thomas the Tank Engine, and the worst thing that these trains can do is cause confusion and delay, which is sort of an industrialist memo that I'm not sure if I love in a children's show, but here we are.

Anyway, it confuses people, and it really does delay and make ineffective conversations when you're assuming a lot about another person. You have to be curious. [00:14:00] What are the things you're assuming about the person across from you? That, or that you're assuming that they know? Or you're assuming that they feel?

And then write down, if you're writing all this down in advance, or at least plan to ask them if those things are true. Or say, I get the sense, because right, ultimately, you're the one who's coming into a conversation with a slew of assumptions. So you get to own that and say to the other person, Hey, I get the sense that you're upset about something.

Is that true? Am I off base? Can we talk about that? You know, those are questions that are curious questions. You don't want to charge in with assumptions and then wind up solving for problems that don't even exist. The other way I see that show up for folks is you may have done this in the past where you come into a conversation, you have your goal in mind, but you haven't been curious enough about the other person to even understand how they're really thinking or [00:15:00] feeling about the topic.

So, you rush in with a bunch of solutions addressed in other words to the problem that you assume they have, which they may not even have, or if they do have it, it's totally alienating for them to have someone come in and tell them what to do about their own problems, right? Like nobody likes that.

Even if you are absolutely correct, and they are mad at you, or they are lacking motivation, or they are dragging their feet, or whatever. Remember, even if your

assumptions about where they're at are true, then you want to confirm that with them. Let them say, yes, totally. And then you can say, great, tell me more about that.

Let them talk. Let them own their truth. Let them be who they are with you and respect that and honor that. And then once they've told you the truth about how they're feeling and where they're at, then you can get to the [00:16:00] part of the conversation where you steer it in the direction of whatever the goal is, right?

Okay, it seems like, to me, and here's how this would go in a real-life example. Let's imagine that you have, Right? Assign this project to a person who's kind of a friend, but they're also your direct report. So you've given them this project and it just seems like something's off. It's taking longer than it should.

You're wondering if they lack motivation or if maybe they're mad at you, but let's assume you think they're lacking motivation and you don't really know why. So you would say, okay, context is professional, the clear goal is to get us to a place where I've eliminated any roadblocks to this person meeting their deadlines and getting it done.

Curiosity. Am I correct in thinking that this person is lacking motivation or is there something else going on? So, all right, so then that's what you go into the conversation and find out. Hey, it seems like, is there something getting in the way here? It feels like there's something getting in the way.

Is it that [00:17:00] you feel demotivated to tackle this project? Are you overburdened by other stuff? In fact, here's my problem. I always, this is a communications quirk I have. I tend to talk to fill the silence. And I understand this is a podcast, so I am literally talking to fill silence. But in the context of an actual conversation, it's not useful to ask someone a question and then provide a bunch of potential answers.

Like it's good to just be quiet. And if you're like me, that may require actively biting your tongue or sitting on your hands and just reminding yourself, shush, so that the other person can talk. So, what you would say in this example is It seems like we're falling behind in moving toward our goals.

What do you feel like is getting in the way here? Is it a motivation issue, or is it something else? I would love to know so that I can support you. [00:18:00] And it may be a little uncomfortable to stay quiet and let them tell you whatever their truth is because maybe they'll hit you with something you don't really like.

Like, yeah, I am demotivated because my salary sucks and I don't know if I want to work here anymore. I mean, who knows, right? They could hit you with something that feels emotionally distressing to you. And that's part of where your leadership is required because they're allowed to feel however they feel.

And you get to support them wherever they're at. So that is the uncomfortable part. That's the one uncomfortable part. You have to let them just be how they be, how they are, and then take the truth and then work with that. And I think once you have that framework, this context, clarity, and curiosity framework, you will find that all of your conversations are smoother and more effective.

And you feel like you're all getting on the same page faster and that you're all feeling more understood and better [00:19:00] heard and respected by each other, which is something I wish for everyone. I hope that we can all feel heard and respected to at least some degree in our professional lives as well as our personal lives.

A few more, just one more thought. Something that I always share with my clients, so I want to share it with you, is one of my favorite questions to ask. In fact, you even heard me ask it in this episode, was does that make sense? Do you have any questions? Am I being clear or not? And to pause yourself to make sure you're not steamrolling over someone's questions.

Or someone's like, actually, no, I don't know what you're talking about. It's really, really helpful to just slow down and ask during conversations. Does this make sense to you? Or should I explain it in a different way? Is there anything I'm missing? You can also do what my husband calls listening checks.

Here's what I just heard you say. Is that correct? And it's really about taking that time to slow down [00:20:00] and show the person across from you that you are collaborating with them to reach whatever solution is going to be in the highest and best interest of that context, right? So if you are, you know, again, if this was a personal conversation instead of a professional one, I always like when I'm having conversations with my husband that I just mentioned, I like to always contextualize it with I love you and I want to have this conversation because I think it's going to help us be happier, me feel more comfortable, so we can be happier, like make our household run more smoothly. Whatever, just that the shared goal and shared context are always useful.

Elizabeth: So I could go on and on about communication, but I just wanted to share that framework with you today so that you have something to prepare for yourself. The next time you go into any kind of difficult conversation. And like I said, this is also useful [00:21:00] to do, in advance of meetings, I think, meetings with groups of people.

I think this is especially effective for one-on-one conversations, but it's also useful for meetings and prepping for those. And even, you know, prepping for a presentation if you want to really work the room in advance. I think it's always useful to start by sharing context, stating the clear objective for the presentation, or the speech or whatever, and starting off by getting curious about the people across the room from you or the people who are listening to you, because ultimately conversation is meant to be a two-way street, and it cannot be a two-way street if we go in with an agenda that isn't curious about the other

person, or doesn't give them enough support in getting on the same page right from the get-go.

So I hope this was helpful. I am wishing you a day and a week of wonderful communication, lots of good news and happiness coming your way, and I will talk to you next time.

[00:22:00] Thank you for tuning in. I hope today's show helps you remember that every day can be extraordinary and that you, my friend, already are. If today's episode was inspiring or useful to you, hit subscribe so you don't miss an episode. If you want to go deeper, you can hire me as your private coach or as a workshop leader for your organization.

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