

# **SPEAK YOUR MIND**

**ALSO BY DR. EMERSON EGGERICHS**

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# **SPEAK YOUR MIND**

**Evaluating and Unleashing  
Your Communication Strengths**

**EMERSON EGGERICHS, PHD**



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*Speak Your Mind*

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# TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

**D**o you want to improve your communication skills and become more persuasive in speaking your mind? Would you like to strengthen your relationships, prevent misunderstandings, and express your thoughts and ideas effectively? If so, this book will help you discover and harness your communication strengths while you recognize and tame your weaknesses.

You have communication strengths—you really do. But since you're reading a book about speaking your mind, I assume you are like me in that you tend to say, or want to say, things that shouldn't be said or should be said more wisely. You may even have underlying issues affecting your communication that you aren't aware of yet.

The goal of this book is simple: to help you speak your mind by unleashing your communication strengths and silencing your communication weaknesses!

In the introduction, you'll learn the four critical questions for effective communication, which provide the foundation of this book.

In the prologue, you can take the *Speak Your Mind* communication self-assessment to discover your strengths as a communicator. At the same time, you can identify any weaknesses that may be hindering your effectiveness as a communicator. To benefit the most from this book, I encourage you to set aside enough time to answer these eighty questions honestly and thoughtfully.

After you complete the *Speak Your Mind* communication self-assessment, you will be ready to dive into chapters 1–21, where you will explore in depth how to speak your mind based on the findings from the assessment. In these chapters, you’ll discover specific ways to harness your communication strengths while you tame your weaknesses. The self-assessment allows you to turn to those pages in the book and go to work immediately.

These chapters will also give you insight into how the people you interact with communicate. It’s my hope that the insights you learn in this book will give you wisdom and grace as you seek to communicate with all different kinds of people.

This book is like an encyclopedia of communication strengths and weaknesses. Don’t be overwhelmed by all the information. You don’t have to master all this content; however, I would encourage you to keep this book around for a reference and refresher—and give yourself a break when you make a mistake. I’ve written this book, yet I still make communication blunders more than I wish!

Are you open to improving your communication? Are you ready to become more persuasive in speaking your mind? Do you hope to earn a reputation as someone who seeks to understand and listen more than to be heard and be right?

If your answer is yes, I invite you to turn the page to begin your journey of discovering where you can increase your knowledge about communication and improve your skills.

## INTRODUCTION

# TRUE, KIND, NECESSARY, AND CLEAR

Since you're reading a book about speaking your mind, you may relate to one of the following common communication struggles:

- You have been holding back your ideas, only later to regret not speaking up.
- You tend to blurt out your thoughts and feelings but later are sorry you didn't think before speaking.
- You are a fairly good speaker but haven't yet become the master communicator you know you could be.

In this book, you will uncover why you tend to refrain from speaking up, succumb to communication disasters, or feel stuck as a merely average communicator. You'll also learn how to harness your communication strengths. And, perhaps most importantly, you'll learn the powerful four-part strategy that has successfully guided and guarded my speech and writing for the past five decades.

### THREE RULES OF COMMUNICATION . . . NO, FOUR!

As a college student, I sat in a chapel service at Wheaton College and heard a speaker make the following statement: "All of us must ask three questions before communicating: Is it true, kind, and necessary?"

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I don't remember the name or face of that speaker, but I remember that advice as though it was given yesterday. It rang true for me immediately. That brief sentence struck a chord and stuck in my brain, and it has chaperoned my thinking for the last five decades.

Many have credited the fifth-century BC philosopher Socrates with originally asking, "Is it true, is it kind, or is it necessary?"<sup>1</sup> No one knows, however, who first penned the question. Regardless, in that chapel service I came into the possession of a rule of communication that has worked well for me—and I'm confident it will work for you too.

These three qualifiers pulsate throughout the Bible as well. As a pastor for nearly twenty years, I often heard Ephesians 4:15 quoted by folks in my congregation: "Speak the truth in love" (NLT). This verse emphasizes the importance of truth and kindness in our communication. Or who hasn't heard it said that there is "a time to be silent and a time to speak," originally written by the wise King Solomon (Eccl. 3:7)? This verse reveals that some things are not necessary to say, while other things are.

Bottom line: We intuitively know that we ought to speak the truth in love at the appropriate time. This foundational aspect of interpersonal communication rings true for all of us.

These three rules of communication appealed to me since I wished to be a person whom, when I spoke or wrote, others would view as accurate, goodwilled, and helpful. I had a desire to be competent, trustworthy, and effective. I wanted to be a good communicator. I wanted to be confident that when I spoke my mind, the words I said were true, kind, and necessary.

I believe the same can be said about you! If you didn't see the value in becoming an effective communicator, you wouldn't have picked up a book called *Speak Your Mind*. You, too, likely wish to take control of your speech. It's a beautiful thing to learn how to communicate in a way that touches others' hearts and allows them to know ours as well.

## ONE MORE TO ADD TO THE CHECKLIST

Since that day in the chapel service, I have come to the conclusion that a fourth checklist item must be added: "Is it *clear*?" What we are communicating to another must also be clear.

There have been many times when I knew what I said was true, kind, and necessary, but I later found out that I had been unclear in how I had communicated it. Can you relate? For example,

- I wrongly assumed others knew all the facts—the whole truth. But if they were not fully informed, they felt confused about what I communicated.
- I assumed people understood when I was being silly in a comment, not unkind. Instead, they thought I belittled them.
- I assumed readers or listeners appreciated all the information, but I found out they deemed some of it unnecessary if they had to ask, “What exactly is your point?”

The Bible also speaks of our need to be clear when communicating. In 1 Corinthians 14:9 the apostle Paul asked, “Unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken?” This is a universal rhetorical question.

With the addition of “clear,” we now have four questions we must ask ourselves before communicating:

- Is this communication *true*?
- Is this communication *kind*?
- Is this communication *necessary*?
- Is this communication *clear*?

These four questions have stood the test of time as a proven framework for communication. In speaking and writing based on this checklist, we win many friends and influence many people.

As a Christian, I believe God intends for us to be truthful and kind people who speak what is clear and necessary. For me, that is all the reason I need to hold up these four checklist items toward every word I communicate. But even if you do not share my Christian faith, you likely recognize the importance of being a truthful and kind person who speaks what is clear and necessary. Would any goodwill person disagree?

When we apply these four pillars of effective communication, we

will be able to change our world one conversation at a time. What joy it is to learn how to winsomely affect the hearts and minds of others! Are you in?

## IT'S NOT ONLY ABOUT SPEAKING LESS, THOUGH

You may be saying, “But Emerson, some things just have to be said, even if the person may not like it. I have to be able to speak my mind!”

I agree. That’s why you are holding this book in your hand. Back in 2017, I wrote *Before You Hit Send: Preventing Headache and Heartache*, which served as the source material for much of this book. However, I knew that not all communication problems can be solved simply by refusing to “hit send”—or by choosing not to speak your mind. Eventually, many uncomfortable but necessary conversations need to be had.

*Speak Your Mind* is not only about holding back communication; it will also give you the clarity and confidence you need to speak up more often, even though it may be uncomfortable. In these situations, how can someone best speak their mind?

How do you “speak your mind” to your spouse when you feel unloved or disrespected?

Or to your coworkers when they’re not pulling their weight around the office?

Or to your friends when they’re making decisions you don’t agree with?

Or to your family members who have different political views than your own?

How do you skillfully, honestly, and lovingly speak your mind when you have a truth to share with another—a truth that will be tough to hear?

As you read this book, I hope to serve you well by providing a little know-how on how to speak your mind *truthfully*, how to speak your mind *with kindness*, how to speak your mind *only when necessary*, and how to speak your mind *clearly*, even when you need to share a challenging and uncomfortable truth. In the pages to come, we are going to

discuss in detail what it truly means for your communication to hit all four checklist items.

Will you join me as we look closely at these four concepts? We will answer the following questions:

- Is what I'm about to say the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?
- Is it loving and respectful?
- Do I know if it should be said now instead of later or not at all?
- Will what I say be clear to me and to the other person?

When the answer to all four is yes, let's speak our minds! Remember, mastering the art of communication isn't just about speaking less but rather about communicating with confidence, purpose, and effectiveness.

I invite you to join me on this journey of learning when to speak less and when to speak up. These four distinct dimensions act as guidelines and guardrails for effective communicators. They allow us to move forward with confidence, purpose, and effectiveness.

First, though, do you know where your strengths lie regarding these four dimensions? Do you have ideas about where you could stand to improve? In the prologue, you'll begin with a self-assessment of your current communication. I urge you not to skip over this important first step in becoming a master communicator. Before you can get to where you want to be, you need to first know where you are.

So turn the page to find out!



# ***SPEAK YOUR MIND*** **COMMUNICATION** **SELF-ASSESSMENT**

**B**efore you begin this study of how to improve your communication with the four qualifiers—*Is what I am about to communicate true? Kind? Necessary? Clear?*—it would be beneficial for you to be aware of your starting point on this journey.

Every person has specific strengths and weaknesses when it comes to communication. For example, someone may usually speak the truth but not be aware that much of the truth they speak isn't particularly necessary to share. Or maybe someone is rarely ever a verbal bully, but does their impatience sometimes lead them to snap back with unkind words?

For this reason, I want you to begin your journey toward becoming a great communicator by assessing yourself accurately. While we may have a general idea about our communication abilities, we may not have considered subtopics in the four categories. I will highlight these subtopics to reveal to you where you possess strength but also where you can improve as a communicator. And, by the way, you can still be a great communicator while strengthening areas that may have weakened! No one is perfect all the time, but that does not mean you cannot communicate effectively most of the time.

## 2 *Speak Your Mind* Communication Self-Assessment

None of us is beginning at the same starting point, either, and it would be unwise to pretend we are. The assessment that follows will introduce you to twenty subtopics each of true, kind, necessary, and clear communication. By honestly answering the questions, you will learn not only what your strengths and weaknesses are among the four communication qualifiers of true, kind, necessary, and clear, but where in each of them you rate the most positively and, perhaps more pertinent, where you would be wise to address specific communication weaknesses that have potentially caused fissures in even the dearest of your relationships.

As you proceed, do your best to answer honestly the questions in each section about yourself. Do not rush through but take the appropriate time to assess yourself accurately. After you are finished, you will have a much better idea of your starting point on this journey. My hope is that having a more accurate idea of where you currently stand will help you direct your focus in the proceeding chapters as we break down in detail all the ways to speak your mind truthfully, with kindness, only when necessary, and clearly.

In the introduction, we discussed three possible categories you might belong to (listed below). Please keep these questions in mind as you proceed in your assessment:

- Where have you been holding back your ideas and opinions, then later regretting not speaking up?
- In what ways do you tend to blurt out your thoughts and feelings, only to later regret not thinking before speaking?
- In what areas are your communication skills only average, but you want to learn to be a master communicator?

The journey to learning these answers begins here!

### **PART ONE: SPEAK YOUR MIND TRUTHFULLY**

Instructions: For each pair of adjectives, circle a number on the scale that best represents your current communication style.

### SECURE IN THE TRUTH

1 2 3 4 5

#### Fearful

Because of fear, I hide my missteps to avoid the consequences of past mistakes.

#### Brave

Despite my anxiety over the consequences, I choose courage by confessing my misleading comments and committing to honor the truth confidently.

1 2 3 4 5

#### Evasive

If others don't know what I did wrong, there will be fewer problems all around.

#### Straightforward

I am assured that being open, direct, and truthful builds trust and meaningful relationships, since honesty is the best policy and prevents the heartaches that can result from being evasive and misleading.

1 2 3 4 5

#### Chameleonlike

To avoid conflict, I blend my beliefs to fit my audience, which pleases them.

#### Unwavering

In social settings, I am comfortable in my skin in resisting the pull I feel to blend in as a compromising and conforming people-pleaser by expressing my values honestly and wisely when necessary.

1 2 3 4 5

#### Protecting

I feel responsible to protect another's interests even if I have to lie to do so.

#### Morally Grounded

Though I feel genuinely responsible for protecting those I care about, I will not advance their interests by lying, since I am centered on and bound by a moral code that grounds and guides me in my service to others.

### TRANSFORMED BY THE TRUTH

1 2 3 4 5

#### Self-Deluding

Some claim I lie to myself. But that's a lie. I'm 100 percent honest with myself.

#### Self-Aware

I wish to be more cognizant of my shortcomings that hinder the best version of me as a truthful communicator, so I examine myself to reduce my bias and blind spots that work against my good reputation and healthy relationships.

4 *Speak Your Mind* Communication Self-Assessment

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Chronic</b>				<b>Resistant</b>
I've always lied even when the truth was better. Something comes over me.				While I used to battle chronic lying and the allure to deceive to gain something or get away with something, now I resist these tendencies and choose honesty, recognizing that it is the best and most empowering policy.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Ashamed</b>				<b>Confessing</b>
Out of embarrassment for the bad stuff I have done, I lie to appear good.				I value the renewal I feel when being truthful and transparent, since this is the right thing to do. Nothing compares with a clear conscience and the inner peace that results from choosing confession over shame.

**FORTHRIGHT WITH THE TRUTH**

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Expedient</b>				<b>Up-Front</b>
I lie, since it is quicker and easier for me at the moment.				Though lying about something that might go wrong can be practical, I now sincerely reveal a potential problem ahead of time; speaking half-truths and falsehoods about a possible inconvenient truth is no longer an enticement—especially since most people want to hear the truth, no matter how difficult it may be.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Brainy</b>				<b>Wise</b>
I'm smart, retaining both the lies and the truth. It's easy to get away with lying.				I stopped lying, though I am good at it, and am honest and plainspoken because I realized that it's foolish and arrogant to think I could outsmart and outrun God with my human expertise in deception.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Wordsmithing</b>				<b>Well-Spoken</b>
I find it easy and fun to twist words, using double meanings that mislead.				In the past, I used my ability to be an effective communicator to twist the truth cunningly, but now I use that ability to be persuasive, eloquent, direct, and clear so my speaking and writing can be a positive influence.

### MORAL WITH THE TRUTH

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Entrapped</b> It's not my fault. I was lured into swearing secrecy and facilitated a lie.				<b>Integrous</b> Though lured by others into swearing secrecy to facilitate a lie, I refuse to be entrapped, since I have a moral compass about walking in integrity, and will not compromise even when others claim I do not care about them and try to guilt-trip me to do what they want.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Copycatting</b> I'm not really interested in lying, but everybody else lies, so I do too.				<b>Individualistic</b> I stand alone on my values and principles, strong and independent in telling the truth, even when those around me have a mindset to lie and expect me to copy them and shrewdly deceive others for personal gain.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Perpetuating</b> I lie to stay ahead of other lies I have told, not concerned that lies beget lies.				<b>Self-Correcting</b> My previous strategy of lying to stay ahead of exposure—having to lie about lies—not only was exhausting but impeded healthy relationships, so I amended my ways and changed course by prioritizing the moral value of honesty, and I am much happier.

### INFORMED OF THE TRUTH

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Emotional</b> If it feels true, I say it; I don't need all the facts when I feel I'm right.				<b>Factual</b> When I feel something is true or right, I fight against saying it or acting on it until I have all the facts; otherwise, I can jump to wrong conclusions based on my emotions or impulse.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Inattentive</b> I didn't know that what I said was inaccurate; everyone makes mistakes.				<b>Observant</b> When I am inaccurate in what I say, I try to be attentive and set the record straight when I learn the facts. Previous ignorance is no excuse nor self-justification for perpetuating an untruth.

### ALTRUISTIC ABOUT THE TRUTH

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Selfish</b>				<b>Unselfish</b>
<p>What can I say? Lying works to my advantage, advancing my agenda.</p>				<p>All people are made in God's image and have equal value, which requires fairness and win-win solutions. Therefore, I consider the just interests of others and not solely what benefits me at their expense, even if lying may work to my advantage.</p>

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Prideful</b>				<b>Humble</b>
<p>I need to look better than I am so others will feel good about me and like me.</p>				<p>Striving for authenticity and sincere, respectful relationships, I resist the temptation to lie about being better than I am to feel good about myself and to gain approval. As I will not lie about my inadequacies to prevent rejection, I have ceased projecting a false image at the expense of the truth about who I am.</p>

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Flattering</b>				<b>Genuine</b>
<p>I want to be truthful and tactful, but insincere praise works better for me.</p>				<p>Though flattery or false praise may work in the moment, people eventually see through the insincerity, so I have committed to affirming what is true about others without exaggeration.</p>

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Oath-Making</b>				<b>Reverent</b>
<p>I admit that when hedging, I sometimes swear to God so others believe what I'm saying.</p>				<p>In my communication, others need me to be trustworthy and competent; they do not need me to coerce them into believing I am credible and truthful because I say "Honest to God" or "I swear to God."</p>

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Self-Amusing</b>				<b>Mindfully Humorous</b>
<p>Frankly, I view tricking others as an exciting and entertaining game.</p>				<p>In the past, I might have used inappropriate, disrespectful, and offensive humor to amuse myself, but that hurt others, so I decided to get serious and sincere to help others with problems by using my quick thinking to assess the truth and creatively find innovative solutions. I now try to use only good humor for comedic relief.</p>

### **A WORD OF PRAISE!**

You're off to a great start, but let's take a quick pause.

If you answered 4 or 5 on any of the descriptors, then you need to be saluted. You are a truthful communicator. Even when you feel threatened by possible unpleasant outcomes, you tell the truth. Though you might have personal issues and troubles from the past, you do not use those as excuses to hedge on truth or to lie. In many situations you could be crafty and use both the lie and the truth to your advantage, but you reject such craftiness. You have avoided the traps of getting yourself obligated to others in protecting them with a lie and have not given in to the idea that you're obligated to keep on lying once you have lied. You don't presume you know the truth just because you feel a certain way, and you make sure you are aware of the facts before communicating. And though you care deeply about your own interests, you do not give into a self-serving mindset that says lying is justified if it advances your agenda.

Bottom line, you are a person of integrity and you need to be applauded. This has not been easy, but you have resolved in your heart that you will be a truthful communicator. So let me exclaim: Congratulations! You have countered what is difficult for many of us, doing so with courage and integrity. I admire your honesty and commitment to do the right thing!

Also, you need to be encouraged if you used to be a poor communicator but have changed for the better. This assessment tool will help you see these changes and motivate you to stay the course. This tool, assessing all four dimensions, can help you realize your propensity to default to being untruthful, unkind, unnecessary, or unclear unless you keep taking these new steps to guard against that. So, though you struggled in the past, don't worry. It is a new day! We all have fallen short at communicating in ways that reflect the best version of ourselves. But we can take steps to improve, and that will be worth celebrating.

However, please understand that we all have a tendency to be biased in our own favor. Some of us focus on our positives and block out the negatives. Yes, in general we could be truthful communicators, but we also overlook those moments when we consciously and willfully mislead people with untruths. We suppress our lies because we do not

feel lying is something we do in general. But that's comparable to the bank robber declaring, "I am no thief. I only robbed one bank."

As you take the remainder of this assessment, you might find that you are 90 percent stellar. However, what about that 10 percent? Is that 10 percent poisoning your effectiveness as a communicator? Do you need to be honest with yourself about how others are interpreting you? The goal here is not to shame you but to improve your effectiveness as a communicator. For this reason, seek to be as honest as you can in your self-evaluation so you can strengthen yourself and not give in to your weaker moments.

On that point, if you answered 1 or 2 on any of the descriptors, then allow me to stop and applaud you for being honest about your dishonesty! Bravo! Being honest with yourself is the first step toward making a change in your communication patterns. I would strongly recommend that you now tell a trusted person in your life what you are recognizing about yourself and see if they can help you get to the "why" behind your dishonesty. Once you understand that, you will be much more equipped to choose honesty going forward. The same applies for the next three parts of this assessment.

The rewards are worth the application of this information! Not only will you feel good about yourself, but you will also build trust and respect in your relationships. You will find greater success in every facet of your life—success that is significant, satisfying, and far-reaching.

## PART TWO: SPEAK YOUR MIND WITH KINDNESS

Instructions: For each pair of adjectives, circle a number on the scale that best represents your communication style.

### CARING WITH YOUR WORDS

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Bullying</b>				<b>Gentle</b>
When I am mean-spirited, it works. When I intimidate, I get my way.			My gentle demeanor and kind words can break down others' walls, encourage teamwork, prove winsome, and maintain my good reputation. Therefore, I do not use bullying and intimidating tactics.	

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Retaliating</b> I'm mean only when others are unkind to me; it's an eye for an eye.				<b>Benevolent</b> I choose to be a kind person who returns good for bad, which allows me to speak the truth about another's lack of kindness rather than stooping to their level with tit-for-tat vindictiveness.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Vanquishing</b> To win, I'll lie and dishonor my competition. My end justifies my means.				<b>Affirming</b> As a secure and value-driven person, I kindly compliment others' achievements, even when they outshine mine, and though this praise could contribute to their advantage over me, I am comfortable being truthful and validating about their character and diligence.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Intolerant</b> I detest and cannot stomach those who hold beliefs at odds with mine.				<b>Tolerant</b> I recognize that differing opinions are a reality, and though I might hold contrary convictions and will not compromise them, I treat those who reject my beliefs kindly, with a spirit of tolerance.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Abusive</b> I'm not abusive, and whatever idiot says that better watch their backs.				<b>Peaceable</b> I used to react with aggression, combativeness, and threats when mad, but this damaged relationships, caused shame, and pushed God away, so I strive to be conciliatory by actively listening, speaking calmly, acknowledging goodwill, and finding common ground—and this works!

**SENSITIVE WITH YOUR WORDS**

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Unempathetic</b> I'm no teary-eyed hand holder. The feeble need to toughen up.				<b>Empathetic</b> I understand others' struggles and approach them with consideration and kindness, not dismissive judgmentalism, when addressing the burdens and shortcomings that they are navigating.

10 *Speak Your Mind* Communication Self-Assessment

1 2 3 4 5

**Impatient**

I don't have time for polite greetings but need to get to my point.

**Polite**

I am patient and warm when communicating a difficult but necessary truth with another, and I refrain from hurrying the conversation, interrupting, or making it too brief.

1 2 3 4 5

**Unmindful**

Truthfully, I am preoccupied and don't have time to think about how others might be inadvertently hurt by my neglect.

**Aware**

I am sensitive to the needs of others and am attentive to showing kindness by immediately responding or rebounding when I innocently overlook their concerns.

1 2 3 4 5

**Unintentional**

I didn't mean to be insensitive or coldhearted; I was just upset.

**Amending**

I humbly acknowledge that I meant no ill will, though I reacted unkindly, and I will change my ways and make things right.

1 2 3 4 5

**Oblivious**

I think others are hearing things; I don't hear unkindness in my voice at all.

**Reflective**

I strive to be a self-examining individual who is not only conscious of the impact of my unkind words on others but open to feedback on how I may not always hear what another is trying to say so I can improve my interactive communication.

**RESPONSIBLE WITH YOUR WORDS**

1 2 3 4 5

**Blunt**

I'm not harsh but brutally honest in telling others what they don't want to hear.

**Thoughtful**

Being brutally honest can come across harshly, so I responsibly think about the time, place, and way to kindly and tactfully share my opinions on an inconvenient but necessary truth.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Resentful</b>		<b>Gracious</b>		
I have been dishonored and treated unfairly. I'm infuriated and gruff.		I am composed when dishonored, responsibly controlling my anger, and then as best I can, I kindly assert that I have boundaries against such mistreatment as I seek a peaceful solution, going more than halfway in extending unmerited favor.		

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Conditional</b>		<b>Unconditional</b>		
People who don't earn my respect don't deserve it. Period.		I refuse to treat others with contempt because I feel they haven't earned my respect; instead, I am a kind and respectful person regardless of the conditions.		

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Trendy</b>		<b>Time-Tested</b>		
People need to get over it and get with it. This is how we talk and text now.		Not everything from the past merits continuation if it is outdated; even so, I am committed to conserving proven and universal virtues like kindness, responsibly accepting these as immutable truths.		

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Family-Bred</b>		<b>Accountable</b>		
People need to chill out. This is how my family of origin reacts in conflict.		My upbringing instilled in me unacceptable patterns of talking, such as yelling, pouting, and stonewalling, but I take responsibility for correcting these negative communication patterns and refuse to blame others for being thin-skinned when I am answerable to God for my unkind and ugly discourse.		

**RESILIENT WITH YOUR WORDS**

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Defeated</b>		<b>Empowered</b>		
Showing kindness doesn't return kindness. It backfires. It must be me. I must be to blame.		I will not let others' unkindness toward me define who I am, as though I have no worth; instead, I will be confident in God's love for me as His beloved child and act on this. I will be kindhearted even toward the unkind and will not change my course of action or belief that this best enables me to influence people.		



### A WORD OF PRAISE!

If you selected 4 or 5 on any of the descriptors, then you need to be saluted. You communicate kindly to others. You have refused to be a cruel individual who is mean-spirited and uncharitable in your conversations. You feel what other people feel; you are not unaware or unfeeling when it comes to their concerns as you converse with them. When you do give into those rare moments of unkindness, you take ownership of your words and never blame others to justify your inconsiderate remark. And though life and circumstances mistreat you at various times, you do not bemoan your plight with “woe is me” in a juvenile way to solicit pity. Bottom line, people enjoy talking to you because you are truly kind toward them and focused on them.

I have to say, you are impressive.

However, none of us arrives at a place called “perfectly kind.” This is a journey, not a destination. Give yourself some mercy and grace where you have come up short. Be patient with yourself. This exercise is for the purpose of self-improvement, and that entails time. Change does not happen overnight, just as Rome wasn’t built in a day. But with God’s help and encouragement from others, you can grow as a kind communicator as you do your part and put in the grind.

However, please recognize the proclivity to convince yourself on occasions that you are kinder than you are at those moments. Some of you block out those unloving and disrespectful reactions that appear hostile and contemptuous. Because you prefer to see yourself as kind, you conveniently forget the harsh and disdainful words. When you do see yourself reacting negatively, you claim, “This isn’t me but my reaction to who they are. They caused me to react unkindly.”

However, as I share in my marriage book *Love & Respect*, “You must get to the place where you can say, ‘My response is my responsibility.’ In my own marriage, Sarah doesn’t cause me to be the way I am; she reveals the way I am. When my reactions to her are unloving, it reveals that I’ve still got issues.”<sup>1</sup>

What if you are unkind only 10 percent of the time? Is that 10 percent undermining your effectiveness as a communicator? The goal here is to express your communication in ways that sound dignified and caring—all the time. For this reason, be as honest as you can in your self-evaluation.

If you answered 1 or 2 on any of the descriptors for this part, then it would also be right to applaud you for being honest with yourself about unkind communication! Honesty is the first step toward making a change in your communication patterns. I strongly recommend that you now tell a trusted person in your life what you are recognizing about yourself and see if they can help you get to the “why” behind your unkind remarks. Once you understand that, you will be much more equipped to choose a kinder and gentler form of communication.

You can turn a past misspeak into a pivot point to communicate more kindly. The best communicators were not born with exceptional skills but reflected on their less-than-best expressions and turned that reflection into a challenge to convey content more kindly by acquiring a bit of know-how. See yourself joining their ranks as they wave at you to come over to their side. Be uplifted as they tell you, “Hey, we once stood where you stand.”

## PART THREE: SPEAK YOUR MIND ONLY WHEN NECESSARY

Instructions: For each pair of adjectives, circle a number on the scale that best represents your communication style.

### PRUDENT WHEN NECESSARY

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Untimely</b> What I said was true; it doesn't matter that it was the wrong time and place.				<b>Pertinent</b> I appropriately communicate thoughtful, applicable, and germane information and avoid unnecessary intrusions.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Nonlistening</b> My style is to listen until I know what I want to say and then say it.				<b>Contemplative</b> I listen first to understand the need, then contribute to the conversation what is wise and edifying for the moment's need in the way Christ would.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Mothering</b> When others aren't listening to me, I say it anyway because I care.				<b>Diplomatic</b> Though I care for others and would love to put in my two cents, I do not blurt out my opinion just because I care, since kindness without tactfully stating what is true is unnecessary and unhelpful.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Unprayerful</b> Maybe I should wait quietly in prayer, but I feel they need to hear it now.				<b>Kneeling</b> I want to make sure the words from my mouth reflect the heart of God, so I go to Him first and ask for His wisdom, and sometimes He tells me, <i>Not now</i> .

**COMPOSED WHEN NECESSARY**

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Volcanic</b> I have to vent my pent-up feelings; it isn't healthy to repress my negativity.				<b>Processing</b> I can sort through my feelings inwardly before speaking so that I don't erupt but instead express accurate and necessary things that serve the other person.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Pity-Partying</b> I have sorrows, okay? I look for anyone who will listen to my burdens.				<b>Discriminate</b> As I navigate the obstacles I am facing, I share my burdens only with those who contribute to my emotional or spiritual growth, and never to those who do not.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Exaggerating</b> Honestly, to ignite empathy and change, I jarringly overstate reality.				<b>Matter-of-Fact</b> I refuse to exaggerate or jump to conclusions in an overly dramatic fashion to gain empathy but instead stick to the necessary facts in my speech, though not without feeling.

1 2 3 4 5

**Grumbling**

When I don't get what I want, I am unhappy and feel it's my right to gripe.

**Accepting**

When good things don't come my way, I do not give in to complaints that are unnecessary, despairing, and hysterical, but come to terms with difficulty—some of which is a normal part of life I must roll with—and give voice to constructive ways to move forward.

**HONORABLE WHEN NECESSARY**

1 2 3 4 5

**Coarse**

Admittedly, my words are off-color, but others shouldn't be such prudes.

**Wholesome**

I have committed and limited myself to speech that would not cause my grandmother to exclaim, "That wasn't necessary to say!"

1 2 3 4 5

**Gossiping**

I must be first to know and tell, though I suppose some of it isn't my business.

**Good Neighborly**

I believe it is not necessary to discuss problems that are none of my business, as that can be gossip among my network of relationships; however, if asked for help and input, I am willing to offer any necessary solutions to the issue.

1 2 3 4 5

**Unfiltered**

I unthinkingly speak unwarranted words, but there's no ill will.

**Thoughtful**

I value contemplative, cautious, and purposeful communication, since I do not like the damage my mindless, careless, and useless words cause to other people.

1 2 3 4 5

**Spying**

I don't see it as snooping but as monitoring their mistakes to help them improve.

**Boundary-Respecting**

I have resolved not to spy by secretly watching and listening, since that is a disrespectful invasion of privacy; instead, I operate within appropriate boundaries and I ask God to show me if there is anything I need to know.

**RESTRAINED WHEN NECESSARY**

1 2 3 4 5

**Oversharing**

I think I provide helpful information but some feel overwhelmed, so they say.

**Judicious**

I want to be sure not to share too much information that ends up being unnecessary and unhelpful, so I err on the side of caution and restraint as I use my best judgment in thoughtfully and purposefully communicating.

1 2 3 4 5

**Rehashing**

I've got to go over it again. I won't drop it and move on until I feel okay.

**Succinct**

I know when to state my exact concern once or twice and then stop the unnecessary repetition, since rehashing the issue wears out the listener and is unproductive.

1 2 3 4 5

**Rambling**

I dislike silence, so I fill it with whatever I am thinking at the time.

**Reserved**

I am comfortable in the silence and don't need to fill the air with chitchat to compensate for my nervousness and insecurities, since that has nothing to do with being friendly or setting others at ease.

1 2 3 4 5

**Piling On**

When upset, I think of additional stuff and say it; it's not off topic to me.

**Focused**

I no longer say, "And one more thing" when in conflict but state my single concern and let the truth about that one point carry its weight instead of piling on with other and unnecessary accusations, even though I have other unrelated burdens and the person is attentively listening.

**OTHER-CENTERED WHEN NECESSARY**

1 2 3 4 5

**Prying**

Not knowing the details, I have to meddle to enable me to advance my cause.

**Considerate**

Though curious and caring, I do not probe and meddle by asking intrusive questions to unearth confidential information that is unnecessary for me to know. Therefore I have committed to being a courteous person, honoring others' privacy and only acting in beneficial ways.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Interrupting</b>			<b>Listening</b>	
People tell me I interrupt them unnecessarily, but what I say is important for them to hear and understand.			Since I am other-focused, I first attentively listen to understand the concern.	

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Distracting</b>			<b>Transparent</b>	
I refuse to be put on the hot seat, so I sidetrack others with unrelated stuff.			I strive to be straightforward about myself and what is true, since this is necessary for the health of relationships, so I set aside the insecurities that tempt me to sidetrack the conversation with tangential and misleading information to keep me off the hot seat.	

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Limelight-Seeking</b>			<b>Supportive</b>	
Other people are quiet or boring, so I take center stage with my interests.			I have no desire to upstage anyone, especially when their needs are unheard. I ask questions and contentedly focus on their calling, interests, and burdens.	

**A WORD OF PRAISE!**

If you answered 4 or 5 on any of the descriptors, then you need to be saluted. It can be said of you that you are very strong at communicating what is necessary. You refuse to be an annoying person who intrusively and insensitively interacts with others. You genuinely sense what is needful at the moment of writing or speaking. When flustered, you maintain self-control even when you are overwrought with emotion and feel tempted to say what you ought not to say. You are not improper, giving into words that are not becoming of you nor edifying to others. You are not verbose in the sense that you start talking for sake of talking and end up spouting things unthinkingly. And you are not egocentrically preoccupied with yourself; rather, you focus on the concerns and interests of others.

Again, congratulations! You have the wisdom to speak what is necessary. The ability to know when to say something and when not to say something is a marvelous trait you have gained. Although it's not always easy to know when something should or should not have been

said, overall, you can have the confidence that you know what to say and when (or when not to) say it!

If you answered 1 or 2 on any of the descriptors, then it would also be right to stop and applaud you for being honest with yourself about communication that is unnecessary! I salute you! Honesty is the first step toward making a change in your communication patterns on this topic of necessary expressions. I strongly recommend that you now tell a trusted person in your life what you are recognizing about yourself and see if they can help you get to the “why” behind your unnecessary statements. Once you understand that, you will be much more equipped to halt unnecessary words.

## PART FOUR: SPEAK YOUR MIND CLEARLY

Instructions: For each pair of adjectives, circle a number on the scale that best represents your communication style.

### INTELLIGIBLE COMMUNICATION

1

2

3

4

5

#### Unaware

At times when communicating, I'm unaware that others don't know what I know.

#### Clarifying

I do not assume I am always clear or people are tracking with me, so I purposefully ask, “Does that make sense?”

1

2

3

4

5

#### Mystical

I know what I mean. I just don't know how to say it.

#### Articulate

Instead of saying, “I know what I mean, I just can't say it,” I write or process my thoughts with someone until I have clarity about what I mean, and then I speak coherently.

1

2

3

4

5

#### Incomplete

Occasionally I leave out vital information, since I fail to answer who, what, when, where, why, and how.

#### Thorough

To be clear, I ask, “What needs to be said and why?” “Who needs to hear this, when, and where?” and “How do I best deliver the message?”

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1	2	3	4	5
<b>Indecisive</b>				<b>Decisive</b>
When undecided, my delay leaves others uncertain about my wishes.				I provide clear and timely information about a required decision, since when I dawdle and stall, this leaves people uncertain and confused about my view and intent.

**IMPROVED COMMUNICATION**

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Misconstrued</b>				<b>Revising</b>
I didn't mean it as they interpreted it, but yeah, those were my words.				When people misinterpret me, though I think I have been clear, I take the initiative to improve communication by revisiting the matter and explaining myself better.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Snobbish</b>				<b>Simplifying</b>
Others don't understand because they're stupid. It isn't me. I'm clear.				When misunderstood, I do not show condescension but improve my communication by making it simpler as I strive to reduce complexity, use basic words, give examples, create visuals, and stick to the main ideas.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Unfunny</b>				<b>Cultivating</b>
I try to be funny, but others hear it as sarcasm and misunderstand.				While humor has its place, being sarcastic and abrasive at the listener's expense proves and improves nothing and fails to cultivate a better relationship or ensure greater open-mindedness so others will clearly listen.

**AUTHENTIC COMMUNICATION**

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Fence-Sitting</b>				<b>Direct</b>
I don't land on either side of an issue to avoid trouble with both sides.				Though life has moral ambiguities in the gray areas, I strive to be honest and straightforward about my preferences when a decision is required, since, as an authentic person, I need to be clear about my opinions without being demanding and unkind.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Relativistic</b>				<b>Principled</b>
I'm unmoved by my contradictions. Truth is what I say it is at the moment.				I have moral convictions as an authentic person and will not compromise these to suit my selfish wants or appease those around me; otherwise, this inconsistency confuses people on what I say I believe at my core.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Intoning</b>				<b>Congruent</b>
The words I speak are sincere and clear, but my stern tone puzzles people.				I ensure that my body language and tone coincide with my words when I talk, which is what an authentic person does, to prevent confusing my listeners with an apparent contradiction.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Hypocritical</b>				<b>Reliable</b>
My words ring hollow when my actions don't match my words.				I do not overpromise and underdeliver, since that perplexes people, but do what I say I will do.

### POISED COMMUNICATION

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Unedited</b>				<b>Self-Editing</b>
When snubbed, I react instead of calmly editing myself to be clear.				I take the time to consider things carefully and share thoughtfully; otherwise, I may speak in an unedited fashion, which only confuses others.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Provoked</b>				<b>Temperate</b>
When upset, I react in ways that appear unreasonable and confusing.				When provoked, I remain emotionally self-controlled to avoid brash and unreasonable communication that only confuses and aggravates others and exacerbates the conflict.

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1	2	3	4	5
<b>Weary</b> I don't think or communicate well when I'm too tired, especially at night.				<b>Rejuvenated</b> When worn out, I know my limits on trying to communicate, since I am physically and mentally fatigued, so I recharge my batteries with nourishment and rest in order to communicate clearly and kindly.

**ORGANIZED COMMUNICATION**

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Spiderwebbing</b> I start out on one topic, but this can trigger a web of unrelated points.				<b>On Point</b> I don't sidetrack others with confusing tangents and side notes but stick to the topic.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Disorganized</b> My communication is not always well-thought-out and well-organized.				<b>Prepared</b> Before communicating, I thoroughly plan and organize my thoughts on the topic to guarantee a clear and coherent presentation that my audience can easily understand and follow.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Hasty</b> Yes, I'm hard to follow. I talk too fast and make impulsive remarks.				<b>Well-Paced</b> I don't speak too quickly but use measured words so people can process and understand the information, because though the material is clear to me, too much information too fast gets lost for the listener.

**OPEN COMMUNICATION**

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Willfully Ignorant</b> I sometimes talk while knowing I'm uninformed or misinformed.				<b>Scrupulous</b> When talking, I don't fake it until I make it, but I take great care to verify information so I can be accurate, which enables me to speak with confidence, truthfulness, and clarity.

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Falsely Humble</b>			<b>Learned</b>	
I don't wish to appear self-promoting, so I veil my competencies.			I have no interest in self-promoting to soothe my ego, but there are moments when I know what I know about what can be done, so I communicate with clarity and goodwill what I can competently do.	

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Overly Sensitive</b>		<b>Authentically Friendly</b>		
Not wanting to hurt people, I hold back on what is clearly true.		I am loyal and trustworthy but also honest and candid—a true friend—so while I seek to be sensitive, I won't give in to fearful silence that would deprive others of hearing about what best serves them.		

### A WORD OF PRAISE!

If you answered 4 or 5 on any of the descriptors, then you need to be saluted. You communicate clearly. You have taken steps in your life to be clear, not fuzzy. You are requiring yourself to be clear instead of finding fault with others for not listening or understanding. You have remained true to your convictions instead of being two-sided on issues and confusing those around you. Though you get emotional, you control your emotions so that you do not say things you should not say or leave people confused about what you mean. You do not like being disjointed in your thoughts, so you work hard at being logical, well-thought-out, and organized. And you do not suppress information so that people are left in the dark about what they need to know.

If you answered 1 or 2 on any of the descriptors for this part, then it would also be right to applaud you for being honest with yourself about the lack of clearness in what you communicate. Super! Honesty is the first step toward making a change in this communication pattern that contributes to confusion. I strongly recommend that you now tell a trusted person in your life what you are recognizing about yourself and see if they can help you get to the “why” behind your unclear comments. Once you understand that, you will be in a better position to talk so as to be clearly understood.

May I express my admiration for your clarity as a communicator? Your intentionality to be intelligible and precise sets you apart from many. You have the desire and commitment to make sense! You work hard to remove ambiguity and incoherence, a characteristic of a mature communicator. You serve others well by communicating clearly, which is not always an easy task.

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You did it! Whew! All four dimensions!

You took the first step in assessing your application of true, kind, necessary, and clear communication. Thank you for willingly engaging these descriptors.

Recognizing your strengths as a communicator brings deep satisfaction, and I hope you let yourself enjoy those moments of self-discovery. At the same time, you had moments where you may have exclaimed, “Ouch!” However, this assessment arms you with a comprehensive overview of your communication style—the good and the not so good. The challenge is to maintain those successful traits as a communicator while tackling the topics triggering “Yikes!”

Because you completed the toughest assignment in the book, you have the willingness to diligently enhance your strengths, since we can all improve what we do well. But you are also ready to dive in on those areas that have revealed weaknesses that may be robbing you of effective ways to win friends and influence people.

Let’s begin that now!

## PART 1

# SPEAK YOUR MIND TRUTHFULLY

**N**ot long ago, my daughter Joy served on a grand jury. Their job was to interview people involved in the crime and take copious notes. Since it can be years before a case goes to trial, a grand jury's notes are vital during the trial. If what a witness says while on the stand during the trial doesn't match the testimony the grand jury recorded, then that witness is caught in a lie, and the court throws out that testimony. Who can believe a person who has been caught in a lie?

Sadly, unless sworn by oath under the penalty of perjury, many people are prone to lie. One person e-mailed me: "Seems everyone is lying these days. It's just easier not to tell the truth."

Some contend that it's okay to say something untrue as long as it's necessary and kind. However, a lie is a lie by any other name. No matter how compassionate you may feel in telling an untruth, eventually the lie will be exposed. It makes no difference whether your spin was compelled by compassion, hope for career advancement, or desire to suppress opposite positions; little good comes to you in the long run when you choose not to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

You may be thinking, *But telling the truth isn't always easy*. Yes, the temptation to mislead others can be enticing. But by reading this material and thinking about it, you are nobly announcing your intention to

be truthful, transparent, and trustworthy. Your integrity as a person is admirable. Stay the course!

## THE HEART OF COMMUNICATING WHAT IS TRUE

Jesus said, “The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good” (Matt. 12:34–35). In other words, the mouth speaks what is good and honest because of a good heart. Though Jesus recognized every person’s sinful condition and need to trust Him as Savior, He described some people as having a “good heart” (Luke 8:15).

On the other hand, lying points to a bad heart—our darker nature. In John 8:44, Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. . . . There is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” According to Jesus, lying arises out of our sinful nature.

How do you know if lying is in your nature? Acts 5 tells the story of a man named Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, who lied about the size of their donation to the church to make a good impression on church leaders. Like Ananias and Sapphira, do you have a price? At what price would you compromise your integrity?

What if you did cross a line in the past? The past need not define you. How you rebound from the past newly defines you.

## THE GOLDEN RULE OF TRUE COMMUNICATION

I recently spoke with a friend who learned from a mechanic that his vehicle had a major problem. The mechanic said, “If we do these repairs, people won’t buy this car once it goes on Carfax. On the other hand, if we don’t do the work, you can sell it without the buyer knowing the serious problem since there will be no public record of it.” My friend asked me what he should do. I replied, “Well, the answer is easy enough.

If you were the consumer and someone withheld the truth about this car from you, you'd be up in arms when the car died on the highway during rush hour. I've found honesty is the best policy even if in the short haul it proves more costly."

The Golden Rule says, "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you" (Luke 6:31). Do you want to know how to communicate truthfully? Ask yourself, *Am I about to communicate unto others in the way that I would want others to communicate unto me?*

I find it fascinating that some people want to be treated with the Golden Rule of true communication but don't want to be bound by it themselves. These people are saying, "I have a right to lie to you, but you have no right to lie to me." Such a position is not only hypocritical but also lacks compassion toward another's rights. We damage trust when people cannot rely on us.

When telling the truth will cause you to lose something or not gain something, do you give wrong information to protect your interests? Do you hedge on the truth and mislead people? Do you buckle and compromise the truth? Do you fail to say what you know is the right thing to say? Or are you committed to telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

The difficulty is that many times we don't think before we speak. We want to communicate the truth, but we let other factors change our minds.

## BACK TO THE ASSESSMENT

In this first part of the book, I invite you to consider more fully the twenty reasons people lie that were described in the *Speak Your Mind* communication self-assessment. Did any of those negative descriptions ring true to you?

As I studied more closely the twenty descriptors for those who are truthful, I noticed connections between many, or what I call *clusters*. In the following chapters, we will examine these twenty descriptors by looking at their clusters. To learn how to speak our minds truthfully . . .

- We must move from feeling threatened by the truth to being *secure in the truth* (chapter 1).
- We must no longer allow unresolved personal issues to leave us feeling troubled, but instead we should remove the unhealthy obstacles that block our truthfulness and seek to live a life *transformed by the truth* (chapter 2).
- Instead of being crafty with the truth, we must learn to be *forthright with the truth* (chapter 3).
- Instead of feeling obligated to repeat others' lies, we need to become people of integrity who are *moral with the truth* (chapter 4).
- If we've often been caught in lies as a result of being presumptuous, we need to take intentional, appropriate action to ensure we are *informed of the truth* (chapter 5).
- We must move from being self-serving to thinking of others above ourselves by being *altruistic about the truth* (chapter 6).

As you reflect on true communication, be encouraged by how simple this is. You need only ask, "If the roles were reversed, would I want that person to tell me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

# SECURE IN THE TRUTH

It is only natural to fear the unpleasant outcomes that may result when telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. We feel threatened by what may happen if the truth is discovered, and as a result, we find ways to tweak the truth to avoid negative reactions or consequences.

Our goal is to avoid feeling threatened by the truth and instead focus on making our communication *secure in the truth*. That means in our communication we are brave, straightforward, unwavering, and morally grounded. We are courageously truthful, are open and direct, resist compromising the truth to fit in, and hold to a moral code despite the pressure to help another by lying for them.

Learning to become secure in the truth begins with simply believing that telling the truth produces the best positive outcomes in the end. With this as our foundation, we can bravely move forward in honesty, even when others encourage us to hedge on the truth to save face or spare hurt feelings. “A little white lie never hurt anyone,” some would say. However, that still, small voice inside us does not agree. Of course, we are not talking about keeping secret a surprise birthday party. I believe most people recognize the difference between withholding knowledge temporarily so as to keep a fun surprise and speaking an untruth so as to protect one’s selfish interests. As tough as it can be in these times, you need to speak what is true and necessary in a kind and clear way because you’re confident that honesty is always the best path forward.

To begin your journey in learning to speak your mind truthfully,

consider the following struggles we have when we're apprehensive about what may result if we tell the whole truth, as well as how we can discover both the freedom and security of telling the kind, necessary, and clear truth.

## FEARFUL VERSUS BRAVE

**Fearful:** Because of fear, I hide my missteps to avoid the consequences of past mistakes.

**Brave:** Despite my anxiety over the consequences, I choose courage by confessing my misleading comments and committing to honor the truth confidently.

Oftentimes we fear that disfavor will come on us if we speak a truth that is negative, either about ourselves or someone else. As a result, we can remain silent about the truth or say something that is at odds with the truth to prevent our fears from being realized.

Let's consider how fear drives the following reasons for telling a lie:

- "I lied about the affair because I was afraid my spouse would divorce me."
- "I lied to my roommate about where I was last night because I knew she would disapprove, and I want her to like me."
- "I lied to my professor about why I skipped class because I was afraid I would fail if he didn't let me make up the pop quiz I missed."
- "I lied about my credentials on my résumé for fear they wouldn't give me an interview."
- "I lied to my boss on the report because I feared conflict with her."
- "I lied on social media about going on an exotic trip for fear that people would not find me important and happy if they knew only of my normal daily life."

There may be some good intentions at the root of these lies. Avoiding divorce, staying in good graces with the boss, and gaining new clients are all worthy goals. However, a lie is a lie, no matter who knows or what results from it, and lying is not the wiser choice even when it gains you a competitive edge at work or helps you get a job and salary your family desperately needs. In the end, the question is not whether you believe that to be the case, because most goodwilled people do. Instead, the question is, will you be brave enough to present the truth, no matter what it may be, even if you have good reason to fear the outcomes of doing so?

### **SPEAK YOUR MIND TRUTHFULLY:**

#### Emerson's Checklist for Brave Communication

- Do I embrace the value of communicating the truth, since honoring the truth is the better and good choice?
- Do I communicate honestly, since others deserve the whole story and it is also in my best interest in the long-term?
- Do I recognize the negative consequences of past missteps and untruths?
- With courage (a virtue I intend to have in my life), do I overcome my fear of disclosing the truth about my past misleading statements?
- Do I understand the consequences of revealing my mistakes but am hopeful this leads to healing and reconciliation?
- Do I prize how my courageous truthfulness creates and maintains trusting and genuine relationships?
- Do I find new energy in being honest from the beginning, in every scenario?

## **EVASIVE VERSUS STRAIGHTFORWARD**

**Evasive:** If others don't know what I did wrong, there will be fewer problems all around.

**Straightforward:** I am assured that being open, direct, and truthful builds trust and meaningful relationships, since honesty is the best policy and prevents the heartaches that can result from being evasive and misleading.

Consider the following scenario: You did something that was neither good nor acceptable, such as using discretionary funds from the company to buy an expensive golf club driver. You conclude that if no one knows what you did, then it will be better for all involved. *What they don't know won't hurt them*, you convince yourself.

When someone asks you about the expenditures, you are vague and evasive. You perhaps even plead ignorance. Yet when a coworker comes into your office and says, "The CEO wants to see you," you break out in a nervous sweat. Because you didn't come clean on your misuse of those discretionary funds, you have an anxiety attack. You feel the evasion is over. You feel caught. Your mouth dries up. You conclude the CEO intends to fire you. But wait, maybe you can come up with an excuse. Maybe you can evade the truth again. You quickly formulate a lie that you intended to pay back the company for the money you used to buy the golf club but honestly forgot.

When you enter the CEO's office, he says, "Hey, thanks. I have a quick comment and request. Excellent job on the Macintosh account. Because of that, I want you to give a report on the account to the management team next Tuesday at 10 a.m. here in my office."

As you return to your office, your sense of relief cannot be measured. You got away with your evasive lying. But your conscience speaks loud and clear: *People who walk in truth don't experience heart palpitations like this.*

God provides your conscience, which whispers, *Change course. Be honest. Make things right.* The person who comes clean realizes it isn't just about them. As Khaled Hosseini wrote in *The Kite Runner*, "When you tell a lie, you steal someone's right to the truth."<sup>1</sup> The company has a right to know about the misallocation of funds.

"But, Emerson, when others aren't hurt by what they don't know, isn't it best to be evasive? Why risk upsetting them and harming my reputation?" Being evasive with the truth to save face or avoid trouble is not noble but an act of deceit, for we are told in Proverbs 12:17, "One

who declares truth tells what is right, but a false witness, deceit.” A difficult truth shared, even when uncomfortable, will always be better in the end than an evasive lie that deceives others and damages relationships.

### **SPEAK YOUR MIND TRUTHFULLY:**

#### Emerson’s Checklist for Straightforward Communication

- Do I buy in to the axiom “Honesty is the best policy”?
- Do I wish to be viewed by others as trustworthy and reliable because I remain truthful in all I do and say?
- Do I prioritize truth and genuine relationships over untruths and superficial relationships?
- Do I see the long-term headaches and regrets from my persistent mistreatment of others when I withhold the truth or state misinformation?
- Do I choose directness by being candid about what I did wrong, since my evasive tricks only temporarily keep lies in the dark?
- Do I accept the consequences of being honest about the past as a way of enabling me to begin anew, even if it means facing criticism or conflict?
- Do I detect the tendency to be evasive when feeling the embarrassing truth will be detrimental and remain committed to overcoming this propensity?
- Do I speak the truth when questioned and refuse to hide behind the false claim “I have no idea what the answer is to your question, since I am ignorant of the facts”?

## **CHAMELEONLIKE VERSUS UNWAVERING**

**Chameleonlike:** To avoid conflict, I blend my beliefs to fit my audience, which pleases them.

**Unwavering:** In social settings, I am comfortable in my skin in resisting the pull I feel to blend in as a compromising and conforming people-pleaser by expressing my values honestly and wisely when necessary.

In order to make others happy, chameleonlike communication appears sincere by telling people what they want to hear. But the motive is to fit in at the expense of truth. This is not an accommodation in the gray areas but a compromise on black-and-white matters. For example, you are conservative with conservatives on Monday night (e.g., pro-life) and liberal with liberals on Tuesday night (e.g., pro-choice). Though you're trying to make everyone like you, everyone eventually sees you as lacking core convictions and integrity. Chameleonlike communication is a double standard, and the fallout undermines your credibility and good reputation.

A person who uses chameleonlike communication may rationalize, "I don't like tension and conflict." But this approach involves deception. A young man explained, "I don't support the political candidate my girlfriend expects us to vote for, but if I reveal my true voting preference, there will be a heated argument. It's easier to deceive for the sake of peace." A chameleonlike communicator changes colors—or adapts their stance—to align with the desires of another person or group, even though it contradicts their convictions or preferences.

### **SPEAK YOUR MIND TRUTHFULLY:**

#### Emerson's Checklist for Unwavering Communication

- Do I approach social settings with a desire to engage others, know what they believe, and learn from them?
- Do I seek to understand where another is coming from in what they espouse?
- Do I acknowledge the concerns and convictions of others who differ from me without changing what I believe so they will accept and like me?
- Do I adapt in appropriate ways to the needs and concerns of people without compromising my values by conforming to what others expect at the expense of my convictions?
- Do I resist the compulsion to be liked as someone I am not?
- Do I stand firm on my convictions, since I will be true to myself even if rejected, though this rarely happens because people enjoy being around humble and honest folks?

- Do I have the confidence that when I am genuine and humble as I kindly communicate what is true to my values and convictions, most people are attracted to me as a person even when disagreeing with me?

## PROTECTING VERSUS MORALLY GROUNDED

**Protecting:** I feel responsible to protect another's interests even if I have to lie to do so.

**Morally Grounded:** Though I feel genuinely responsible for protecting those I care about, I will not advance their interests by lying, since I am centered on and bound by a moral code that grounds and guides me in my service to others.

In the Bible, a woman named Rahab hid Israelite spies from the king of Jericho and received honor and praise from God for her bravery (Josh. 2; Heb. 11:31). Most of us would agree that there is some virtue in protecting others from those who intend to harm them. In times of war, when evil rulers intend unjustified violence against the innocent, a protective lie can be a noble thing. But apart from the evils of war or other such rare examples, can we justify a protective lie as noble?

For example, Lisa lies to protect a work associate. "Kelli is out sick today," she tells their supervisor. "I talked to her. She may have to see the doctor." But Kelli is with her boyfriend to resolve a big fight they had the night before, so she asked Lisa to cover for her. Lisa goes along with the cover-up, since it helps Kelli with her relationship and protects her job. In some odd way, Lisa feels responsible to cover for her friend instead of coming up with a plan to enable Kelli to take a vacation day or resolve the conflict after work.

"What's the big deal?" many ask. "It's just a white lie to help a friend with a personal problem." But when Kelli and Lisa lie to management, they are lying to other human beings. Furthermore, if Lisa became the manager and Kelli lied to her about Barbara being sick, Lisa would not see Kelli as acting responsibly to protect Barbara.

She'd say, "Look, get someone to cover for Barbara, but don't cover up for Barbara." We are back to the Golden Rule of true communication.

There is a slight shift from "I have you covered as my friend" to "I will cover up for you as my friend." There is a difference! Then it becomes a quid pro quo situation: "You owe me." Eventually, the other covers up, and now they've formed an alliance. Both feel duty bound to lie for each other.

Have you ever found yourself advancing a false narrative so another person doesn't get in trouble? Have they returned the favor? Rarely does this work out. In our example above, when layoffs came, who do you think were the first employees to be let go? Kelli and Lisa, of course. Word got out that they were not trustworthy.

Before moving on from the idea that "a little white lie won't hurt anyone," we would be wise to take notice of how quickly a small lie can snowball all the way to perjury, as we find a way to justify each next step of deception. Consider the following sequence of events:

- We begin with an innocent white lie—a minor untruth so as not to hurt another's feelings.
- This can lead to a fib—a small lie to avoid trouble or take advantage.
- Before long, we justify an exaggeration—stretching the truth about what happened.
- If stretching the truth is okay, then why not omission— withholding important information?
- This naturally leads to telling half-truths—or partial truths.
- If we're okay with telling partial truths, then why not state only those half-truths that help us mislead and discredit—or what we call *misrepresentation*?
- From here, it is an easy next step to falsification—distorting or inventing information.
- This leads us to discover how easy it is to step into the world of deceit—intentionally lying so as to trick others into thinking what is not true.
- And if we're okay with deception, what then will keep us from committing perjury—lying under oath in a court of law?

Do you see why Ephesians 4:27 warns, “Do not give the devil a foothold” (NIV)? There is no such thing as a “little white lie.” This supposed tiny lie—even for a so-called noble reason like helping a coworker with her relationship problems so she doesn’t get in trouble for missing work—is just the kind of “foothold” the devil is looking for.

Bottom line, the best friendships and alliances are built on truthfulness. People who commit to telling the truth can almost always find a legal and moral way to protect the interests of another. For example, Lisa could say to Kelli, “Why don’t you take a vacation day, and I’ll cover for you by working late for you tonight at work. The boss has signed off on this.” It may be inconvenient and costly, but it is an honest plan of action. Cover-ups may feel noble as a way of protecting another, but at the end of the day, they are just lying, and lying is not the best policy.

### **SPEAK YOUR MIND TRUTHFULLY:**

#### Emerson’s Checklist for Morally Grounded Communication

- Do I live by a moral code like the expression “I will not lie, cheat, or steal”?
- Do I have a line morally and legally that I will not cross when caring for another, such as not providing false information to help this person?
- Do I recognize the pressure one can feel to provide misleading information to advance worthy interests, such as lying about someone’s past failed relationship to their new boyfriend or girlfriend so as to not scare them off?
- Do I discern the negative consequences of deceitful protection when I lie to help someone’s well-being in the short haul, since it doesn’t help their well-being, or mine, in the long haul?
- Do I have the resolve to remain bound to my moral code even if someone begs me (“If you cared, you’d help me”) or bullies me (“If you don’t help me, you will suffer!”) to deceive on their behalf?
- Do I humbly say no to someone who asks me to go along with their lie to keep what they took or to take what they want?
- Given my limited resources, do I hear God’s call for me to entrust this person to His care and protection?