



Karen Friedman

— ENTERPRISES —

CREATING COMPELLING COMMUNICATORS

# COMMUNICATING WITH DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

## Managing Mindsets to Maximize Messages



You cannot control the  
behavior of others, but  
you can always choose  
how you **respond** to it.

R O Y T . B E N N E T T



## **UNDERSTANDING THEIR MINDSET**

- **Anxious. Scared. Concerned**
- **Emotions are strong**
- **Think you should agree with them**
- **Angry. Think they're right**
- **Want answers that you don't always have**
- **Power struggle**





## **CHANGING YOUR MINDSET**

- **Don't avoid conversation**
- **Address fears**
- **Empathy**
- **Listen, don't interrupt**
- **Remain calm**
- **Focus on what you can do**

# YOUR TURN

## Pick a Scenario



# SCENARIOS

## **Scenario #1:** Production Issue/Identified Bug (Delivering a Difficult and Technical Message to non-technical Stakeholders)

The team has identified an issue with the product they are trying to release for a restaurant/and or brand grouping on your team. This issue is going to cause a 2- week setback from the original deadline you gave the brand. You need to give an update to your stakeholders and restaurant grouping (non-technical team members) to help them understand the impact and what you are doing to resolve the issue.

Audience: Stakeholders within the Business

## **Scenario #2:** Pitching a New Technical Initiative (Communicating and Selling to the Business)

Product Example

You recently identified a new product and/or restaurant need that you will need resources for. The tool/update will be leveraged across the entire organization, but there is a cost associated with it and you will need heavy collaboration from your peers to build out the content for their respective areas, which will take time (a few days or so to locate and then build out their content/team information). You will need to get them onboard that this solution has the ROI for the organization and get their buy-in to help build this out.

Audience: Peer Group

## **Scenario #3:** Managing Competing Priorities/Communicating Out Changes to Your Team

Example

Your Director reaches out to you and requests that you escalate a new initiative that was not scheduled for your team to take on for a couple of weeks. You and your Manager meet to review and agree, the team is already working on multiple initiatives, and you do not have a ton of bandwidth to complete the newly requested work. While you understand the work is important, you will not be able to fulfill and deliver as they requested. You must communicate back to this leader on where the team is out, and why you cannot deliver on this initiative as they requested.

Audience: COO/Stakeholder

## **Scenario #4:** Reporting Out Bad News to Senior Executives

Product Example

One of your initiatives is taking longer to complete due to multiple factors (engineering resources, competing priorities in Product etc.) You need to give an update to the executive team on why your initiatives are behind and what you are doing to resolve and work on these issues. You need to tell them What the current state of the initiative is, why it's, and what they can expect going forward on this initiative.

Audience: Senior Executives

## **Scenario #5:** Holding a stakeholder accountable

Product Example

Peer: You are working with a peer on a cross-functional project. At the start of the project roles and responsibilities were decided and timelines committed to. Throughout the course of the project, you observe that one of your peers is not pulling their previously agreed upon "weight". You will need to have a conversation with them to address your concerns.

IC: You have assigned a task or project to an IC, and they have not completed it by the deadline. You will need to have a coaching conversation with this contributor.

Audience: Peer/IC



# **WHAT IS A MESSAGE**



**Marketing statements**  
**Mission statements**  
**Advertising**  
**We** are the best  
**We** serve our customers  
**Complicated sentence structure**



**Messages are not**

**Simple language**  
**Easy to understand**  
**Tells a story**  
**Clear and concise**  
**Informs or educates**  
**About THEM**



**Messages are**

# What is a Message

Our products are made from natural and sustainable ingredients that are designed to provide effective cleaning while minimizing environmental impact.

Our commitment to protecting the environment is what our products are all about. We use only recycled materials when packaging and our manufacturing processes are designed to minimize waste and conserve energy.

# NOT ABOUT YOU

## NO

This has been tough for us. **We** have a lot of problems. **We** had a hard time getting here. **We** have two people out sick today.....

## YES

This is a difficult situation, but we are here to walk **you** through it and to let **you** know what the plans are, and what systems are in place to help **you**.

# THREE QUESTIONS



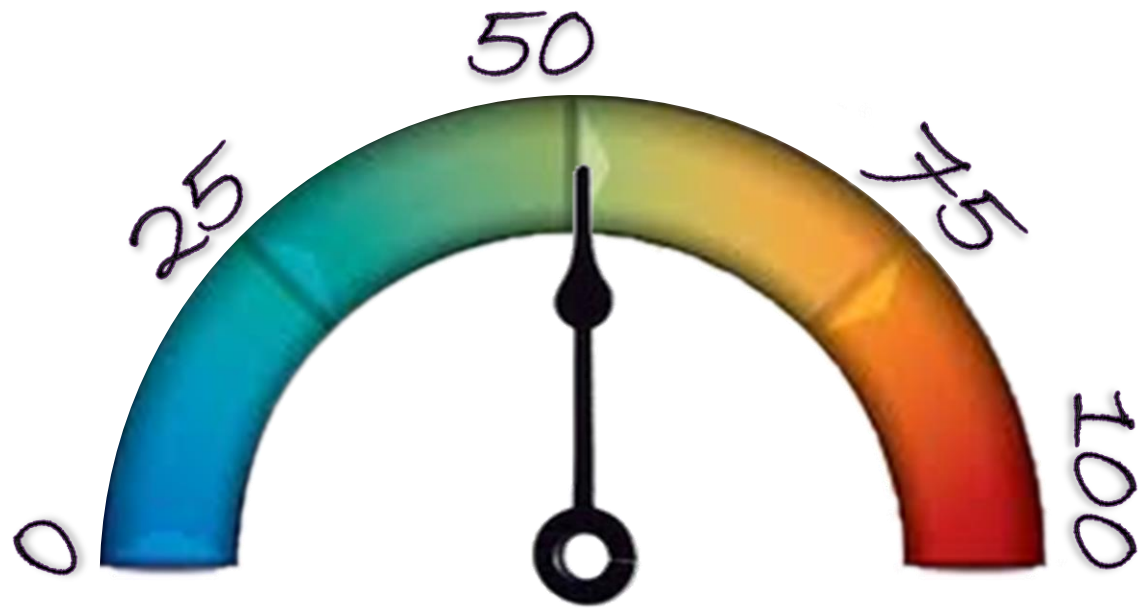
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN



SO WHAT



WHY SHOULD I CARE



Make Me Care Meter



# Think Before You Act



# GOAL: DIFFUSE TENSION/FOSTER DIALOGUE



Acknowledge your responsibility to diffuse emotions



Have a goal. Define outcome in advance



Listen and validate. Hear where they're at



Where should I begin?

# OPENING STATEMENTS



Express purpose and positive intended outcome



Empathy and understanding



Describe the gap/problem



Ask a Question

# OPENING STATEMENTS



**EXPRESS PURPOSE** “We are not going to change our decision but do want to reach an agreement on how to move forward together.”



**EMPATHY:** “I understand how difficult this must be for you...”



**DESCRIBE GAP:** “We clearly have different views on this. I want to understand how you see things, but also want you to understand what we believe needs to happen.”



**QUESTION:** “I have not seen you follow through even though you agreed to bring recommendations to the team two weeks ago which makes me wonder about your commitment to the project. Is this right or am I missing something?”

# PRACTICE OPENS

## **YOUR TURN**

- **Pick a scenario**
- **Write a SHORT open**
- **Include one or more components:**
  - **Purpose**
  - **Empathy**
  - **Gap**
  - **Ask Question**

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# WRITE THIS DOWN

- 
- 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  - 5.
  - 6.
  - 7.
  - 8.
  - 9.
  - 10.
  - 11.
  - 12.

# ORGANIZE YOUR THOUGHTS



**ORGANIZE THOUGHTS**

**OPEN:**

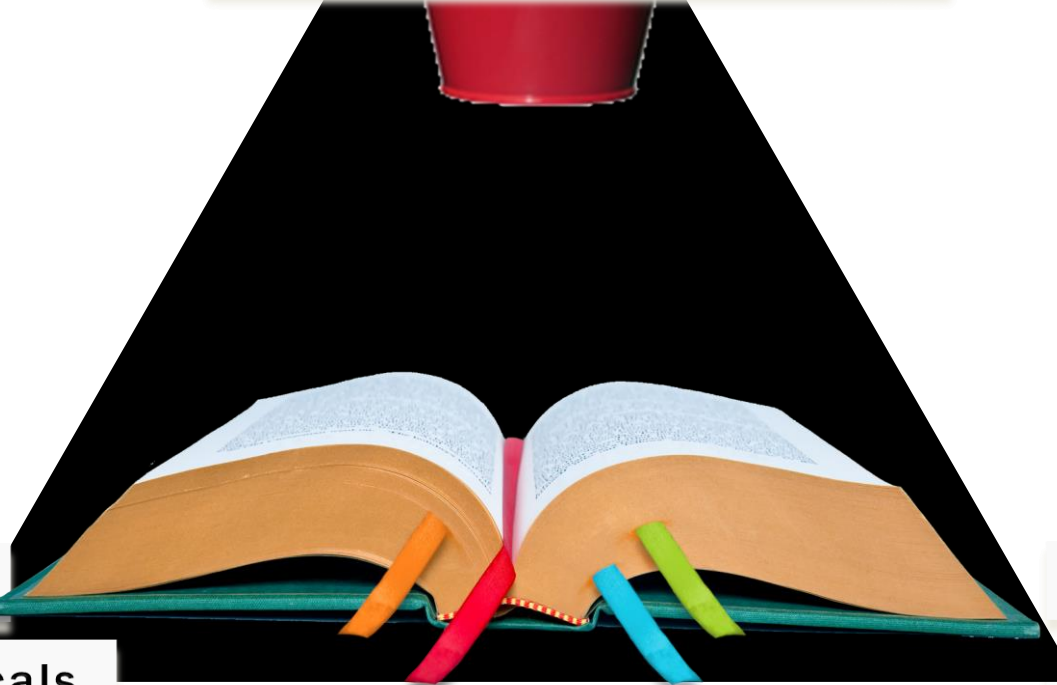
New effective eco friendly cleaning products better for environment

**WHAT IS IT**

New eco-friendly

Natural ingredients

All purpose cleaning



**WHY**

Great results

No harsh chemicals

Recycled materials

**IMPACT**

Safer environment

Less waste/energy

Effective cleaning

# Bridge to Message

In fact

It's important to understand

What you might find interesting

That is a common misperception so let me clarify

First, let me say

Let me also point out

In reality

What we do know is

I'm not going to speculate; what I can tell you

That is not entirely correct, the truth is

In my experience

A - T - M

WELCOME



Acknowledge  
Transition  
Message  
and Address



Insert Card

Receipt

# Three Conversations

1

“What Happened”  
Conversation

2

The “Feelings”  
Conversation

3

The “Identity”  
Conversation



# The “What Happened” Conversation



Disagreeing about what happened or what should have happened.



I’m right, you’re wrong, whose to blame?



Filled with untrue assumptions. See the other person as the problem

## Three Conversations

## The “Feelings” Conversation



Manage strong  
emotions



Struggle to express  
their feelings and  
listen to others



Emotions make  
people feel  
vulnerable and  
uncomfortable

# Three Conversations

## The “Identity” Conversation



Conversation we  
have with  
ourselves



Will it expose my  
self doubts?



How will people see  
me afterwards? How  
will I see myself?

# Three Conversations

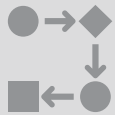
# SHARING PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

## **YOUR TURN**

### **Share what happened**

- **What helped the conversation?**
- **What hurt the conversation?**
- **How did identity, feelings and what happened affect outcome?**
- **Report out: If you could do it again, what would you do differently?**

# Common Ground Closes



“I think we both understand where we differ. How can we move forward and work through this together...”



“I have a better understanding of why you’re upset”



I understand how the situation was misinterpreted”



**WHAT TO SAY**



# SPEAK WITH CLARITY/CONVICTION



What's important to us is...



For us, this is about xyz



I want to be very clear about our purpose



Is there anything I'm saying that isn't clear?

**NO**

**Calm Down  
Just Relax  
Don't Worry  
Stop Stressing  
It will be fine  
You shouldn't feel  
that way**

**YES**

I understand

Help me understand

I'm listening

Let's find common ground

What can I do to help

It's okay to be frustrated

Take me through what happened

Take a breath and start from the beginning

# Hostile Questions



**Listen without interrupting**



**Do not attack the questioner**



**Acknowledge emotional concerns**



**Re-state key messages**

# Don't Know Answer



I don't have enough information to answer your question



Based on what we know today



I don't know, let me get back to you



Repeat, paraphrase, clarify

# Unclear Comments



Ask person to give an example



Share information or facts



Restate to verify what person is saying



Can you elaborate?

# Speculation/Rumor



It would be inappropriate to speculate. I can tell you this



Here is what we know



I can only address current guidelines



We do not discuss personal employee information



Avoid thinking they are the problem



Have own story and interpretations



Don't make assumptions



Abandon Blame



**[KarenFriedman.com/grubhub](http://KarenFriedman.com/grubhub)**