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If You Do Nothing Else, Be Clear...

How To Speak *Courageously* & *With Conviction*

By Meryl Runion

Keynote speakers don't get much better than Marcus Buckingham, whom I am proud to say I spoke with at the San Diego Meeting Professionals International convention in January.

OK, by speaking with him, I mean we were at the same event. He spoke to a huge room full of people, and I spoke to a small room full of people. Still, he was exceptional, I was honored to be there, and I was inspired by his message.

Buckingham spoke about the importance of clarity. He explained that fear of the unknown produces anxiety, but that clarity is the antidote to anxiety. He noted that leaders who are clear have loyal followers, even if they are wrong. If you do nothing else, he said, be clear.

Have you ever been with a group that couldn't decide on a restaurant? After all, there are so many possibilities. If you eat at Joe's, you'll miss out on Friday's. If you delight in the salads at Fridays, you'll ignore the biscuits at Red Lobster. Then someone comes along and says, "Let's eat at India Gardens, because they have a buffet and we'll get out of there fast." The whole group is persuaded because finally someone is clear. When you are clear, you have conviction. And when you speak with conviction, you speak courageously.

First, you must convince yourself. I recently had an issue with a colleague that left me feeling confused, weak and uncertain. I did not feel myself to be in a position of power. I knew that if I spoke in the state I was in, I would not come across convincingly. Fortunately, I was able to gain clarity. In that clarity I saw what power I had. As soon as I did, I felt my conviction grow and my words flow.

You must ask yourself what you think, what you feel, what you want, and why. Answer these questions boldly and truthfully. If you don't get a strong sense of certainty, keep asking yourself these questions until you do.

When you express your thoughts, feelings and wants, avoid the temptation to water them down or apologize for them. Too many of us express ourselves in non-committal ways that sound like we ourselves are unconvinced. When we do, we fail to convince anyone else. Too many of us worry so much about having the "right" answer that we do not offer any answer at all, or we keep our ideas tentative and vague. When we do, no one notices the brilliance of the idea at the core of our message. For example, the person who suggests that some kind of lantern theme might be good for the convention is unlikely to motivate others

in the same way as the person who says, "Let's make the theme 'Turn Up Your Amperage and Shine.' We can use a lighthouse, and we can honor people for the illumination they've contributed to their areas. We can seek them out in the audience with the lighthouse beam and increase the intensity of the light as we describe how they have upped the amperage of their teams." The second recommendation is more effective because the second recommendation is more clear.

Do you have an idea you think could be good, but you're not sure? Ask yourself three questions: What do I think? What do I feel? What do I want? Listen for answers until clarity comes. However, don't wait so long to be sure that you are right that you never get around to sharing your view. Remember the wisdom of Marcus Buckingham. If you do nothing else, be clear. Choose a direction and communicate with clarity. §



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