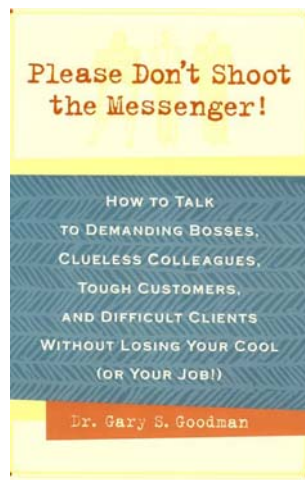


Please Don't Shoot the Messenger!

How to talk to demanding bosses, clueless colleagues, tough customers, and difficult clients without losing your cool (or your job!)



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The Big Idea

Whether it's asking your boss for a raise, or dismissing an employee as painlessly as possible, this book addresses all kinds of thorny situations, how we can effectively communicate in business situations, and calmly manage potential conflict.

1. Mastering the psychology of conflict prevention and conflict management

- First acknowledge that conflict is natural and normal despite what many believe.
- There are four predictable responses to conflict: Avoidance of the person, offering a compromise, fighting back, or coddling (telling someone there's nothing to be upset about, which may fuel their anger even more).
- The greatest conflict you'll manage will be inside of you.
- We cannot control other people's reactions and emotions, but we can at least control our own.
- Learn to enjoy everything, accepting the bad along with the good.
- The interesting thing about comedians is they come from poor and dysfunctional backgrounds. The ability to use a sense of humor in certain situations can help you get through them.
- Take a well-deserved break, take a walk, take deep breaths, or if you must let off some steam, hit a punching bag or enroll in a martial arts class. Don't take yourself and the situation you're in too seriously, everything will come to pass.
- Don't take things personally. This is just work, it's just a job.
- There are several types of messages that can put us on the defensive: When someone uses forms of name-calling, or gives a negative evaluation of us, tries to control our behavior, strategically keeps information from us, gives us a neutral cool reply, tries to be superior, or acts like a know-it-all.
- There are many ways to manage conflict and remain tranquil at the same time. First, remember that what goes around comes around, so if someone is treating you unfairly, sooner or later "they'll get theirs". You can also use a little assertiveness, or "be like water". This means partially agreeing, to leave your adversary little to resist, then disagreeing in an easy-going manner, without sounding too hard and stubborn. The more we stiffen our resolve, the less our adversaries will back down, and the cycle leads to greater misunderstandings, creating a lose-lose situation all around.
- Have interests outside of work, so you don't take work so seriously. Your career is not the sum total of your life. Make sure you have a private life, a family life, sports, and hobbies.
- Don't carry around the weight of self-criticism.
- L-E-A-R-N-I-N-G is the best revenge. L means let the negative event or conflict play out in your mind, until you see that the worst thing that can happen isn't so bad after all. Evaluate the situation as a third-party observer would. Ask yourself what you can learn from this. Resolve to transform every defeat into victory. Negate negative thinking. Immerse yourself in the wonders of life. Note all your conflicts and use this logbook as a testimony to how you overcome obstacles. Let it inspire you. Go beyond the conflict in your mind. Imagine the good times to follow and you will prevail.
- Stay positive.
- Remember how far you've come. You've met challenges in the past; you'll do it again.
- Remember those who didn't quite make it to where you are now.

- Do something nice for yourself or for others less fortunate.
- Count your blessings.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help. If you are stuck in a depression, the National Institute of Mental Health offers a checklist on the Internet for you to gauge if you need help. Go to www.nimh.nih.gov. Remember, you don't have to go it alone. Men, especially, refuse to ask for help when they are lost.

2. A universal model for communicating in the most challenging business situations

- Master the fine art of the apology. In business situations, you don't need to feel contrite in order to apologize to clients and fellow businesspeople. It is simply part of business etiquette to apologize on behalf of the company if a client or customer is unhappy.
- We need to practice our tone of voice so we can sound sincere when we express our apologies.
- Use empathy to show you understand the person's situation, predict a positive outcome and eliminate the person's anxiety by stating the worst that could possibly happen, and then provide comforting, positive words. Keeping people informed will show that you respect them.
- Organize your sensitive communications with PEP. The Point-evidence-point method means you first make your point, and then offer 3 supporting evidences, and finally, restate your point. It is a natural method for persuading or informing.
- Use "I'm sorry but..." to introduce your PEP talk. Transition phrases like "I appreciate that, but..." and words like "Well" sound more friendly.

3. Leveling the playing field with your boss

The general rules about bosses

- Bosses want reasonably happy employees. They don't want to face disgruntled workers everyday.
- They want to look good and seem effective to their bosses.
- They want to fulfill and exceed their unit's objectives.
- They want to earn profit for the company.
- They want to feel liked by their staff.
- They don't want to appear as if they're wimpy or "soft touches" for any and every employee request.
- They don't want to incessantly renegotiate the working arrangements they have with you.

Asking for a raise

- When asking for a raise, phrase your request carefully. Saying "I could really use a raise" or "I need a raise" works better than "I'd like a raise". Your tone of voice matters too. Do not use an ultimatum, like "I'm going to have to get a raise" because it implies you will quit if you don't get immediate action. Bargaining statements may work such as "Another company has offered me a position at a significant raise in pay". It also helps to use the "What can I do to qualify me for a raise?" approach. Asking for a specific area for improvement to justify earning a raise is also a good approach because it is an evaluation of your performance, it may impress your manager because you are requesting feedback and criticism, a true sign of maturity. You may hear good things about yourself that will help you see your value in the open job market.

Negotiating for extras, discouraging flirting, and other matters:

- When tasks are multiplying, you can propose to have more assistance in performing your duties, and it also helps to outline what is the best use of your time so you can accomplish all your tasks effectively
- It is best to fully articulate and make explicit the expectations of your employer, if you must stay late for extra pay or not.
- When negotiating for flex-time try something like “Bill, I would like to find a way to spend a little more time with my daughter, by driving her to school every morning. If I could start here at 9.30 and work until 5.30, would you be open to it?”
- When negotiating for job-sharing, (when two people work the same job during different working hours) you could cite the benefits to both employer and employee. Employers can benefit from two experienced people for the price of one, they can assign tasks according to their individual strengths, and when one is sick, the other may be able to fill in full-time. Job-sharing allows parents more time to see their kids and keep their job skills current.
- When negotiating for benefits, like additional coverage for health plans, its best to do your research and propose group rates for your company. Companies that offer health plans, retirement plans, and other pluses tend to retain loyal employees.
- To discourage sexual harassment in the workplace, make it explicitly clear and be direct about it. You can report it to someone higher up on the ladder, or get help from your attorney, or from outside sources like the US government’s Equal Employment Opportunities Commission. You can first ask the offender, “Are you flirting with me?” or if he is unrelenting, “The way you talk to me about sex makes me uncomfortable and keeps me from doing my job, I expect it to stop right now. Understood? Thanks.” Or “I’m not going to discuss my private life, it has nothing to do with my job here.”
- Do not bargain for a better compensation package from your boss unless you have secured a better offer from another company.
- When quitting, tell your boss how you’ve enjoyed working at the company, what you’ve learned, and contributed, and make sure you leave a good last impression. This is not the time to rat on other co-workers, or air all your bitterness. This way it’s also easier to ask for a reference when you need one. Remember, people don’t always leave because they are unhappy; winners normally do well at a company, and then move on to bigger and better things.

4. Dramatically improving peer relationships at work

Your rights in the workplace

- You have the right to enjoy an atmosphere that is free of incessant distractions.
- You have the right to expect cooperation from your coworkers.
- You have the right to expect professionalism from your coworkers.
- You have the right to expect a fair reward commensurate with your contributions.

Asserting your rights: Scripts for dealing with loudmouths, ramblers, blabbers, etc.

When dealing with the office loudmouth, you can start by complimenting him on his radio announcer-quality voice, then smoothly adding that sometimes it can be distracting and could he maybe tone it down a bit?

With ramblers, or those people who never seem to get straight to the point, you can say, “Well, I know what you mean, but what exactly are you trying to tell me about the Henson file?”

Or “That’s all very interesting, but what’s the bottom line on the Applegate situation?”

Or “Sorry to interrupt, but how much are we willing to pay this guy?”

Just remember to maintain politeness.

With gossips, rumors pertaining to personal lives should be addressed directly. Confront the person spreading the rumor about you, and make it clear that your personal life has no bearing on office performance and should be kept out of the workplace.

With vicious competitors, it's best to point out that internal competition should not be the focus of one's efforts. Attention should be drawn to the company's real competition in the industry. You can say, "Bill, I'm not competing with you and your team. Our competition is Sharp, Ricoh, and Canon, so let's gear our efforts to defeating them, and not each other, ok?"

Slackers are people who don't do their fair share of work. They should be confronted and asked to fulfill all their duties, because most of the time slackers don't "pick up the slack" and the whole team suffers. This results in less productivity and profit for the whole company.

Mavericks like to do things their way, sometimes breaking the rules of the company. They make great entrepreneurs, but when it comes to following a uniform method, they need to be reeled in. Use honest, direct, but upbeat words to simply state the problem, you can suggest the maverick move to a more creative department or position elsewhere.

The Rat, or that person who reports each and every shortcoming thinking he or she will gain favor with the management, should be confronted the same way as gossips. Instead of focusing their efforts on the business, rats waste time telling on their colleagues. They should be confronted and perhaps even given a dose of their own medicine. You can tell the rat you could report all her mistakes to management as well.

Informal leaders are those who have been working in the group longest, the ones people turn to when questions of policy and procedure come up. You need to stay on their good side, or these people can make your working days hellish.

5. Communicating with those who report to you, and improving relations with those who don't

How to conduct a critique session with an employee

Follow the agenda of 3 discussion points:

- What objective did we set forth to achieve?
- How well are we achieving it?
- Where do we need to go from here to achieve it or to achieve related objectives?

Implement incremental discipline

Have fair and proper warnings when an employee fails to deliver, give him a number of chances to redeem himself before you take action by way of termination, a demotion, or a transfer.

Demoting someone may work well in some situations, where a person may be more suited to a particular role among regular staff rather than to a managerial position.

Demoting someone may also mark the person as a failure in some organizations, and therefore it is more dignified to just leave the company. Someone who has been demoted may have to deal with the humiliation of reporting to someone who was once under him.

Getting fellow managers to support your initiatives:

- First, announce your performance objective.
- Second, specify what support you'll need from your counterpart.
- Third, set a target date for completion, and calendar a follow-up meeting.

6. Trouble shooting the 21 toughest customer service and client communication situations

- Customers (your short-term business) should be treated with the same degree of professionalism as clients (long-term business).
- When informing a client/customer that his shipment will be late, it pays to break the bad news with a valid reason (weather, strikes, etc) an estimate of the soonest possible time you can deliver, and a promise to keep the client/customer posted.
- Always thank your customers for doing business with you. You can never thank them enough.
- Give reasons, forecasts, and have enough empathy. By being thorough the speaker sounds like he is on top of the situation, and gives the client a dose of personalized treatment.

Phrases to avoid using are:

- "You'll just have to wait"
- "You must put complaints in writing"
- "It's not our fault"
- "That's not my responsibility"
- "You can't talk to me like this!"
- "I have bad news"
- "There are no exceptions"
- "You'll be treated like everyone else"
- "Life isn't fair, Mr. Jones!"
- "Are you ready to be civil?"
- "I didn't make the policy"

When informing a customer that your product is out of stock, emphasize it is a temporary setback, give a valid reason, make arrangements for prompt overnight or the soonest possible delivery, apologize profusely, and thank them for their business.

When you need to communicate price increases, the general rule of thumb for a modest increase is a casual announcement. There is no need to explain or justify a small increase. If the price hike is quite substantial, then you need to justify it. A nice touch would be to give the customer a rationale for seizing the new price instead of shopping with competitors. An example follows:

"Hello Bill? This is Gary Goodman of Goodman Supplies. How are you? Good. How's your stock of widgets? How many do you still have on hand? A dozen? Well, you may run out in a week or so, right? Let's get you a reorder of six dozen and those will be coming to you at \$46.50 per dozen. That's a little higher than what you've been paying in the past. The manufacturers have been passing along higher prices because of the latex shortage, so it's a good idea to get a supply now. And is there anything else I can help you with? Well, thanks for your business, and I'll talk with you soon. Bye."

When a customer/client return unsold goods and you need to ask them to pay a restocking fee, simply announce your company policy for handling returns. When asking your customers to pay a modest restocking fee, you need to sound helpful, offer your assistance. Remember to use the PEP format when justifying your restocking fees.

Sometimes it's easier to say yes than no. If you take a look at Nordstrom, they may have some customers who abuse the return policy and expect their money back even for a well-worn shirt. They can afford to take in all returns because they charge premium prices and there is enough profit left over to make shareholders happy.

When you are too busy to speak to a customer, simply ask them if you can call them back within the hour, and take their number. Make sure you call at the time you said you would.

When arguing a breach of contract, organize your reasons through bullet points:

- We agreed to a certain compensation package.
- I relied upon this agreement in coming to your campus to speak.
- Contracts are special and should not be violated.

Stand firm and use your PEP talk to stick to the terms of your agreement.

When finishing your PEP talk, add a flourish at the end like:

“Don’t you agree?”

“Sounds good, doesn’t it?”

“So let’s do it this way, fair enough?”

“This should work well for both of us, ok?”

“Oh we never received that invoice you said you faxed”

There are customers who may lie to you over the phone, saying they never received your shipment, your fax, etc. This may prompt you to send another one over right away, but beware of rip-offs. For packages, it’s best to consider return-receipts. Suggest you might ask the postal or delivery service to trace the package. By indicating you are not going to just give up and write off the loss, your customers may start cooperating.

When substituting automation for human help, use the PEP format to justify and explain the benefits to your customers. As with the introduction of ATMs during those pre-ATM days, for instance:

ATMs may seem a bit unusual now, but we’re confident you’ll like them because:

- They give you 24-hour access to your accounts seven days per week
- They eliminate the long wait in line at the bank simply to make a deposit or withdrawal.
- They actually add to your safety by eliminating the need to carry around large sums of cash.

We’re sure once you’ve tried our ATMs, you’ll like them.

When dealing with hostile, verbally abusive customers, one surprise strategy is to introduce a new personality (your supervisor). This might calm the person down. Another option is to talk about the way the customer is talking. You could gently suggest, “Could we tone down our voices just a bit”. If things are just too verbally abusive, you can fire the customer. Simply say, “I’m sorry sir, but I regret we can’t meet your requirements and I’m sure you’ll find a better source” or “We aren’t comfortable doing business with you so we’re asking you to find other suppliers, good luck”.

When discussing money that is in arrears, don’t get emotional. Offer a payment plan, you need to get the customer to pay you a certain sum on a definite target date. If you seem friendly, express warmth, and are concerned about his business, you will be better able to get him to pay your firm back more regularly. Use words like “Hello Mr. Smith? This is Gary Goodman with Goodman Communications, how are things with you? How’s business? Well, we’re a bit concerned because it seems your 60 days behind on your payments. We would appreciate it if you could make a payment by next Monday. Is there anything else we can help you with? Thank you for doing business with us. Goodbye.”

Let’s say you want to make more sales, but you can’t commit to extend more credit to an account that isn’t paying in a timely way. Some suggestions for this situation are:

"Sure, I'll be happy to help you. We'll ship you two gross of widgets, that will be at \$562.50. Would you prefer to do that COD or prepay?"

Customer: "Can't you bill me?"

"Unfortunately, not when there's a past-due balance on the books. Once you take care of that, we'll be back to your regular net-thirty-day terms, ok?"

Using an alternative close, like suggesting COD or prepayment would be best because it makes the customer choose between something and something, rather than something and nothing.

If you screwed up with a client, and you still want his business, asking forgiveness and for a second chance can sound like this:

"I want to personally apologize for screwing up your billing as we did. We really didn't want to get paid twice! I realize we made an error and we made you look bad at your company. Allow us to make it up to you and send you your next set of widgets at half-off."

When you'd rather not do lunch, (or attend cocktails and certain events) you can turn down an invitation without offending your client by saying: "I appreciate the invitation, but I really don't take a formal lunch, so could we handle this during a normal meeting time?" or "I appreciate your invitation but after 6 pm I'm on family time and they get grumpy if I cut in on it. Could we schedule this for a normal meeting time?"

When it comes to discouraging flirtation, there are indirect ways of doing it, like casually mentioning your spouse, family, or significant other during the course of a conversation. Whatever you do for a living, you have the right to a private life and no one is allowed on this turf.

When you have to demote a customer, say someone who cannot enjoy the privileges of his gold card anymore because he travels less, you can say "We see that your travel needs have changed and you have made fewer trips this year. We would like you to once again enjoy gold-card status and to reach that level you only need to make 15 round trips. In the meantime, if we can help you plan your itineraries, please let us know. Ok?"

When canceling an event, the best way not to lose any goodwill is to offer assistance in getting the person's money back, working with the airline or hotel so that the inconvenience becomes a little less painful on the pocket.

When the company comes under new management, clients want to be reassured they'll enjoy the same service, and if you can promise it, even better and faster service.]

7. Communicating with vendors and outsiders

Treat your vendors or suppliers with the same respect you give your own customers. Return their calls promptly. Even if you are the customer in this situation, you need to extend the same type of goodwill.

Let's say your shipment of hats from your supplier came in too late in the season, and you're afraid you won't be able to move the stock until next year. Instead of shouting at your supplier for sending the hats so late, you can nicely ask them for a fairly large discount and explain your situation. Arguing contract law should not be your first strategy.

When doing damage control with the press, say you need to clear up your company name, remember to use the PEP format. Offer as much information as you can, and if you cannot give them answers at the moment, establish a better time for a press conference. It's important to buy time until all your facts are gathered. If your restaurant has been cited as the source of an outbreak of stomach discomforts in your area, you must show people you are doing everything

you can to test all your menu items, and if possible, temporarily close your business while the crisis is ongoing.

When communicating with investors, the most important thing to remember is to sell the long-term vision your firm is pursuing.

8. How to prevent communication mishaps and miscues

Your prevention checklist:

- Thank your customers incessantly.
- Appear genuinely happy to help your customers in any situation.
- Every chance you get, ask if there's anything else you can do for your customers.
- Ask how your service compares to others your customers do business with.
- Ask clients to write you a note about your service quality.
- Ask customers to refer new business to you.
- Communicate with buyers frequently through various means, including newsletters. Also make it easy for them to contact you.
- Place your best customers on your advisory boards and panels.
- Periodically send clients special coupons and exclusive offers.
- Be quick to alert customers to changes that will affect them.

Achieving telephone effectiveness:

- Answer promptly. No more than four rings, whenever possible.
- Pleasantly greet the caller.
- Use the caller's name.
- Apologize for delays or errors.
- Use diplomatic responses.
- Give the other party the option of holding or being called back.
- Always fulfill a promise to call back.
- Avoid abrupt questions and phrases.
- When taking the perfect message, note specifics: his or her name, department or company, area code, phone number, time zone, and a brief reason for the call. Even taking note of the tone of voice could be helpful.
- Tell your coworkers where you are going if you have to leave your desk or office.
- When an associate receives a call while on another line and you see he or she is tied up, take the caller's name and put a note in front of the associate.
- Always say thank you and good-bye before ending the conversation.
- Don't hang up too quickly.
- Ask for feedback to ensure that the message you left was clear.
- When disconnected, try to call back if you initiated the call.
- Always be polite.
- Discontinue noisy activities when speaking on the phone.
- Never leave the phone off the hook. Someone important may hear what you and your coworkers are saying while it's off the hook. Use the hold button.
- Give the boss privacy when he or she receives a personal call.
- Discontinue conversations with associates when the phone rings.
- Use common sense.

Remember to use the golden rule in all forms of business communication: communicate to others as you wish them to communicate with you.