

# **Building Trust in Relationships: Key Communication Skills Part 2**

**Suggestion Offering  
Praise  
Apologies  
Bibliography**

**Jennifer Abrams, Communications Consultant**  
**jennifer@jenniferabrams.com**  
**www.jenniferabrams.com**  
**@jenniferabrams**

## About the Presenter

Jennifer Abrams is an international educational and communications consultant for public and independent schools, hospitals, universities and non-profits. Jennifer trains and coaches teachers, administrators, nurses, hospital personnel, and others on new employee support, supervision, being generationally savvy, having hard conversations and effective collaboration skills.

In Palo Alto USD (Palo Alto, CA), Jennifer led professional development sessions on topics from equity and elements of effective instruction to teacher leadership and peer coaching and provided new teacher and administrator trainings at both the elementary and secondary level. From 2000-2011, Jennifer was lead coach for the Palo Alto-Mountain View-Los Altos-Saratoga-Los Gatos Consortium's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program.

In her educational consulting work, Jennifer has presented at annual conferences such as Learning Forward, ASCD, NASSP, NAESP, AMLE, ISACS and the New Teacher Center Annual Symposium, as well as at the Teachers' and Principals' Centers for International School Leadership. Jennifer's communications consulting in the health care sector includes training and coaching work at the Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula and Stanford Hospital and Clinics.

Jennifer's publications include *Having Hard Conversations*, and the Corwin Press e-courses by the same name, "Planning Productive Talk," her article for ASCD's *Educational Leadership* (October 2011), her chapter, "Habits of Mind for the School Savvy Leader" in Art Costa's and Bena Kallick's book, *Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind: 16 Essential Characteristics for Success*, and her contribution to the book, *Mentors in the Making: Developing New Leaders for New Teachers* published by Teachers College Press. Her latest book, with co-author Valerie Von Frank, *The Multigenerational Workplace: Communicating, Collaborating & Creating Community* was published by Corwin Press in November of 2013 and her upcoming book on developing one's skill set around challenging communications will be published in 2016. Jennifer also writes a monthly newsletter/blog, *Voice Lessons*, available for reading at and subscribing to on her website, [www.jenniferabrams.com](http://www.jenniferabrams.com).

Jennifer has been recognized as one of "18 Women All K-12 Educators Need to Know" by *Education Week's* 'Finding Common Ground' blog. She has been a featured interviewee on the topic of professionalism for ASCD's video series, *Master Class*, hosted by National Public Radio's Claudio Sanchez, and in the lead article, "Finding Your Voice in Facilitating Productive Conversations" for Learning Forward's *The Leading Teacher*, Summer 2013 newsletter; as a generational expert for "Tune in to What the New Generation of Teachers Can Do," published in *Phi Delta Kappan*, (May 2011), and by the Ontario Ministry of Education for their *Leadership Matters: Supporting Open-to-Learning Conversations* video series.

Jennifer considers herself a "voice coach," helping others learn how to best use their voices - be it collaborating on a team, presenting in front of an audience, coaching a colleague, supervising an employee. Jennifer holds a Master's degree in Education from Stanford University and a Bachelor's degree in English from Tufts University. She lives in Palo Alto, California. Jennifer can be reached at [jennifer@jenniferabrams.com](mailto:jennifer@jenniferabrams.com), [www.jenniferabrams.com](http://www.jenniferabrams.com), and on Twitter @jenniferabrams.

## **Open Suggestions – Consulting Stance**

- **Are offered in the spirit of support and are expressed with invitational, positive language and voice tone**
- **Offer choices to encourage ownership**
- **Are often expressed as a question or include a “tag question” to invite further thinking**
- **Are achievable and offered in brief – enough to encourage but not to overwhelm**

### **Suggestion stems**

- **One thing I’ve noticed is....**
- **Something to keep in mind when dealing with....**
- **There are a number of approaches....**
- **From the work I have seen others do, one thing I think has worked for others is...**

**Try following a suggestion with a question that invites the teacher to imagine/hypothesize how the idea might work in his/her context.**

- **How do you think that would work?**
- **Which of these ideas do you think makes most sense for you?**
- **What do you think of trying that idea out in class?**

*Adapted from Lipton and Wellman*

# Praise

Adapted from Los Angeles County Office of Education's TESA Program

**A planned and intentional four-step process for praising includes:**

- 1) Describing the behavior or accomplishment that is being praised**
- 2) Giving the person reason the behavior or accomplishment is being praised**
- 3) Providing a positive consequence for the behavior or accomplishment.**
- 4) Requesting acknowledgement from the person indicating that he or she understands why he or she is being praised**

**Praise should, if possible:**

- Immediately follow the accomplishment**
- Be specific to the accomplishment**
- Be natural rather than theatrical**
- Be private most of the time**
- Be individualized**
- Be attributed to effort and ability**

**Example: Kathy, thank you for your skillful facilitation of the meeting today, especially the way your framing of the situation made it easy for us to see the problem in a new light. Using the word, “opportunity” vs. “crisis” made all the difference. You really had a positive impact on how everything went. Thank you.**

# Apologies

Adapted from On Apology by Aaron Lazare

## Reasons Why People Don't Apologize

- **They fear others will lose regard for them, humiliate them, end their relationship with them, become smug and hold a grudge.**
- **They fear others will find them weak, incompetent, emotional. They don't want to let their guard down, swallow their pride, feel terrible.**

**Note: These concerns are about personal comfort and not about the impact of one's behavior.**

## People Need Apologies to Heal

**What does the person need from my apology?**

- **Restoration of self-respect and dignity**
- **Assurance that both parties have shared values**
- **Assurance that the offenses were not his/her fault**
- **Assurance of safety in the relationship**
- **See the offender suffer and show pain**
- **Reparations for the harm caused by the offense**
- **Have meaningful dialogue interactions with the offenders**

## **So...What's The Right Way to Offer an Apology?**

- **Correctly identify the party(ies) to whom the apology is owed**
- **Acknowledge the offending behavior in adequate detail**
- **Recognize the impact the behaviors had on the victim**
- **Confirm that the grievance was a violation of a social/moral contract by showing shame, remorse, humility and sincerity and a wish to reclaim trust**
- **Make reparations – offer to do something, buy something, change something**

### **A sample apology**

**Maria, I am sorry for cutting you off in our meeting today. I snapped at you and didn't allow you to continue with your idea for helping Matthew. My behaviors were belittling and disrespectful. All the explanation in the world for my responses today and my reasons for acting inappropriately don't matter. What matters is that I messed up, I feel bad about my actions toward you, and I will not do so again. I am sorry.**

***Does this fulfill the “requirements” of an apology?***

## 8 Ways to Derail an Apology

- **Offering a vague and incomplete acknowledgement**  
Saying, “I am sorry” with no more explanation
- **Using an impersonal or passive voice**  
Saying, “Mistakes were made” but not putting them in a first person active verb. Not owning the mistake.
- **Making the offense conditional**  
Saying, “If mistakes were made then I am sorry.”  
Saying, “If someone might have been upset...” vs. saying, “We made a terrible mistake.”  
Just let go of the “ifs.”
- **Questioning whether the victim is damaged or weak in some way**  
Saying, “If anyone was hurt,” or “If you were offended...” implies that others might not have been so hurt or wounded by this action and I am only apologizing because you personally were in need of an apology and I am being generous by offering it to you.
- **Minimizing the Offense Or “There’s Really Nothing to Apologize For...”**  
“In the scheme of things, we have done a good job. Your complaint is one of so few....” really minimizes the impact on that person.

## **8 Ways to Derail an Apology, Continued**

- **Using the empathic “I am sorry”**  
“I am sorry you suffered so much damage” or “I am sorry you are upset with me” is different than you are sorry for your actions. And while you might be sincere in your communication of regret, your tone might also make all the difference as well. If you are condescending or patronizing with your “I am sorry you feel bad” it continues to limit your responsibility for the impact of your action.
- **Apologizing to the wrong party**  
Not apologizing to the offended, but instead just apologizing in general to make sure it looks good to the group or to the public is manipulation to protect yourself vs. reconciliation with the victim.
- **Apologizing for the wrong offense**  
Saying you are sorry for the embarrassment you caused the organization for your action isn’t the same for being sorry about what you did to cause the embarrassment in the first place.



## Quick Scripts for Having Hard Conversations

From Crucial Conversations by Kerry Patterson

### **“State My Path Statement”**

**“This is what I have noticed.....  
I am beginning to think.....  
What is your take on it?”**

**Example:** “I noticed you said, “What do you want?” in a gruff way when the person came to see you at your desk. If I was that person I might feel a bit intimidated about coming to ask you a question if I got that response. Did you sense that she was a bit shy in responding to you? What’s your take on what happened?”

From “Management Shorts” by Andrea Corney ([www.acorn-od.com](http://www.acorn-od.com))

### **“I Message Feedback Statements - Take One”**

**“When you do X (behavior), I think/feel Y (reaction).  
It would be helpful to me if you could do Z (behavior) instead. Would that work for you? What do you need?”**

**Example:** “When you come to our meeting late, I get the sense that the meeting isn’t important to you and that you disrespect me in some way. It would be helpful for me if you would show up on time and that way I wouldn’t feel defensive from the get-go. Is that something you could do?”

From “Management Shorts” by Andrea Corney ([www.acorn-od.com](http://www.acorn-od.com))

### **“I Message Feedback Statements – Take Two”**

**“Here is the problem as I see it. What is going on from your perspective? What am I doing that gets in the way? And what can we both do to fix this problem?”**

**Example:** “When you roll your eyes and respond to my comments in the brainstorm with “Yeah, but...” I have to admit I feel really feel angry and pretty much shut down. I have no idea if you know you are doing this or if you know how it is impacting me. I would really like to be able to participate in this meeting without feeling bad about it. Can you see this from my perspective? Am I missing something because I would like it if both of us could participate fully in this meeting.”

**Our conversations invent us. Through our speech and our silence, we become smaller or larger selves. Through our speech and our silence, we diminish or enhance the other person, and we narrow or expand the possibilities between us. How we use our voice determines the quality of our relationships, who we are in the world, and what the world can be and might become. Clearly, a lot is at stake here.**

**Harriet Lerner, The Dance of Connection**

## Resources

The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups – Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman, Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1999

CLASH: 8 Cultural Conflicts That Make Us Who We Are – Hazel Rose Markus and Alana Conner, Hudson Street Press, 2013

Cognitive Coaching: A Foundation for Renaissance Schools, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. – Arthur Costa and Robert Garmston, Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 2002

The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life, Parker J. Palmer, Jossey-Bass, 1998

Covert Processes at Work: Managing the Five Hidden Dimensions of Organizational Change – Robert Marshak, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006

The Dance of Connection: How to Talk to Someone When You're Mad, Hurt, Scared, Frustrated, Insulted, Betrayed or Desperate – Harriet Lerner, Harper Collins, 2001

The Dance of Fear: Rising Above Anxiety, Fear, and Shame to Be Your Best and Bravest Self – Harriet Lerner, HarperCollins, 2004

Dancing at the Edge: Competence, Culture and Organization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Maureen O'Hara and Graham Leicester, International Futures Forum, 2012

“Don't Get Defensive: Communication Tips for the Vigilant” – Mark Goulston, Harvard Business Review Blog Network  
<http://blogs.hbr.org/2013/11/dont-get-defensive-communication-tips-for-the-vigilant/>

“Find the Coaching in Criticism” – Sheila Heen and Douglas Stone, Harvard Business Review Magazine, January-February, 2014,  
<http://hbr.org/2014/01/find-the-coaching-in-criticism/ar/1>

Having Hard Conversations – Jennifer Abrams, Corwin Press, 2009

## Resources

How The Way We Talk Can Change The Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation – Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, Jossey-Bass, 2001

“How to Argue Across Cultures” – HBR Blog, December 4, 2013 - Jeanne Brett, Kristin Behfar and Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks,  
<http://blogs.hbr.org/2013/12/how-to-argue-across-cultures/>

Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling – Edgar H. Schein, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2013

Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization – Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey – Harvard Business Review Press, 2009

The Language of Emotions: What Your Feelings are Trying to Tell You – Karla McLaren, Sounds True, 2010

[www.lasw.org](http://www.lasw.org) - Looking at Student Work

Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life – Martin Seligman, Vintage, 2006

Lemons to Lemonade: Resolving Problems in Meetings, Workshops and PLCs – Robert Garmston and Diane Zimmerman, Corwin, 2013

Learning-focused Supervision: Developing Professional Expertise in Standards-Driven Systems– Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman, Miravia LLC, 2013

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success – Carol Dweck, Ballantine, 2007

The Multigenerational Workplace: Communicate, Collaborate & Create Community – Jennifer Abrams, Corwin, 2013

The Multiplier Effect: Tapping the Genius Inside Our Schools – Liz Wiseman, Lois Allen and Elise Foster, Corwin, 2013

## Resources

[www.newteachercenter.org](http://www.newteachercenter.org)

The Power of Protocols: An Educator's Guide to Better Practice, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition - Joseph P. McDonald, Nancy Mohr, Alan Dichter, Elizabeth C. McDonald, Teachers College Press, 2007

Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect – Matthew D. Lieberman, Crown Publishers, 2013

Switch: How To Change Things When Change Is Hard – Chip Heath and Dan Heath, Crown Business, 2010

Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well – Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen. Viking/Penguin, 2014

Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement – Anthony S. Bryk and Barbara Schneider, Russell Sage Foundation, 2002

Unleashing the Positive Power of Differences: Polarity Thinking in Our Schools – Jane A.G. Kise, Corwin, 2013

Unlocking Group Potential to Improve Schools – Robert Garmston, Corwin Press, 2012

“Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are” – Amy Cuddy – TED Talk - [http://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are.html)