

FOREWORD BY **MARSHALL GOLDSMITH**
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

OVERCOMING FAKE TALK



How to Hold **REAL** Conversations
that Create Respect, Build
Relationships, and Get Results

JOHN R. STOKER

Founder and President of DialogueWORKS

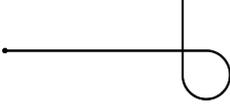
About the Author



For over 20 years, John R. Stoker has been facilitating and speaking to audiences, helping them to improve their thinking and communicating skills. He is an expert in communications who believes the human capacity to achieve astonishing results depends on the individual's ability to interact with others. John has dedicated his professional career to the science of communication and interpersonal interaction.

John holds a Master's Degree in Organizational Behavior as well as a J.D. Degree. His landmark book, *Overcoming Fake Talk: How to Hold REAL Conversations that Create Respect, Build Relationships, and Get Results* is both entertaining and engaging, and it presents skills that help readers talk about what matters most.

In the past, John worked as a practicing criminal defense attorney (until he repented!), spent summers as a Grand Canyon white-water guide, and he taught for 13 years as a faculty member at a leading university. John has been happily married since 1994 and he and his wife Stephanie are the proud parents of five children.



Praise for *Overcoming Fake Talk*

“*Overcoming Fake Talk* is not only a terrific book title, it should be the mantra of anyone who’s determined to get consistently great results. Many well-intended people dance around the issues that beg for open and candid discussion. Trouble is, when the topic is risky they simply don’t have the skills to carry on a real conversation. So they engage in fake talk. Then, when the tough issues don’t get resolved, they engage in more fake talk and the cycle starts to resemble a scene from *Groundhog Day*. John Stoker’s book is a breakthrough because it so clearly identifies a common problem that few have really talked about and offers principles, practices, and skills so necessary for honest, trust-building conversation. If you’re truly interested in respect, relationships, and results, this book is for you.”

— **Stephen M.R. Covey**, bestselling author of *The Speed of Trust and Smart Trust*, Franklin Covey

“Nothing about authentic leadership is fake and that includes all forms of talk and walk. so, if you are now a leader or if you aspire to be a leader you need to learn how to have REAL conversations. John Stoker’s enlightening and entertaining book, *Overcoming Fake Talk*, will help you to gain and maintain influence with key stakeholders by holding real conversations that get results.”

— **Marshall Goldsmith**, New York Times bestselling author of *MOJO* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*



“John Stoker has been a white water rafter, an attorney, a speaker, and now a thoughtful writer. His book, *Overcoming Fake Talk*, is a thorough compendium of ideas, frameworks, examples, and actions to improve conversations. His 4 REAL conversation skills and 8 principles give the novice and master insights and guidelines for improving conversation. His book will help get people talking in ways that create respect, build relationships, and get results.”

— **Dave Ulrich**, Professor, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan; Partner, The RBL Group

“John Stoker scores early and often with his groundbreaking book, *Overcoming Fake Talk*. He begins with the premise that much of what passes for meaningful conversation is counterfeit because the participants either tiptoe around the real issues or ignore them altogether. Then he offers a wealth of easy-to-understand principles and practices that help you engage in the real conversations that produce deeper respect, better relationships, and stronger results. I like this book so much I wish I’d written it myself.”

— **Rodger Dean Duncan**, Bestselling author of *Change-Friendly Leadership*

“For 30 years, I’ve tried to help people see the difference between fake (counterfeit) and real (authentic) leadership. John Stoker not only reveals fake talk, he also delivers spot-on advice for holding real conversations that cultivate relationships, respect and results. Read it and reap. You’ll be a better, more effective leader.”

— **Ken Shelton**, Editor of Leadership *Excellence* magazine and author of *Beyond Counterfeit Leadership*

“John R. Stoker’s book, *Overcoming Fake Talk*, is a natural extension of the training and leadership development he has provided within our company. His concepts are clear, his explanations down-to-earth, and in my experience, what he teaches really works. Our organization places great emphasis on the quality of our people, and on creating a healthcare and work environment where we treat each other with compassion, dignity, and respect this book is a primer for developing precisely those characteristics.”

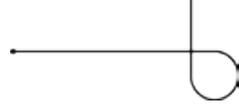
— **Ed Oxford Ed.D**, VP, Human Resources and Chief Talent Officer, Banner Health

“Wow! I just finished reading Fake Talk. I have taught communication skills for over forty years, I wish Fake Talk had been available forty years ago. The book provides the most needed and helpful communication tools in a very effective manner. Stoker teaches true principles for getting Results, Respect, and great Relationships using REAL Conversation.”

— **Brent D. Peterson, Ph.D.**, Co-author, *Fake Work: Why People Are Working Harder Than Ever but Accomplishing Less, and How to Fix the Problem*

“As Peter Drucker wisely observed, nearly all leadership and management challenges come back to breakdowns in communication. This book is an insightful blend of rock-solid theory accompanied by compelling examples of the huge distinction between real and fake communication. It would be hard to read it and not gain valuable tips.”

— **John H. Zenger**, CEO, Zenger Folkman



How Do You Hold You Back?

The Creation Principle—
Choose to Change

When the water is low in the Grand Canyon, running the rapids necessitates a piloting maneuver called “backing.” It is impossible to run the rapids by just motoring downstream, bow forward. In “backing,” the boat is turned backwards with the 40 HP motor facing downstream. The entire boat is balanced on the motor with the current of the river pushing downstream while the power of the motor pushes upstream.

Then the boat operator maneuvers the boat into position so that the channel downstream is free of rocks, waterfalls, and holes. Then he backs off on the power and lets the current push the boat safely through the clear channel. When another obstacle is encountered, the boat operator powers up the motor to stop the downstream momentum of the boat and then maneuvers the boat to another safe spot before powering down and letting the current do the work. Every boat operator has to be able to “back” the most dangerous rapids in low water before they are entrusted with their own boat.

Some boat operators never learn to make this maneuver. They can usually manage to turn the boat around, but when they have to face the rocks and holes in the river looking directly into

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BUY



potential danger, they lose their composure and cannot manage the pressure of the moment.

Holding what we perceive to be a potentially difficult or sensitive conversation is similar. When we are confronted with what we perceive to be negative consequences, we bolt. We lack the courage, let our fears get the best of us, and either skirt the issue or avoid it all together. Ironically, when we let our fear rule us, we end up creating the very thing we fear. If we avoid taking responsibility for what we want, we end up creating the very thing we didn't want.

Why Don't We Speak Up?

We may let our thinking get the best of us. Holding REAL conversations takes courage—courage to speak up and really tell the truth. This is a scary proposition for even the most competent and brave-hearted souls. Why? Because we just don't know what the results or consequences of speaking up will be. One of the best known entrepreneurs of our day, Wilson Harrell, tells of his confrontation with fear.

BURIED ALIVE

"As a fighter pilot in World War II, I was shot down behind enemy lines and was picked up by members of the French Underground. They devised a unique and cynical way to hide me from the Germans: they buried me in a cornfield with a hose stuck in my mouth so I could breathe. The first time they buried me, I lay there for four hours—time enough to consider all the bleak possibilities. I figured the Germans would (1) stick a bayonet through the dirt into me; (2) riddle the ground with bullets; (3) accidentally kick the hose; or, worst of all, (4) hook up the hose and turn on the faucet. For eight days in succession, I was buried; for eight days, I lived with a new and unwanted friend—stark, raving fear."¹

¹ Harrell, Wilson. "Entrepreneurial Terror." *Inc. Magazine*. Feb, 1987. Web.

Notice that Harrell's fear was the result of a number of imagined scenarios. Although none of these outcomes became reality, the fear that he experienced was created by his thought process in that situation.

Predictably, individuals act out of self-preservation—they act in accordance with what they believe or perceive to be true. Is perception reality? It is to the person who perceives it. When this is the case, the word *fear* aptly serves as the acronym for **F**antasized **E**xperience **A**ppearing **R**eal. Our fear and our inability to manage our fear impact our ability and willingness to speak up for fear of the negative consequences.

Over the years, we have asked thousands of individuals, parents, family members, managers, and leaders from a wide range of industries and organizations what they believe will happen if they venture to talk about difficult topics. The most-frequently identified consequences follow:

1. ***“I could lose my job!”*** Why do we jump to such extremes? This statement makes you wonder what has happened in the past. Has the individual seen others lose their jobs for sharing a different perspective or speaking up? If they have, then their thinking may be justified. On the other hand, an overstatement like this is an easy way to avoid taking responsibility to share what might lead to the solution of major problems and the implementation of necessary changes.
2. ***“I don't know what to say it.”*** This implies there is a “right” or “wrong” way to say what needs to be said. Without understanding *how* to say something well or *what* to say, people generally avoid saying anything at all. We need to understand that the spirit of helping and assisting rather than criticizing and blaming will carry the day. It is the feeling and not the words that matter.
3. ***“I don't want to hurt their feelings.”*** Why do we equate giving others feedback with hurting their feelings? Does that mean we tolerate their poor performance rather than run the risk of “hurting” their feelings? This statement

espouses that some semblance of a relationship is more important than results. The fact of the matter is that most of us actually *want* to know when we have broccoli stuck in our teeth or if we are not meeting expectations. When we know what is wanted, we can change, improve, and deliver what is expected. But for some reason we assume that others are too thin-skinned to handle the truth.

4. ***“I’m uncomfortable with how the person might respond.”*** This is political speak for, “I hate dealing with conflict, emotional reactions, or defensiveness in any form.” People feel this way because they don’t know what to do when emotion rears its ugly head. Still others are afraid of how they might respond because they are aware that they have a short fuse. Most people go to great lengths to avoid confrontation or conflict in any form.
5. ***“I don’t want to make matters worse.”*** This statement assumes there is a negative cost associated with speaking up, telling the truth, or expressing our opinions. Rather than tell it like it is, we feel it is just easier to keep our thoughts to ourselves. After all, no one wants to be labeled a “troublemaker,” a “naysayer,” or the “devil’s advocate.” Part of making matters worse could also be that you might be asked or expected to do something to fix what you point out as not working. So, the logic goes, if you are already overburdened, why should you take on even more responsibility? There is enormous pressure to say nothing and maintain the status quo.

The consequences listed above share two elements in common: they are all projections about what people *believe* will happen to them in the future, and they all result in silence—no one speaks up! Paradoxically, the fear-based stories we tell ourselves may create the very outcome that we are trying to avoid. For example, suppose I think, “If I say that, I’ll lose my job.” Then my manager finds out later that I knew about the issue and chose to say nothing, so I end up losing my job. We assume that we can’t change our forecast of the future by how

we act in the present. Unfortunately, how we act in the present may create the future we are trying so desperately to avoid.

What is the Cost of Silence?

No results! You may get more of the same, or things may even get worse. The advantages for speaking up far outweigh keeping your mouth shut and your head in the sand.

Many people in organizations today are not speaking up for fear of what the consequences will be. Towers Watson, an organizational consulting firm, recently completed a “Communication ROI Study” which identified that “effective employee communication is the leading financial indicator of financial performance and a driver of employee engagement. Companies with highly effective communication have a 47% higher return to shareholders over the last five years.”² The study specified that employees really want to know what tough decisions are being made and what feedback customers are providing. It emphasizes that companies need to have courage, step up, and “tell it like it is.”³

There are numerous reasons for speaking up. The main business reasons are to increase learning, to solve problems, to improve performance and motivation, to increase productivity and profitability, to manage change, to accelerate decision making, to express appreciation, to enhance teamwork, to increase respect, and to build trust. We cannot afford to underestimate the cost of silence. Speaking up and *telling it like it is* is critical to professional effectiveness.

2 “2009/2010 Communication ROI Study Report: Capitalizing on Effective Communication – Towers Watson.” Towers Watson: HR Consulting – Risk Management Insurance – Compensation Benefits. Web 12 Nov. 2010. <<http://towerswatson.com/research/670>>
3 *Ibid.*, p.5.

CLOSE DOWN THE COMPANY AND FIRE EVERYONE

An Irish trucking company recently purchased a local US company. An executive from Ireland arrived to hold a meeting to review what would happen to the company in the near future. The first thing she did was ask to see a map of all of the company's distribution centers.

After going over the map for several minutes, she announced, "These distribution centers are much too close to each other. We need to make plans to close at least half of the centers and lay off the employees who work at the centers." No one said a thing.

She spent the next half hour calculating how much the company would save by laying people off and saving money by being more efficient. Still, no one said a thing.

Finally, someone asked. "How close are your distribution centers in Ireland?"

"Well, we've found that having distribution centers within 10 miles of each other helps us to efficiently serve our customers," she answered. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, I don't know if you noticed the key on our map, but none of our distribution centers is closer than a 100 miles from any other," responded an employee.

"Really?" she asked.

Thank heaven someone asked questions and spoke up before a decision was made that would have drastically impacted the profitability and efficiency of the company. Remaining silent is not an uncommon practice—no one wants to challenge management, look bad, or open their mouth and remove all doubt. It is just easier to say nothing than run any kind of risk. Our fears can rule the day.

What Supports Our Fear?

All our fears are the product of our thinking. Our fears arise out of our history, our mental models, and all of our past experience—whether real or imaginary. Our fears are supported by a number of justifications or assumptions that we make as well as by our inability to objectively identify how we may be contributing to the problem.

Supporting Justifications

To support the fear-based assumptions that we adopt to avoid speaking up, we rationalize our assumptions with any number of justifications for not engaging others. Some of our justifications are well-founded. Sometimes we fabricate an excuse to justify our inaction. We have captured a number of these justifications for your consideration:

1. ***“There’s not enough time.”*** Sometimes this is absolutely true. We are behind. We are overworked, so we tell ourselves we don’t have the time, we can’t make the time, or we won’t make the time. A corollary to this justification is “I need to simplify.” In either case, we have a belief that speaking up will just create more work!
2. ***“It doesn’t really matter.”*** Since when does not talking about improving something not matter? It is easier to make this statement and just move on. If it doesn’t really matter, then no one needs to do anything.
3. ***“If I ignore it, it will eventually all just go away.”*** That depends on what “it” is. Ignoring an issue that needs to be addressed doesn’t improve the situation. Ignoring anything of significance won’t eliminate the issue. In fact, ignoring an issue usually leads to more devastating consequences over time.
4. ***“People don’t want to hear it.”*** This is an interesting way of saying people “can’t stand the truth” or that people aren’t interested in hearing a perspective that is different than their own.
5. ***“No one cares about that.”*** This is a great way to make a judgment on other people’s behalf, keep your opinion to yourself, and never really find out whether they care about it or not. Excluding people from the problem-solving process does not create a better solution.
6. ***“It’s not my place.”*** This is akin to “it’s not my job,” or “I’ll stay on my own turf.” This justification allows you to limit your responsibility to whatever you deem your responsibility to be. How convenient!

7. ***“Something else is more important.”*** This is about priorities and determining that something else matters more. Interestingly enough, “something else” is always more important. This is a corollary to “I need to simplify.” Whether the issue is really not important or really needs simplifying, the individual is using these justifications or excuses to *avoid doing* what might need to be done. In a sense, they are rationalizing their unwillingness to engage and be responsible.
8. ***“Someone else will do it.”*** Someone else cannot do it if they don’t know what “it” is. This is another way to avoid what needs to be done if you don’t want to do it.
9. ***“Rather than talk about it, I’d rather just do it myself.”*** This response usually occurs when a number of fires need to be put out quickly or when someone doesn’t want to take the time to teach, coach, or mentor others. Instead, that person decides that it’s easier to do the work or task themselves rather than deal with the drama associated with working with “certain” people.
10. ***“Just let it go!”*** This is about doing nothing at all, under the assumption that the issue either isn’t worth talking about, or that you are holding on to something that is not worth the effort. This is akin to “this too shall pass.”

So what do our fears of the consequences and these justifications both have in common? Both are interpretations—the stuff we make up in our head. Both contribute to the silence that leads to inaction.

The “Delusion-Collusion” Cycle

In addition to our fear of the consequences and all the justifications that support those fears, we are not very good at taking responsibility to speak up and make a difference. We engage in what we call the Delusion-Collusion” Cycle.

This cycle occurs when we think we are “talking the talk” and “walking the walk,” but we in fact aren’t—we are deluded.

We don't see our behavior and the consequences thereof accurately. Certainly, we may be well-intended, but we don't often step back to challenge our assumptions and the justifications for our behavior from an objective perspective.

The Delusion–Collusion Cycle is in play every time you observe someone saying and doing things that are not in the best interest of an organization, a team, or their relationships, and yet you choose to say nothing. By saying nothing, you enable the destructive behavior. And you get more of the same. This “observe-but-don't-tell” cycle dramatically impacts the way people work and live with others.

TOO CASUAL FOR CASUAL DRESS?

*One organization we worked with had adopted a casual dress policy. The organization received positive feedback on the new policy for several months. But after a few more months, two executives began dressing a little **too** casually for the liking of the other executives.*

These two typically wore old Pendleton wool shirts and tan Dockers that looked like they had been dried while tied in a knot. The other executives asked us to give feedback to the offending parties. We suggested the executives provide the feedback to their colleagues themselves. After all, this was an organization that claimed to espouse the values of teamwork and individual development. With such values, we assumed that the executives could step up and tell one another in the spirit of respect and personal development that the choice of attire could and should be improved.

Rather than hold the conversation, though, the offended executives sent out a memo that changed the dress policy for executives, requiring them to wear dress slacks and a tie. Everyone conformed—even the “slackers,” but at what cost?

The ripple effect continued. Everyone below the senior executive level started wondering why this distinction was made. There was discussion about it in the lunchroom. Some hypothesized that the leaders were trying to distinguish themselves from everyone else—which killed the idea of being one team. Others thought the change in dress was an expression of superiority. Still others scrutinized and worried that it was only appropriate to visit the executive floor if one were dressed in slacks and a tie. This started the rumor mill churning.

One person taking the responsibility to hold a REAL conversation would have saved this company vast amounts of emotional energy and speculation about what was going on with the dress code. The unintended consequences of no one taking responsibility resulted in lost effort, continued negative assumptions, endless speculation, lower morale, and mounting frustrations. Holding this one conversation would have focused individual energy that could have increased productivity rather than allowing individuals to second-guess a needless change. It was easy to understand how more important issues might never reach the discussion table.

None of us sees ourselves the way that we are seen. In a sense, we are all deluded or hampered in our view of reality and our place in it. When we see the delusion and refuse to address it out of our fear of perceived consequences, then we perpetuate the behavior and the very consequences that we desire to avoid.

When you keep your mouth shut at work, in relationships, with friends, with the neighbors, and even with those to whom you are the closest, ***you are part of the problem!***

If others engage in behavior that creates negative consequences of any kind, you need to say something. You can't assume that a person "gets it" or understands how his or her behavior impacts others, even if it is obvious to you.

Get REAL: Try asking yourself some of the following questions to identify if you are caught in a Delusion– Collusion Cycle with someone:

- "How much money is lost at my company by people for whom I am responsible?"
- "How much frustration or tension exists in my current relationships that I haven't spoken about?"
- "How has my silence contributed to my current results?"

Doing a little self-reflection on the quality of your results may serve as the impetus for you to change your thinking and your behavior and create different results.

Here's an example of a situation where it was necessary to take responsibility to speak up and improve a frustrating situation.

BACK OFF!

Todd was an obnoxious real estate salesman who handed a customer's file to a new underwriter, Tina. Once the file is completed and approved, then the real estate closing can take place, which results in a commission check being cut for Todd.

About 30 minutes after Todd turned the file in to Tina, he called her.

"Are you done yet?" he asked.

"No! I'll call you when I've finished," she promised.

Todd waited about 15 minutes and called her again.

"Have you finished my file yet?" he demanded.

"No! I said I'd call you when I'm done!" she retorted.

This continued for at least half the day. Frustrated, Tina asked some of the other underwriters if they have had the same challenge with Todd.

"Yeah, I guess that's his way of hurrying you up," answered one.

"Has anyone ever told him to just back off?" Tina asked.

"No. That wouldn't be polite or 'good' customer service," another countered.

Todd called again and badgered Tina.

"Look, Todd! Your 50 calls today have kept me from working on your file. Every time I have to answer your phone call, you keep me from finishing the file. So cool it! I'll call you when I'm done!"

Todd got the message.

To Tina's credit, she didn't get caught in the Delusion-Collusion Cycle, and she displayed personal responsibility to successfully do her work by calling Todd on his unproductive behavior. Todd's strategy for increasing Tina's productivity was to nag and badger her to death. His own behavior was hindering the very work he wanted done. If Tina hadn't stopped him, he

would have created the very thing he hated—an unproductive underwriter.

We need to notice our fear of the consequences and our supporting justifications and then test them for accuracy. Our behavior should focus on what we want rather than on what we want to avoid. Then we need to act with courage to create a different result.

Courage to Choose and Change

Courage is an action principle; courage is displayed by action. Our fears lead us to inaction, which impacts our results. Everything we do or don't do creates something. If you don't like your results, have the courage to step up and create different results.

We succeed or fail based on our ability to change our minds. Everything we create starts as a thought. Every thought creates something. Likewise, every conversation begins with a thought that creates feelings, actions, and results. As we learned earlier, our thinking can get us into trouble because it may be incomplete or inaccurate. Consequently, it is important **not** to believe everything you think. You must be willing to examine your thinking and change your mind to create different results.

TAKING A SHOWER

Jacob and Leah, who moved into our neighborhood, are immigrants from Nigeria, Africa. Despite the lack of cultural diversity in our community, they were well received, and they began attending the local Community Church with the rest of the neighborhood.

Leah was almost nine months pregnant and was to be a first-time mother. All the women of the church were excited for Leah and told her they were going to give her a shower before the baby arrived.

The night before the shower, Leah made an appointment with the pastor. Leah pleaded with him, "Oh, please! You've got to help me! I don't want to take a shower with the ladies of the church, no matter how nice they are!"

Part of Leah’s problem was in understanding certain words, and she was quick to come to a negative interpretation about what being “given a shower” entailed.

The brain is very quick to interpret data in the worst possible way. Remember our Process of Perception makes *observations of events* and then *selects the* data that results in our *interpretations*. *Interpretation* drives *emotion* that in turn drives our *actions* that creates a *result*. Our *actions* include whatever we *say* or *do*.

If you desire to create different results, consider the following points:

1. Every emotion is preceded by a thought.
2. Every emotion fuels an action.
3. Our actions and what we say and do create our results.
4. To change your results, you must change your thinking.

Changing Your Results

In order to create different results, we want to “backtrack” through the process to the thinking that created our results. Backtracking would look something like this:



“Backtracking” allows us to look more objectively at each element in the process that created our results. To “backtrack,” simply examine your results and the actions—what you said and did—that created your results. Then, identify what you were feeling at the time that you took action. Finally, you will want to surface the thinking or thoughts behind your emotions or feelings that arose because of your interpretation of the event that you experienced. Simply backtrack through results, action, emotion, and thoughts in that order.

Backtracking is an effective way to understand the thinking that is creating your results. You can backtrack yourself or with others. The purpose of this exercise is to help you systematically uncover how you are creating your current results. You “backtrack” by asking questions that assist you to focus on the process. Consider some questions in each phase of backtracking.

- Results** “What results am I receiving?”
“What are you experiencing?”
- Action** “What actions have I taken?”
“What would you improve? Why?”
- Feelings** “What are you feeling?”
“How are you reacting to ...?”
- Thinking** “What are you thinking?”
“What creates your current results?”
- Event** “What happened?”
“What are the events of your experience?”

I’M GETTING NOTHING FOR CHRISTMAS!

Two of my boys had been playing a card game. Matt, the 10 year old, had beaten Zach, the 14-year old. Out of frustration, Zach told Matt he was weird. In fact, Zach told Matt he was so weird that he wasn’t giving him a Christmas present.

When I arrived home from work, Matt was laying face down in the living room carpet and loudly wailing about his dilemma. No one could console him. I wanted to understand what was behind the results we were currently being subjected to and I wanted to help Matt to look at his thinking.

Let’s review how to “backtrack” with Matt:

“Matt, what are you getting right now?” I asked. (Results)

“I’m not getting a present from Zach for Christmas,” Matt wailed.

“Is the crying helping you get a present?” I calmly asked.

“I guess not!” he sobbed.

"What are you doing right now?" I asked. (Action)

"I'm crying and screaming with my face in the carpet!" He stopped crying to answer this question.

"Matt, what are you feeling right now?" I asked (Emotion)

"I'm feeling sad and all alone," he answered.

"Why is that?" I asked. (Thought)

Matt sat up and looked at me for a long time.

"I hate my life because no one in this family loves me," he answered.

"Do you think Mom and I love you?" I asked him.

"Yeah, I know you do!" Matt answered.

I then asked Matt a series of questions that called into question the accuracy of his thinking. This allowed him to change his perception of himself and his circumstances. Although I wanted to smack Zach for tormenting his little brother, I appreciated the event for what it taught us about Matt's perception of himself.

Creating our results can be intentional or unintentional. Everything we think, feel, and say or do creates something. If you don't like your results, you have the ability to "backtrack" to your thinking, change it, and change your results. This is important because so much of our thinking takes place subconsciously. We don't want our results to occur because of a thought process we are unaware of. Giving conscious attention to the results we want will create different results. **Bottom line: Change your thinking and you change your results.**

Why Do Fish Discover Water Last?

Because they live in it, breathe it, and are surrounded by it. Having our thoughts is the same way. We are so encompassed by our unconscious and conscious thought processes that we often lack an awareness of what we are thinking. In essence, we can either have our thoughts, or they'll have us. Learning to choose or create positive thoughts will create different results.

Choose the "Emergency Response"

Neuroscientists believe that we have about 60,000 thoughts a day and 80% of those thoughts are negative.⁴ Doing some quick math yields approximately 1,920 negative thoughts an hour and 42,080 negative thoughts a day. It's easy to see why individuals have such an easy time allowing their fears—their negative thoughts—to determine whether or not they will speak up and create different results.

The “emergency response” is a quick exercise that helps us examine the thoughts that create our fear so we can choose a different response. You can use the “ER” model by answering the questions or finishing the sentence stems below.

E stands for **Explore** Your Fear. In this step, you are acknowledging and identifying your fears.

“I am afraid of speaking up because...”

or

“If I speak up, I’m afraid that...”

R stands for **Replace** Your Thoughts. For every negative thought you surface, try to create at least three positive thoughts. For example, if you could identify a thought such as “If I speak up, I’ll lose my job,” then you might replace it with any of the following:

“If I speak up, I’ll keep my job.”

“If I speak up, we’ll be able to develop a viable solution.”

“If I speak up, others will also speak up and contribute.”

Changing your thoughts will shift any negative feeling or emotion to a positive one. This shift will also increase your objectivity and courage to take action—to change your results in absence of evidence that doesn’t support your fear. Here’s an example of application.

4 Snider, Marie. “Change Your Thoughts to Change Your Life” Fort Frances News Online (17 March 2010). www.fftimes.com 17 Mar 2010. Web. 12 Nov 2010 ,<http://www.fftimes.com/node/231889>>.

YOU GET EXCITED, THEN YOU DIE

Years ago, I was coaching an executive who was struggling to make effective presentations. When we would practice together, he was a fabulous presenter. But when he presented in front of a large audience, he became tongue tied and confused—he really bombed.

One day, I asked him if he wouldn't mind answering a few questions. He answered affirmatively. I asked him, "Just before you stand up to speak, what you are feeling?"

"First I feel confident, and then I get excited almost to the point of not being able to breathe," he answered.

"What are you thinking in that moment?" I asked.

"I don't know," he responded.

"Take some time to ask yourself, 'Why do I get so excited?' and note whatever goes through your mind. Will you do that and call me when you have an answer?" I asked.

He agreed.

A couple of days later, he called me.

"You're not going to believe this, but when I did what you asked, I remember when I was about 10, my Dad gave me a horse. It was my first time riding. Once, I got on the horse and my dog got so excited, he started barking and nipping at the horse's leg. The horse kicked the dog in the head and killed him. I realized that I'm thinking that if I get excited like my dog, I'm gonna die," he exclaimed.

We both laughed.

The next time he gave a speech, he was fabulous. I asked him how he prepared, and he told me before he spoke, he had repeated to himself several times, "I am vitally alive, and I am a speaker extraordinaire!" And he was.

My friend was not only able to identify his thinking, but he was also able to replace an inaccurate negative interpretation with a positive statement that changed his response when he spoke.

One Last Thing...

In every difficult conversation, an element of vulnerability exists. Vulnerability is not about being weak. We could define vulnerability as being open, flexible, willing to engage others and being willing to follow the flow of the conversation. Such vulnerability is about moving forward, discovering, learning, and growing without knowing for sure where the conversation will go or how it will end up.

Paradoxically, courage does not exist without vulnerability, and vulnerability requires courage. Likewise, refusal to be vulnerable creates no space for new possibilities. Being vulnerable allows you to seize opportunities to change and create improved results in the process of conversation.

In Summary

The fear of consequences and the justifications we create keep us from fully exploring our responsibility to speak up. Our delusion about our own behavior and others' unwillingness to confront us perpetuates our poor results.

Courage is required to change your results. The first step in changing your results is to examine and potentially change your thinking by “backtracking” from your results to your thoughts. Changing your negative thoughts to positive thoughts will improve your results. Having a conscious intention about what you want will also increase your courage to take action. Finally, being vulnerable will allow you to engage others in creating your results.

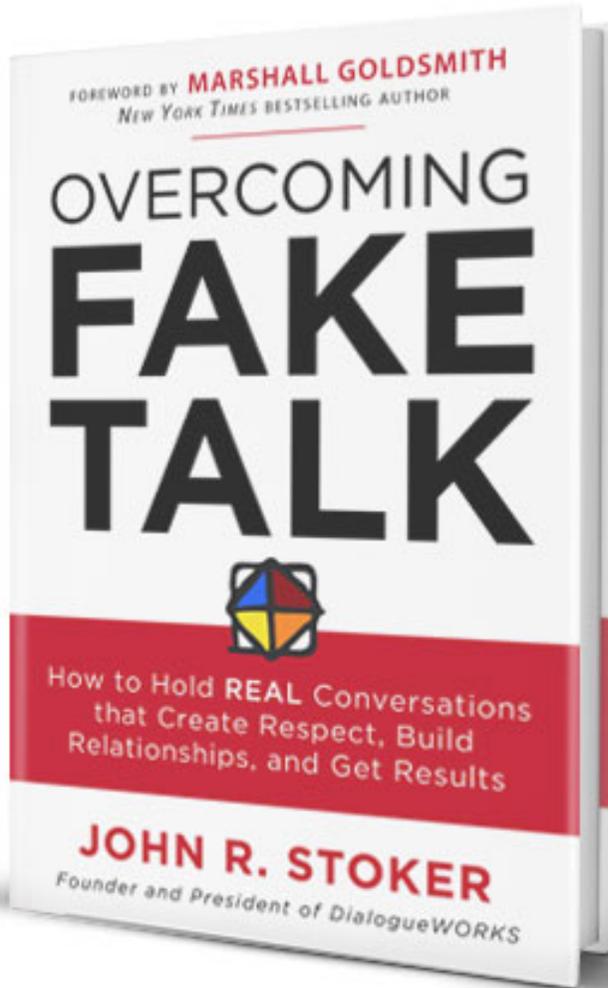
Get REAL: Pick a conversation to improve your results. “Backtrack” the conversation to discover what you said or did, what you felt, and what you thought. Change your thinking and work the conversation to create different results.

Gentle Reminders:

- Your reality may be the creation of your fears.
- It's up to you to speak up and change what matters most.
- If you want to change your results, change your thinking.
- Vulnerability is the key to developing courage.



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