

# **THE POWER OF WORDS**

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**Clear Communication is Essential  
in Achieving the Results You Want**

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## Introduction

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In our daily interactions with other people and even with the world, is there anything more important than our ability to communicate?

Whether or not we succeed or fail at our attempts at communication is the measure of our successes and failures. At home, at work, at leisure, while socializing, while shopping, while discussing, while working things out—communication is key.

If you have even a passing interest in self-development, you'll need to address your communication skills. For anyone who spends any energy on improving their personal or professional lives, these skills are integral to getting ahead.

Each week for ten years, Michael Angier has communicated in writing with thousands of readers from all around the globe. Every day, he meets with his team at SuccessNet and conveys to them his mission, values, expectations and goals. In a variety of conferences, training seminars and coaching programs, both his written and verbal communication skills are tested and refined. If there's one thing that Michael knows, it's communication.

Today, you can tap into Michael's 30 years of experience in good, clear, effective communication. He has personally selected six articles that will help you hone your communication skills for many life situations. Learn how to improve your communication in relationships with loved-ones, with work team-members and even with yourself.

Communicate better—live better!

## Ten Ways to Confront Without Being Combative— How to Create Light Without Heat

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- 1. Tell your truth with compassion.**  
Always remember that your objective is to share your insight. It's not to be right or belittle the other. People can't hear and you can't inspire when you've triggered their defense mechanisms.
- 2. Seek first to understand.**  
Before you confront or criticize, make sure you understand the situation. Your assumption may not be accurate. Take the time to understand as best you can.
- 3. Ask questions.**  
No one likes to be told what to do. Used in the right way, questions can enlighten. "Would you be open to a suggestion?" "Are you aware that you do X?" "Have you ever considered doing X instead of Y?" "Would you be willing to do this differently?"
- 4. Speak from a position of personal responsibility.**  
"When you do this, I feel this way." "When you do thus and so, it affects me in this way."
- 5. Keep your emotions out of it.**  
If you have strong emotion attached to the situation, you're probably in judgment of the other person. If your issues are triggered, it will likely obscure or distort the communication.
- 6. Start with a compliment.**  
Challenge the best that's within them. "I know you're committed to doing your best and what I saw today doesn't seem consistent with that commitment."  
Confront the behavior, not the person. Use the word "and" instead of "but" after a compliment.
- 7. Avoid sarcasm.**  
Leave this technique to TV sitcoms. It has no place when telling the truth with compassion.

**8. Avoid absolutes.**

When you use words like “all”, “every” and “never,” you dilute the power of your statement. They serve to antagonize, and it’s rare these absolute adverbs are ever true.

**9. Pick an appropriate time.**

If possible, choose a time and a place that will enhance your message being heard with an open mind. Timing does matter.

**10. Don’t be attached to the outcome.**

Say your peace without trying to control the behavior of the other person. Your responsibility is to deliver the message in a way that is understood, not to force change or control behavior.

**11. Bonus: Don’t “should” on people—or yourself for that matter.**

When we tell people they should do something, we are subtly—or not so subtly—attempting to manipulate their behavior and we are judging them.

## The Ability to Respectfully Disagree

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A critical key to success in your career and in your life overall is developing and maintaining good relationships. In fact, “Relationships” is number five of the Ten Pillars of a World Class Business.

Our relationships with coworkers, suppliers, spouses, clients, bosses, siblings, employees, competitors and parents affect everything we do. Our success is highly dependent upon these relationships.

And it’s not enough to be likable. Being agreeable and good natured are admirable traits. But in order to effect real change—in order to be a leader—one must often go against the norm. To make a difference, we often have to disagree with people and take different positions. Just going along with everyone will not work.

People are often surprised at how diverse my friends and business associates are. I have good relationships with people who are liberal and conservative, religious and secular. I seem to be able to get along with people from different cultures, with dissimilar philosophies and even divergent values.

I credit this to usually being tolerant and respectful. I like people and I learn something from almost everyone. I don’t need to be right—even though I like to be. I also don’t believe there is only one way, one path, one right answer.

The trick is to be able to disagree without being disagreeable. We want to respect others and have others respect us.

I think it starts with respecting others enough to listen to their points of view—and to do this regardless of whether or not we agree with them. The more you understand, the more you validate their viewpoint, the more likely it is they’ll respond in kind, and you’ll have a better relationship.

There’s real truth in the old adage, “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” And I love Stephen Covey’s profound maxim, “seek first to understand.”

We all know that a response to someone’s viewpoint like, “That’s stupid!” is near the worst end of the spectrum. Here

are a few on the other side. Be aware: they require you to be sincere and won't work unless you are.

*"That's an interesting viewpoint. You must have a good reason for thinking that way. Do you mind telling me what it is?"*

*"I think I understand what you're saying, and could you tell me more about how you arrived at your opinion?"*

*"That's interesting. And I see it somewhat differently. May I explain?"*

There are many more. The point is to respond with respect, courtesy and honesty.



Commit to improving your ability to talk about controversial things in a responsible, respectful and tolerant fashion. You'll get better with practice, but you won't practice and experiment unless you're committed to doing it well.

Then do it. Respond, don't react. Be considerate without being abrasive. Speak your truth with compassion.

After discussions, think about how you might have responded better—how you could have listened better, demonstrated more respect and been more tolerant. Don't make yourself wrong for it; just notice what you do, then resolve to do it better next time.

## Get to the Point, PLEASE: The Power of Being Pithy

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Have you ever tried to listen to someone but found yourself becoming impatient because they were rambling? Ever checked out of a meeting because the speaker was droning on with too much intro, explanation or background?

Of course you have. We all have.

Unfortunately, most people who use ten words when two will do are blind to the fact they're losing their listeners. They have no idea how much they detract from the power of their presentation by being verbose. They lose their audience. They lose their ability to influence. Sometimes they even lose their friends.

On the other hand, people who make their point quickly and effectively are easy to listen to. They use fewer words and have more power. By holding your attention and getting to the point, they're more effective communicators.

People listen much faster than you speak. Unless you're really holding someone's attention, the tendency is for their thoughts to wander to other things. Here's three things to keep in mind to help you become more succinct:

### **1. The Bottom Line**

These days, we expect information to be delivered quickly. Younger people, especially, have short attention spans. We may not like this, but that's the way it is.

It's up to us to deliver our messages in a succinct, interesting and compelling fashion. We have to GET attention, HOLD attention and make our request or our point QUICKLY. We have to get to the bottom line.

### **2. Stop the Pre-Ramble**

The U.S. Constitution begins with the Preamble. It's a one-sentence, masterfully written, powerful introduction to one of the world's most important documents.

But far too many people practice what I call "pre-ramble". They provide too much detail. And they take way too long introducing what they want to say. In the process, they lose the listener—or don't even grab them in the first place.

Better to just say what you have to say than spend too long setting up what you have to say. Be brief. Instead of saying, "I'd like to tell you a story," just tell it.

### 3. Less is More

Many people think the more said, the better. Not true. A good writer knows short sentences are more powerful than long ones. Short paragraphs carry more weight. If a word, a sentence or a paragraph doesn't do any work, it shouldn't be there.

What we need to do is edit what we say as well as edit what we write. Aleksandr Solzhenitzyn said, "Everything you add to the truth subtracts from the truth." Let us speak less and SAY more.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not advocating being so curt that we're rude or lose our style. We need sufficient detail to do the job—just not TOO much. Be considerate enough of your audience to convey your message in a way that it can be heard.

Remember, brief is better.



Ask some of your friends for their honest feedback. Ask them if you talk too much, too long or take too much time to get to the point.

Really listen to what they have to say. If they say you practice any of the above traits, get to work on becoming more succinct. Speak less and say more.



#### ***You Never Know When Your Words Will Make a Difference***

A story from Colin Powell's *My American Journey* illustrates this well.

<http://www.successnet.org/members/articles/yourwords.htm>

#### ***Listen, Pause, Clarify & Validate***

We all know that listening is even more important than speaking when it comes to good communication. But how *do* we really listen?

<http://www.successnet.org/members/articles/angier-validation.htm>

#### ***Mistakes Count Against You***

We're all using email more and more these days. But when did we really learn email etiquette? Read this article for a crash course in eMail 101.

<http://successnet.org/members/articles/osgoodby-mistakes.htm>

## Telling the Truth is a Loving Act

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The tendency in most organizations—whether large companies, government departments or even family units—is not to rock the boat and refrain from telling our truth. For a variety of reasons, we hold back from saying what’s true for us. We may fear being ostracized, held up for promotion, ridiculed or even fired.

But that’s not the way to greatness; that’s the way to mediocrity or even failure. To grow, we have to tell the truth—*our* truth.

I’m talking here about sharing what we believe, what we feel and what we think about things that matter.

Sometimes we hold back because we’re protecting the person or persons we need to confront. Maybe we’re not sure they can handle the truth. But we do them and ourselves a great disservice when we withhold our point of view. Telling the truth truly is a loving act.

Can you overdo it? Sure. And you should never use this to dump your judgments or harsh criticisms onto another person. That’s not what I’m advocating at all.

I’m recommending that we tell the truth with compassion. I’m suggesting we have the courage to speak up and let the chips fall where they may. If we’ve done our best to tell the truth with compassion, if we’ve been honest, if we’ve been genuine, and if we’ve not let our emotions cloud our judgment, we’ll have done our part.

From time to time, your truth will not be received well. When it isn’t, we should make every attempt to be sure we’ve told our truth as responsibly and as compassionately as possible. As I’ve often said, the truth will set you free, but first it may tick you off.

It’s not often easy to tell the truth. But it *is* the path to excellence. And it does get easier.



What are your withholds? Where are you holding back? What’s been left unsaid that stands in the way of open, honest, clear communication and relationship?

With whom do you need to get clear? What do you need to communicate in order to feel complete?

## The Power of Having a Veto

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We had a good trip home from Florida this spring. From Clearwater to Burlington requires 24 hours of steady driving. Depending on which route you take, it's 1,450 or 1,550 miles. We took the longer mountain route home and drove 11 hours the first day and 14 hours the second. We arrived tired but safe with Dawn, myself and Rex the cat very happy to be home in the Green Mountain State.

For the first time, we're experiencing three springs: one in Florida, another on the way back in the Carolinas and the beautiful Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, and spring is just beginning here in the Champlain Valley.

But something happened on the way back that caused Dawn and me to create a new ground rule for our relationship. And I think the idea has value for any team, partnership, personal or professional relationship.

We respect and appreciate each other's driving ability. We're both good drivers with excellent driving records. We *do* have different driving styles but rarely have a disagreement about the other's driving. We did in South Carolina.

Our first day, we ran into a thunderstorm, and it rained as hard as I'd ever seen it rain. Visibility was so poor that many drivers pulled into the breakdown lane, creating an added hazard. I slowed down as much as I dared and got off I95 at the next exit.

We sat out the worst of the downpour and after it let up some, I wanted to begin driving again. Dawn disagreed. She wanted to sit it out longer. But I wanted to put as much concrete and asphalt under us as we could that first day.

It was the first upset we'd had in over four months. We had some cross words, and we both felt a little hurt and misunderstood.

But a few miles down the road, a good discussion took place as to how it had happened and how we could prevent an upset over something similar in the future.

What we decided was that when it comes to our personal safety or risk to personal property, either one of us has veto power as to what we do or don't do.

Veto power is the right to reject a course of action. Early in our relationship, we agreed to veto power in financial decisions. We set a limit as to how much we each could spend without the other's approval. It started with only \$100 and then as our trust and our incomes grew, we raised it to \$500 and now it's \$1,000. What's interesting is, in ten years of marriage, I can't remember either of us exercising our veto. It was enough just to know it was there.

Even though it had worked well for us in finances, we never thought about it in other areas—like driving a car—or soon—a motor coach.

Veto power is a ground rule that can be agreed upon ahead of time. And it can prevent hurt feelings because agreements are made when all parties are calm and rational rather than stressed, tired or upset. There's a comfort in knowing your partner has to gain your approval in certain situations. *And* that you are free to make decisions yourself *except* in those situations.

It's clear, it's fair and it works.



Set ground rules for your discussions. Agree ahead of time what is acceptable and unacceptable in a disagreement. Decide in advance what decisions require agreement by both parties. And agree upon what constitutes a veto. It makes for much smoother sailing—and driving.

## Do You Ask Why?

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Do you ask these why questions?

Why does this always happen to me? Why can't I do anything right? Why do I keep screwing up? Why can't I make any money? Why can't I lose weight? Why do all the good things happen to other people? Why can't I remember anything? Why do I have to do everything? Why am I always the one who gets punished?

When you ask why, you get answers, don't you? But not the right ones, right? When you ask questions like those, your mind goes to other times where you acted that way and tells you that is the way you are. Because you always ask for it. Because you're stupid. Because you don't have the right qualifications. Because you're always in the wrong place at the wrong time. Because you're getting old. Because you're always in the way. Because you're a loud mouth. Because you're convenient. Etc.

You ask those kind of questions, you get those kind of answers.

Why not ask empowering questions?

How can I use this? instead of Why do I keep screwing up? leads you in the direction of solutions, not uselessness.

What is great about this problem? None of the debilitating answers in the second paragraph are going to come up for this one, are they? No. Now, think about what you can find about this problem that you really like.

Why, you ask? Because, and listen good, if you ask yourself what you can find in the problem that you really like, you aren't asking yourself Why me? questions. Now, you're asking yourself questions that lead you in a positive way, questions that *make you think*. When you think the right thoughts, you're finding solutions instead of finding more problems.

What is not perfect *yet*? This implies that things will be perfect. It gives you new answers and reassures you at the same time. Make a list of what is not perfect yet, then check the list off as you perfect the situation.

What am I willing to do to make it the way I want? Make your list of what you're willing to do, then set a time frame that you'll do the projects in.

What am I willing to no longer do in order to make it the way I want? For instance, am I willing to stop smoking in order to be healthier? Am I willing to give up a night with the guys in order to make a more harmonious home life? Am I willing to buy more fruits and vegetables in order to eat healthier?

How can I enjoy the process while I do what is necessary to make it the way I want? Keep looking. You'll find lots of ways to enjoy it that you never even thought of before.

Do any of these questions bring up anything that in any way calls you a dummy, a failure, a non-productive person? No. And believe me, that's the goal. These questions guide your mind in a direction away from the first set of questions. Far away. In fact, don't go back there ever again if you can help it.

And while you're at it, maybe you can change the questions you're asking others, also.

For instance, have you ever noticed the results you get when you ask someone why they did something? Especially if you used a voice tone that implied Why are you so *stupid* to do that? Now, I know we don't do this on purpose, but in the process of trying to figure something out, we sometimes actually wonder that and it communicates itself to the other person. We don't ever want to do that, no matter how upset we are. One way to avoid that is to change the question to How can we change this so it won't happen again?.

That is a very productive question.



Let's take stock now. What are the primary questions that are currently shaping your life? Do any of them start out with Why? Wouldn't now be a good time to change that?

Change the questions you're asking yourself, and change your life around. It's that simple.

## You Can't Un-ring a Bell

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There's an old ditty that goes, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me."

And most of us know that it simply isn't so.

Words can be extremely hurtful.

It's true that it's our reaction to what others say that causes our pain, but we can all agree that much unnecessary distress has been caused by the utterance of unkind words. Sometimes we've been on the receiving end, and other times, we've been the one to say angry, insensitive things.

And once the words are out, you can't ever take them back. You can apologize, you can beg forgiveness, you can claim fatigue, but the damage has been done.

Obviously, the best way to avoid such conflict and harm is to simply not say thoughtless things. And it's not always easy.



Whenever you're angry or upset, take a deep breath and pause before saying anything. It's never helpful to say things rashly when we're overtired, upset or angry.

Be mindful that your words—whether in person, via email or letter—can rarely be called back. You can't un-ring a bell, and you can't completely undo the damage of your angry words.

So don't say them.

## Adding Interesting Words to Your Speech

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Say these words out loud. How do you feel when you say wimpy words as opposed to power words?

### Wimpy Words

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I feel  
 I believe  
 If  
 Suggest  
 Sort of/Kind of  
 Might/Perhaps  
 I hope  
 May  
 Worried  
 Problem  
 I'll try  
 Share

### Power Words

---

I know  
 I am confident  
 When  
 Recommend  
 It is  
 Definitely/Absolutely  
 I know  
 Can  
 Concerned  
 Challenge  
 I will/I'm committed  
 Discuss

## SuccessNet Resources

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### Books

- Success: A Spiritual Matter***  
<http://SuccessNet.org/spirit/>
- 101 Best Ways to Get Ahead***  
Solid gold advice from the world's most successful people  
<http://101BestWays.com>
- 101 Best Ways to Simplify Your Life (late 2005)***  
<http://101BestWays.com>
- 101 Best Ways to Stay Motivated and Inspired (early 2006)***  
<http://101BestWays.com>

### Reports

- 101 Things I've Learned in My 50 Trips Around the Sun***  
<http://SuccessNet.org/reports.htm>
- 101 Ways to Save Time and Be More Effective***  
<http://SuccessNet.org/101savetime.htm>
- How to Form Your Own Success Team***  
<http://SuccessNet.org/teams.htm>
- How to Write a Mission Statement***  
Creating Vision and Mission Statements That Work!  
<http://SuccessNet.org/mission-report.htm>
- 10 Essential Keys to Personal Effectiveness (free)***  
<http://SuccessNet.org/subscribes.htm>
- 101 Best Tools & Resources to Run Your Internet Business***  
The top must-have tools and resources Infopreneurs use to get more done with less hassle.  
<http://SuccessNet.org/101bestways/resources>
- 101 Ways to Save Time & Be More Effective***  
How to get more done in less time.  
<http://SuccessNet.org/101savetime.htm>

## Tools

- Laser Questions™**  
 Get clear, get focused, get ahead.  
<http://SuccessNet.org/laserq.htm>
- Priorities™**  
 Determine your most important, biggest pay-off, mission-aligned goals, purchases, challenges and objectives.  
<http://SuccessNet.org/priorities.htm>

## Programs, Courses & Other Resources

- SuccessNet Gold Membership**  
 Discounts, private web site access, insider information and much more.  
<http://SuccessNet.org/join.htm>
- Freedom to Achieve™ System**  
<http://SuccessNet.org/fta>
- Inspirational and Motivational Quotation Library (free)**  
<http://SuccessNet.org/library.htm>
- World Class Business™**  
 Take your business to the next level.  
<http://WorldClassBusiness.com>
- Your Core Values™ eCourse**  
 Discover, define and begin living in accordance with your true values.  
<http://YourCoreValues.com>
- Step Up to Success™ Course**  
 Learn the fundamental principles of success.  
<http://SuccessNet.org/stepup.htm>
- SuccessMark™ Cards**  
 Inspirational and motivational online greeting cards (free)  
<http://SuccessMarkCards.com>
- Michael Angier, speaker, coach and consultant**  
 Michael works with senior executives who want to build world-class companies and with people who want to do value-driven work.  
<http://MichaelAngier.com>

## About the Author

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Michael Angier is the founder and CIO (Chief Inspiration Officer) of SuccessNet, the popular web-based community dedicated to helping people operate at their personal and professional best.

Michael is a father, husband, mentor, author, speaker, entrepreneur, coach and student. He's also the creator of The World Class Business™ Conference and has taught seminars and conducted workshops on goal setting, motivation and personal development in four countries.

Michael's passion is human potential. Helping people discover, develop and fulfill their dreams is his purpose, which is clearly reflected in SuccessNet. Michael is one of those individuals who has found his purpose in life and aligns all his endeavors with it.

In his youth, already an ardent student of the principles of success, Michael began reading biographies of successful individuals and was fascinated by their lives and the contributions they made to the world.

Intrigued by the science of individual achievement early in his life, Michael has devoted himself to advancing his experience and expertise in personal and professional development for more than 30 years.

Michael is married to Dawn Angier—his partner, best friend, mentor, teacher, student and confidant. They live in South Burlington, Vermont and have six children ranging in age from 14 to 34. Michael enjoys sailing, tennis, traveling, reading and helping people realize their dreams.

## About SuccessNet

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SuccessNet is an international association of people committed to operating at their best—to creating excellence in every aspect of their lives and throughout their respective organizations. We support people in developing the skills, knowledge, belief and passion to achieve their dreams.

**OUR MISSION:**  
to inform, inspire  
and empower  
people to be their  
best—personally  
and professionally.

SuccessNet is dedicated to helping you become more knowledgeable, prosperous and effective. In addition to our publications, we provide a complete membership package dedicated to making your road to success easier and more fun.

Since 1995, over 150,000 people from all around the globe have benefited from the SuccessNet experience.

People from all walks of life become members: small-business owners, managers and people who want to get ahead in their careers. Our members want to maximize their potential, improve the quality of their lives and make a lasting difference in the world.

SuccessNet is for great people who want to become even better.

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