

Speech is golden

If you are striving for effective and efficient communication you should first bid farewell to conventional wisdom as expressed in the following saying: speech is silver but silence is golden. Even if that is occasionally true, it is a rare guru who achieves a long-lasting impact with silence. If you bring yourself to speak, however, beware: if you speak then you must make sure that your speech is better than your silence would have been.

Key situations

In key situations it is rare to achieve long-lasting impact through speech for the following reasons:

1. What the speaker considers important may be seen in a different light by the listener.
2. The speaker does not explain himself well enough.
3. The key issues are expressed in such a way as to induce an adverse reaction.

All three situations lead to uncertainty and a decrease in performance ability. The key situation does not become any clearer, the attitude of the speaker is not obvious and this prevents a positive move in the right direction.

The logical steps

The motto “speech is golden” goes through four stages before reaching the point at which the key situation can be embraced:

1. The facts.
2. My feelings.
3. Our requirements.
4. Our agreement.

Putting the four stages into practice:

1. *The facts*
I establish objectively what the facts are. The important thing is that the facts are not just accepted by me but also by the listener!
2. *My feelings*
I express my personal reaction to these facts. My openness creates surprise.
3. *Our requirements*
I stick firmly to what is important to both of us in the future – and what can therefore also provide the motivation for the listener to keep to “our agreement”.
4. *Our agreement*
This can be expressed as a wish or a request. It is also possible to challenge the listener: “What do you suggest?”

The length of the “golden speech” is ideally less than thirty seconds. Don’t kid yourself: it’s not true that a key situation needs to be addressed using a lot of words. It needs short, precise and understandable words! That can be momentarily shocking, but it lends added security and creates long-term trust!

The two most common mistakes:

1. The facts are not expressed objectively enough (it's important to stay cool!).
2. Too much empty space is left between the four stages. Result: the listener becomes the speaker and sweeps my attitude and my intentions off the table.

Effective application

I apply "speech is golden" when I have a clear position in a given situation. Whether I am right or wrong is just a matter of opinion – but I have a clear position. This application is just as advisable in positive situations as in negative ones (see examples). In negative situations the model is only effective in private. Do not confront groups!

With my "golden speech" I express my position briefly, precisely and clearly to the man or woman. Following on from that you frequently find a useful discussion takes place. However, if I wish to avoid any discussion I have to ensure that the conversation takes place on neutral territory, so that I can leave immediately afterwards!

The negative example: a committee member arrives late for an important meeting.

Facts	We set the time of this meeting at 06.30. It is now precisely 06.40. We hadn't heard from you and have been waiting ten minutes for you.
Feelings	I'm annoyed,
Requirement	because it's essential that we can rely on one another.
Agreement	Don't apologise. I cannot tolerate this behaviour. We will adjourn for today and try again tomorrow at 06.30. Goodbye.

The positive example: an exceptional sales success

Facts	We have been trying for five years now to win this important distribution partner. You've been at it for exactly one year and you've done it!
Feelings	I think that's fantastic. I'm really pleased.
Requirement	Such successes are worth their weight in gold for our future.
Agreement	I would like to invite you out to lunch next week to find out at leisure what we can learn from your success. When would be a good day for you?