

SECRETS OF

GREAT WORKPLACE COMMUNICATORS

ART PETTY

01. LEARN TO LOVE CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

Reframe your mindset

about challenging workplace conversations. Tell yourself and remind yourself often that these conversations are really opportunities to:

- + Create mutual learning.
- + Repair relationships.
- + Promote change.
- + Discuss differing opinions.
- + Select a path together.



Build good habits now—**learn to love challenging conversations**, and you'll be one of those great workplace communicators who provide **clarity, context and inspiration**.

02. LEARN THE PRINCIPLES OF POSITIVE PERSUASION

Every conversation

in the workplace is a negotiation. Every time you ask for resources, help, budget, headcount, or a change in process, you are involved in a mini-negotiation.

Great workplace communicators learn and apply the 11 Principles of Positive Persuasion in their negotiations. They focus on uncovering interests, empathizing with their counterparts and designing solutions that create positive outcomes for all parties.



The 11 Principles of Positive Persuasion are:

- | | | | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------------|----|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | | Creating positive outcomes. | 7 | | Vanquishing fear. |
| 2 | | Emphasizing emotional appeals. | 8 | | Using empathy to create openings. |
| 3 | | Avoiding arguing. | 9 | | Reframing to melt resistance. |
| 4 | | Uncovering interests. | 10 | | Rewarding, not threatening. |
| 5 | | Giving control to gain support. | 11 | | Using positive talk. |
| 6 | | Creating options not ultimatums. | | | |

03. BEGIN AND END EACH DAY WITH A JOURNAL ENTRY

Regular reflection

about your interactions during the day in a properly maintained journal offers context for continuous personal and professional improvement.

Not sure what to include in your leadership journal? Here are some ideas:

- + Priorities, achievements, and ideas to strengthen.
- + Information, options, assumptions, and expectations for decisions.
- + Information surrounding challenging conversations and outcomes, including ideas to strengthen in future situations.



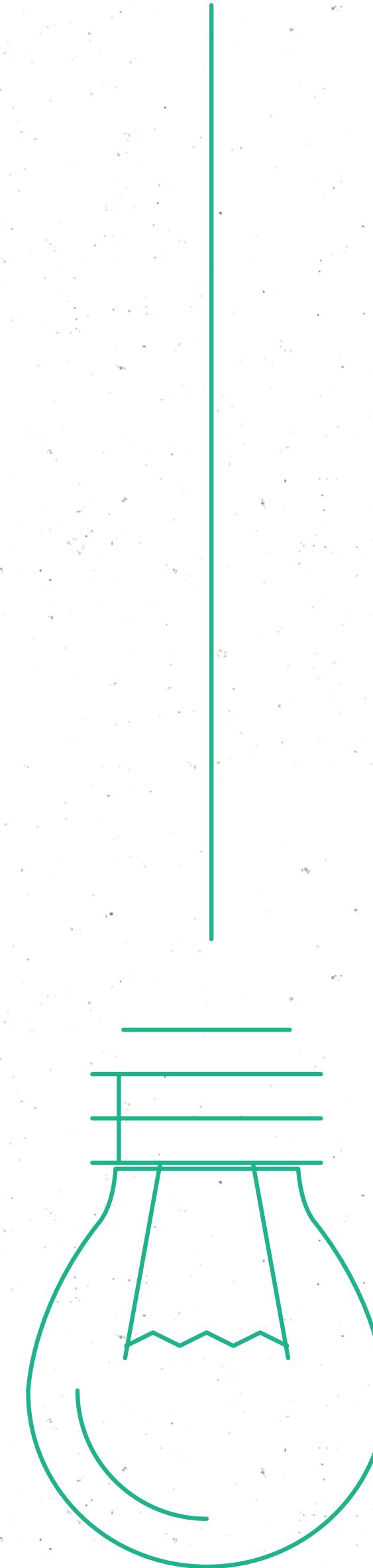
Great workplace communicators
understand growth occurs by focusing on
continuous improvement.

04. UNCOVER INTERESTS, DON'T ARGUE OVER POSITIONS

We all find ourselves

in tense situations where someone is attempting to assert a direction or insert themselves into the area we perceive as our domain. Our natural reaction is to aggressively defend our position and challenge or attack theirs.

The opportunity and the challenge is for us to take a step back and focus on uncovering the interests of our colleague (the why) and to reconcile their interests with our own.



Armed with an understanding of mutual interests, you are prepared to design a **solution that works for both parties.**

05. USE ANGELA'S QUESTION TO DEFINE YOUR ROLE

So many of us

are accustomed to managers telling them the way things are. Rather than taking a directive approach, great communicators employ the practice of inquiry and ask their team members “Angela’s Question” and find a way to turn the answers into behaviors:

“At the end of our time working together, what will you say that I did?”

The responses define the manager’s role as leader. Use the input to craft our own leadership charter to guide your efforts.



06. FOR NEGOTIATIONS, SEEK TO “EXPAND THE PIE”

Every workplace

request for help, resources, money, time, and equipment should be viewed as a negotiation. And like any negotiation, you have to choose an approach ranging from win-win to I win-you lose.

One group advocating principled negotiation focuses on creating a great outcome for all parties.

If an apple pie were involved here, principled negotiators strive to split the apple pie in half or, ideally, find a way to make the pie bigger for everyone.



Strive to expand the pie and **help everyone**—especially the overall organization—benefit in the process.

07. CONFRONT CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

“I really regret that I never learned how to have the tough discussions with the people that worked for me..To this day, I wonder how much money that I cost my companies.”

A C.E.O. IN REFERENCE TO AVOIDING CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

It's the feedback

that's never given and the coaching that never occurs that keep individuals and organizations from improving, learning and growing. People may have a false set of beliefs about their own performance. Poor practices and lousy management remains unchanged and unchallenged.

Great workplace communicators realize that pushing past the fear and unease of having challenging conversations is a requirement to effectively work through workplace issues.

I win-you lose negotiators want to keep you from eating any pie.



08. PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY'S NATURAL RESPONSES

For most of us

the idea of broaching a topic that might result in personal conflict is enough to trigger an anxiety attack.

Our bodies pump adrenaline, and our primitive brains take over our higher-order processing capabilities.

There are ways to move beyond our typical responses to challenging conversations, such as:

- + Learn to plan and manage your message. A well-developed message helps you navigate criticism.
- + Learn to recognize the signs of an impending confrontation.
- + Learn to manage your brain and body's response to sudden confrontations: create a brain mind/body reboot process that allows you to maintain control in tense moments.



Great workplace communicators
recognize the need to **overcome**
their natural biological reactions to
stress and confrontations.

09. DON'T WAIT TOO LONG TO HAVE A CONVERSATION

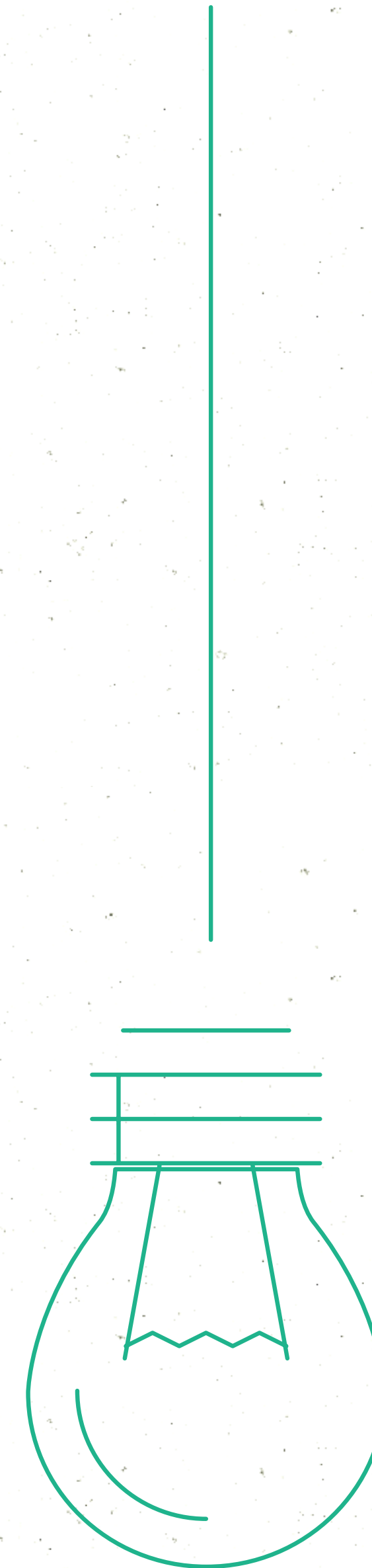
A good number of

challenging conversations are delivered long after their freshness date, while others are muddled or massacred in delivery.

My law of the declining value of constructive feedback suggests:

The value of feedback divides in half for every day you delay giving it.

It's imperative to recognize the need for timeliness when it comes to challenging conversations.



10. KEEP YOUR COMPOSURE DURING CONFRONTATIONS

As you climb

the ladder in your career, you inevitably encounter situations where a colleague disagrees with your ideas or approaches. For high-stakes topics involving strategy and investments, you're in competition with others for attention and resources, and not everyone wants you to win.

When faced with a direct or passive-aggressive attack on your ideas and character, your response speaks volumes about your maturity and leadership to everyone involved.



Learn to navigate meeting room
confrontations with **diplomacy,**
grace, and a good bit of psychology,
and you will go far.

11. USE THE *MANAGER'S* COMMUNICATION STOOL

Maintain balance

with your challenging conversations by using all three legs of the manager's communication stool.

Survival and success as a manager depend in large part upon your ability to master the three legs of the manager's communication stool.

- + Manage your message.
- + Manage yourself.
- + Leverage positive persuasion tactics.

Successful managers draw upon these communication skillsets and toolsets every day when engaging with team members, peers, senior managers and executives across a variety of challenging circumstances.



When one of the “legs” of the stool isn’t present or askew, the communication process can break down.

12. DON'T FEAR CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

Complex, controversial

and potentially emotionally charged situations trigger a natural fear reaction because they create openings for conflict to enter the picture. Few of us willingly invite conflict into our lives, preferring to sidestep issues and individuals and keep the peace. A tenuous peace is preferable to open conflict in our minds. Peel back the layers of this challenging conversation onion beyond fear, and you'll find lack of self-confidence at the core.

Here are ways to overcome fear:

- + Recognize that progress takes place through challenging conversations.
- + Frame these impending conversations as opportunities to advance.
- + Focus on behaviors that link to business performance.
- + Plan and manage your message and plan and manage yourself.



Remember, **progress,**
problem-solving, growth, and
performance are all outcomes of
challenging conversations!

13. LEARN TO BE A TIME-TELLER, NOT A WATCHMAKER

Everyone knows someone

who never got the memo on how to get to the point in conversations. I warmly reference these people in my mind as Watchmakers. Instead of giving you the time of day when you ask for it, they tell you in painful detail how to build the watch.

- + Bosses avoid opening even casual conversations with watchmakers.
- + Groups are hesitant to draw watchmakers into discussions.
- + Co-workers have been known to begin thinking of creative ways to extract themselves from conversations with watchmakers.

Skip the extraordinary depth and get to the point. If someone needs more information, they will open-the-door by asking questions.



14. DESIGNATE A DISCUSSION GUIDE

Group work

is inevitable and all too often wasteful. The best leaders understand the pure raw potential that groups offer, as well as the traps that stand in the way of productive outcomes.

They take on a “Guide” persona, and deliberately develop approaches that steer around or over the traps towards effective outcomes.



Discussion Guides:

- 1 | Ensure roles are clear, including scribe and timekeeper.
- 2 | Provide clarity for the discussion objectives.
- 3 | Shut down sidebar discussions.
- 4 | Ensure all participants have a voice.
- 5 | Ensure the outcomes are clearly understood.
- 6 | Ensure follow-on responsibilities and timing are clear.

The simple step of assigning a guide strengthens your odds of conducting **effective and efficient** group discussions.

15. APPLY PARALLEL THINKING APPROACHES

The Six Thinking Hats

technique uses colored hats where each one represents a distinct topic theme, including: emotions, negatives/risks, positives, creative ideas, process issues and facts.

Edward De Bono developed Six Thinking Hats as a tool to take the complexity out of discussions and to engage the full power of groups by ensuring their common focus on a particular element of a discussion.

A good discussion guide uses this technique to ensure:

- + Unified focus on one topic at a time.
- + Clear identification of known facts and needed data.
- + Proper identification of risks and opportunities.
- + Clear development of ideas and best outcomes.



Great workplace communicators
use parallel thinking approaches
to **turbocharge the effectiveness**
of group discussions.

16. CONTINUE STUDYING COMMUNICATION

The life of a

manager, project manager, team-lead or executive is punctuated by the need to conduct frequent, challenging conversations.

If you're not working hard to strengthen your skills for navigating challenging conversations, you're limiting opportunities for career advancement.

There are a variety of activities you can do that provide you with knowledge to master challenging conversations.



Knowledge Activities:

- 1 | Read widely on this topic. (Nick Morgan, Leigh Thompson, William Ury, Edward De Bono, etc.)
- 2 | Study the great communicators around you.
- 3 | Practice, practice, practice.
- 4 | Get trained.
- 5 | Practice some more.
- 6 | Learn from your failures.
- 7 | Keep improving.

Developing as an effective communicator is an **on-going, career-long process** guaranteed to pay dividends for you, your teams, and your organizations.



ABOUT ART PETTY

Art Petty is a former software industry senior executive and a popular leadership and management author, executive coach and speaker. Art's practical and powerful business guidance is reflected in his multiple books and popular Management Excellence and Leadership Caffeine blog posts.