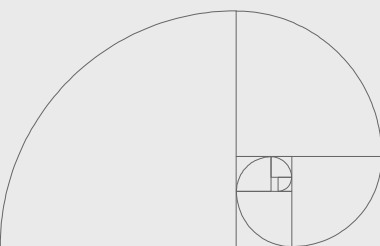


“When I get ready to reason with someone, I spend a third of my time thinking about what I’m going to say, and two-thirds thinking about what they’re going to say.”

Abraham Lincoln

“As I walked in the front door, I heard a heated conversation”



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HIGH STAKES PRESENTATIONS

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Good parents make good managers!



One night, the young Alice Waters refused to set the table for dinner. Her father, Charles Waters, tells a story¹ that demonstrates several lively principles of High Stakes Conversations, all of which are helpful for managers, sales reps, and presenters—in fact, anyone who wants to win the assent of an audience of one or a thousand.

“One evening as I walked in the front door, I heard a heated conversation between my wife and my daughter Alice. My wife was saying, ‘Hurry up and set the table. Daddy will be home soon!’”

Alice answered, “I won’t. It’s not my turn!”

He enlists an ally

“I entered the kitchen and listened for a few moments. Then I suggested that Alice accompany me upstairs to help put my things away and find my lounging jacket and slippers. Without hesitating a second, Alice ran ahead to the bedroom and found my slippers. I complimented her on helping me and once she’d calmed down, I asked, ‘Why do you refuse to set the table tonight?’ Alice responded, ‘Mommy won’t let me have my allowance.’”

...probes for thinking

“I didn’t grasp the correlation between Alice’s allowance and setting the table, but I continued the discussion. “‘You always receive your allowance on Friday and this is only Wednesday. Why do you want to have it today?’”

“Alice informed me that her school was having a bazaar on Thursday and she wanted to buy some things.”

..looks for win-win

“‘How would it be,’ I said, ‘if I lend you the money now and you can repay me when you receive your allowance on Friday?’ Alice was very pleased with this idea.”

“I then asked her what the allowance had to do with setting the table. ‘It’s not my turn!’ Alice repeated. ‘Let’s see,’ I said, ‘I remember your sister Ellen set the

Questioning and listening is key to effective High-Stakes conversations & presentations.

Q & L develops empathy and trust—it gives the other person the experience of being heard..

Empathy does not imply agreement, but, acknowledges the validity of your audience's perspective.

You get your ideas across better when you first learn what's going on in their minds.



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table on Sunday when we had guests. You must have set it on Monday and Ellen again on Tuesday. Today is Wednesday, so it *must* be your turn.”

“At this point Alice started to cry. She said, ‘I don’t like to set the table because every time I do, Ellen criticizes me.’”

...role plays & coaches

“‘Let me see how you set the table,’ I said to Alice. ‘We’ll pretend this book on the bed is a plate, the small ruler is a fork, the pencil a knife, and the pen a spoon.’”

“Brushing away her tears, she quickly placed the utensils as she would on the dinner table.”

“Rather than embarrass Alice with her mistakes, I asked how her set-up would work if she were cutting something. After making several attempts, she placed everything correctly.”

“‘How will you remember the right placement?’ I asked.

“After thinking for a moment and glancing at her wrists, her eyes lit up and she said, ‘I know, Daddy. The fork is on the wristwatch side!’”

At this point I encouraged her. ‘How about trying to set the table tonight?’”

..and sparks a daughter's talent.

“Zoom! Down the stairs she went. She set the table perfectly and even added flowers from our garden. Just as she finished, her sister Ellen came in, placed her

hands on her hips with arms askew and exclaimed: ‘Mother, did you help Alice set the table again?’”

“My wife answered, ‘No Ellen, I didn’t. Alice did it all by herself!’”

“From then on, Alice always enjoyed setting the table. Whenever we had guests or holiday dinners, she would create special decorations. She grew up to become one of the most original and successful restaurateurs in the United States.”

A few thoughts

The calm assertiveness and empathy displayed by Charles Waters distinguishes good managers, sales reps, and public speakers.

Assertiveness without empathy damages relationships. Empathy without assertiveness is a limp helping hand.

What about presenting?

A good *presenter* demonstrates empathy by framing her remarks around the salient concerns of her audience. She demonstrates assertiveness by advancing her ideas with intellectual clarity and personal conviction.

Charles Waters was a “people-problem” solver. We should all learn his skills and bring them home with us, and to work too!.

¹ *Fathers and Daughters: In Their Own Words*, by Mariana Cook

Alice Waters is the owner of Chez Panisse in Berkeley, CA and the driving force behind the local food movement.