



Communication MASTERY

HANDOUT

with Shade Zahrai

AWARD-WINNING LEADERSHIP STRATEGIST &
GLOBAL PEAK PERFORMANCE CONSULTANT
TO FORTUNE 500s

CAREER PERFORMANCE SPECIALIST &
HARVARD TRAINED LEADERSHIP COACH



INFLUENCEO

I. Know how to *Engage*

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the *intent to reply.*”

- STEPHEN COVEY

The better you listen, the more people feel you understand them and that they can trust you.

Validate others and what they are saying through simple questioning, repeating what they've said in your own words and seeking to clarify.

Some examples include:

- “So what I’m hearing is...”
- “So what you’re saying is...”
- “What I understand is that...”
- “Help me understand X...”
- “Could you share more about Y?”
- “What does that mean to you?”

Mirroring

Behavioural scientists have found that as individuals start sharing and mirroring each others nonverbal gestures, they also begin to believe that they share similar attitudes, perspectives and beliefs. This leads to an even greater sense of engagement, connection and belonging.

There are three steps:



1. SCAN

Scan the environment to understand the situation. What emotion is being demonstrated? What is the other person’s state.

2. ASSESS

Is it appropriate to mirror this person’s state? If they are distraught, is mirroring them going to help the situation?

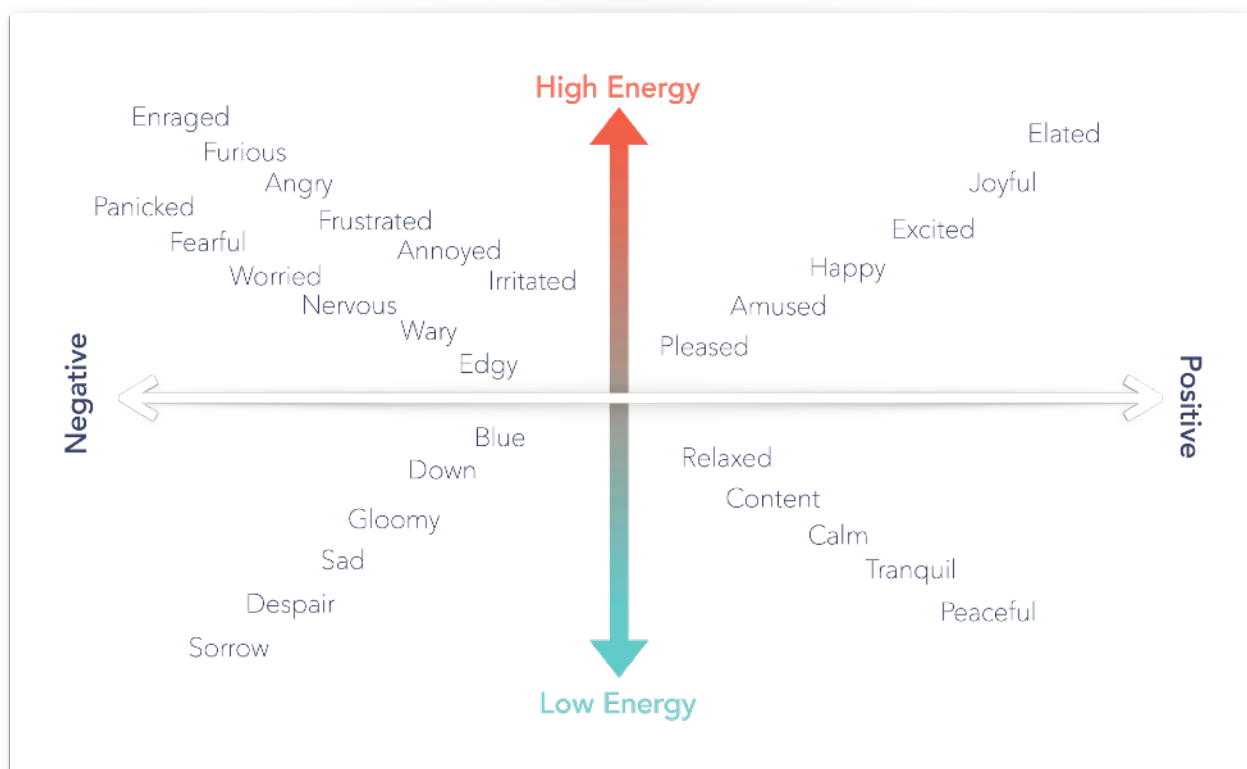
3. ALIGN

Align your approach to theirs. Match their pace of speech, intonation, voice volume, facial expressions, physical stance & body language.

II. Emotional *Intelligence*

Energy Management Tool – Energy Plot

- All emotions have energy behind them, and these energy states manifest across two dimensions: (1) INTENSITY: either high energy or low energy, and (2) VALENCE: positive or negative.
- Psychologists will use these two dimensions to help individuals identify their emotional state, and this 'data' can be vital if it's 'intelligently' and 'strategically' used.





Energy - High / Low

First, ask yourself:

Is it high intensity or low intensity?

Do I feel a large amount of physiological arousal or not?

Has my heart rate increased?

Do I feel a lot of internal energy?

Positive / Negative

Second, ask yourself:

Is this a positive or negative emotional state?

It is pleasant, or unpleasant?



Once you've completed a stocktake on your physiology and how you feel, you can do things to help shift you into the quadrant which is most productive for you in that moment - and it's going to be on the positive side.

Self-Coach by asking yourself:

- *What is my thought process? How is this influencing how I feel?*
- *How is my state impacting other people? My team? My family? Is it serving me? Or hindering me?*
- *What can I do to manage my state before interacting with others?*
- *How can I focus on what's within my control?*



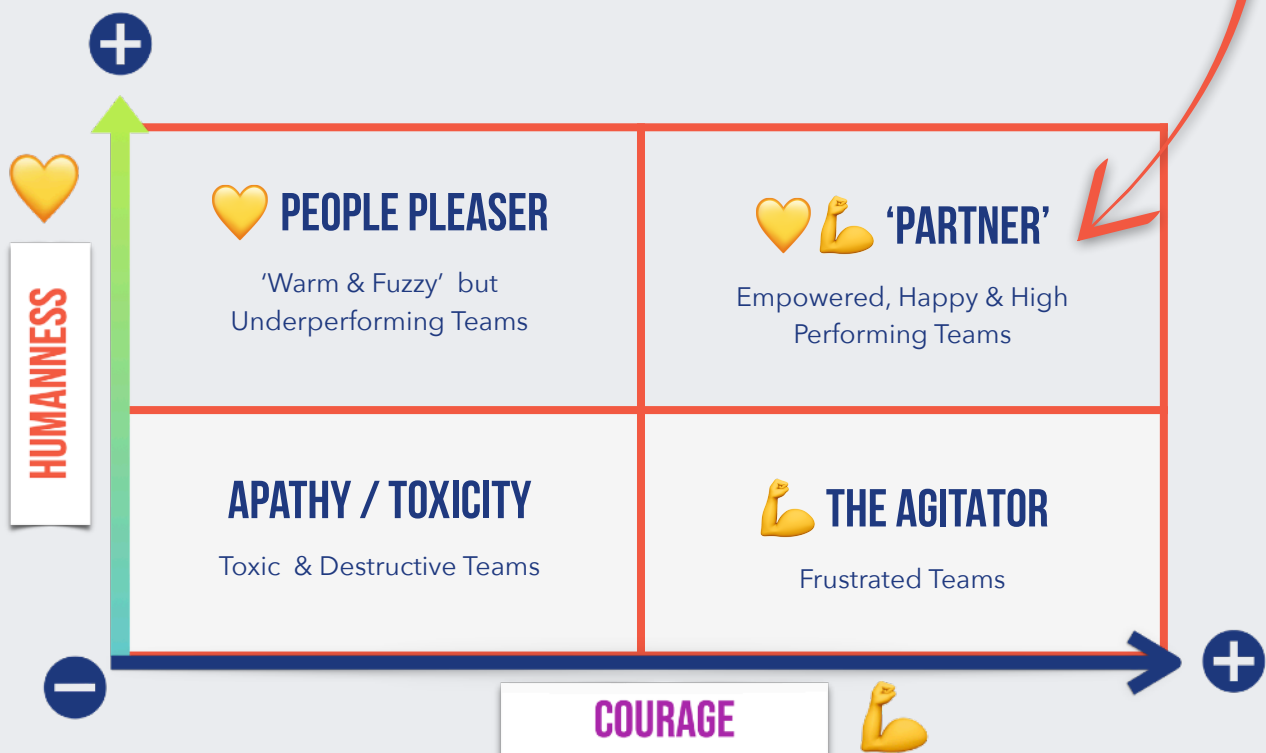
III. Human-Courage Model

1. There's no such thing as valuable feedback from someone you don't trust

2. You need to balance Humanness & Courage

Human Factor: Consideration, Compassion, Empathy and Genuine Care

Courage Factor: Willingness to 'rock the boat', Assertiveness, Directness and Bravery



IV. Techniques to Elevate *Credibility*

1. From 'I Know' to 'That's Right'

When it comes to how we communicate, we so often default to habitual ways to replying, without being aware of the impact it has on others.

Something many of us use when replying to someone who tells us something we already know is, "I KNOW..."

But replying with "I know" can do more harm than good.

It can block the free flow of ideas, can restrict open communication and can reflect that you're not open to the perspective of others. It can (sometimes) be taken to reflect a degree of incompetence (you 'knew' yet you did not 'do').

It can even invalidate someone else, especially where they're excited to share whatever they're sharing. This one's most common in close relationships.

A simple tip is to replace "I know" with "that's right".

This way, you can build on the conversation, justify your course of action (if that helps, e.g. at work) and encourage greater collaboration. It can also subtly offer validation to the person who just shared something with you, while still elevating your credibility.

2. Avoid Softeners

Instead of saying:

- "Correct me if I'm wrong..."
- "I know I'm not the ultimate expert on this, but..."
- "This may be a silly question..."

Just share whatever it is you want to share. You're entitled to speak what's on your mind and share your ideas and perspectives.

When your opinion differs from others, or when you have something to say that could possibly cause upset, don't undermine yourself by prefacing your thoughts with an apology (or something to soften what you're about to say).

Back yourself, and back your perspectives. You can still balance assertiveness with tact.



3. Eliminate Fillers

Remove the word “just”, and any other ‘filler’ from your vocabulary at work. Think about the difference between the sound of:

- “I just want to follow up...” compared with,
- “I want to follow up...”.

It’s a subtle change, but it has a very powerful impact on how confident you appear and how credible you sound. Over time it can also help you feel more confident.

4. End with Confidence

Many of us will often end a statement, sentence or question with: “Does that make sense?”

However, this can be problematic for a number of reasons. If you’re already in an environment where your credibility is questioned (e.g. a minority, a woman in a male-dominated environment, a person of colour, already lacking confidence), this line of questioning can undermine your perceived credibility for two reasons:

1. It could come across as condescending, implying that you don’t believe the person you’re speaking to has the capacity to keep up, undermining their self-efficacy... OR,
2. You’re planting a seed that perhaps your idea doesn’t make sense...

Either way, it’s not helpful.

Instead of “Does that make sense?” try asking:

- “What are your thoughts on that?”
- “Do you need me to clarify anything?”

OR, convert it into a statement:

- “Let me know if you have any questions”
- “I’d like your input on this.”

This is a simple tweak to your communication that results in a powerful shift in how you’re perceived (and how you feel!).



5. Conflict De-escalation Phrases

When 'triggered', instead of defensively reacting, use this expert-level sequence of four very simple phrases. They all start with, *"That's interesting..."* as this can help the person feel validated and reinforces that you're truly listening - without necessarily agreeing with them.

Importantly, you use the word **'what'** instead of **'why'**. This is because the word 'why' can provoke someone into a state of defensiveness or resistance.

Best of all, you give yourself time and space so you don't reactively return with something you might later regret. Fascinatingly, when you respond with any of these phrases, you lift the 'invisibility cloak'. You demonstrate that you are genuinely wanting to understand what motivated them and you're sincerely interested in their answer. This helps de-escalate high pressure situations and is a valuable addition to your communication toolkit.

PHRASES:

***"That's
Interesting..."***

*...tell me
more."*

*...what
makes you
say that?"*

*...what
made you
do that?"*

*...what
made you
think that?"*





Notes & Reflections



SHADÉ ZAHRAI

Director, Influenceo Global Inc.

PhD Cand. MBA, LLB (Hons I), BA-Psych, Dip Pos. Psych, IECL Certified Coach

Award-Winning Leadership Strategist
Global Peak Performance Educator
Harvard Trained Coach | Personal Mastery Expert
Bestselling Author | Forbes Coaches Council Member
10+ Years - Law, Banking & Strategy

Social media

[LinkedIn](#) [Youtube Channel](#) [Instagram](#) [TikTok](#)

Read Shadé's [Forbes Articles](#)