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WHAT SENIOR LEADERS HEAR WHEN YOU WON'T STOP TALKING

Welcome to The Highly Valued Leader podcast, where I make it simple for leaders at all levels to amplify their value. My name is Mel Savage, and I went from working in the mailroom at a small ad agency to making multiple six figures in senior management at McDonald's, to running my own multiple six-figure executive coaching business. I've had huge successes in my career and epic failures. All of it taught me the world-class leadership, mind, and skill sets that I simplify for my clients and share with you on this podcast. I'll help you reset your leadership style, demystify the politics, and help you become the highly valued leader everyone wants on their team. Get ready for the most honest, direct, and revolutionary leadership coaching you've ever heard. Let's simplify leadership together.

Hey, leaders, welcome back to the podcast. Today, we're talking about presenting with authority. This is a big part of what seasoned leaders need to really practice doing, and something I talk to my one-on-one clients a lot about. And I think the biggest challenge that I see with folks is that they are overcommunicating to their senior leadership. And so today, what I want to talk about is what senior leaders actually hear when you won't stop talking. I know it's like, not that I'm not talking, I feel like I'm saying all the most important things that they need to hear. And I get that. You think you're being clear, you think you're being collaborative, you think you're being persuasive.

But when you don't know how to communicate to your audience or how to really effectively and efficiently land the plane, let's say, that's when senior leaders stop listening. And it's not just that they stop listening, okay? It's that they start to form conclusions about you when you communicate—or overcommunicate, in this case, right? And especially when you're trying to get to the next level.

When you're at that tipping point of being an established leader and you're trying to become more seasoned or move towards the executive suite, people start to know that that's what you want, or that you're at the cusp, and they listen a bit more carefully to how you're communicating. So when you are overcommunicating, when you won't stop talking, they will start to form conclusions about you.

Because in their mind, the way you communicate is actually the way that you lead. The way that you communicate is the way you lead. And if you can't get to the point, if you can't create emphasis or impact when you're communicating, they assume that you can't see the point, that you don't know the point that they need to hear, and that you don't know how to influence your audience, okay?

That's why presenting with authority isn't just a communication skill; it's a credibility skill. And it's one that as a seasoned leader or one that's trying to get to the next level, you really can't afford to get wrong. So in this

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episode, I want to walk you through what senior leaders actually hear when you don't know how to get to the point or when you won't stop talking. And then how to shift into a sharper, stronger communication strategy that positions you as someone who's really ready for the next level.

One that actually communicates your credibility, not just the point that you're trying to make. So the situation is this: you are getting airtime in front of senior executives in the organization or whoever is the stakeholder that's helping to determine your future growth in the organization. And by the way, also outside the organization, because people leave, and you want to make a good impression at every touchpoint.

But what often ends up happening is that when you get this airtime in front of the group, you end up trying to give too much context to your recommendation. You overexplain. You are building the case from the beginning versus just getting to the end because our egos want them to see how well we have thought through this issue, how we have thought of everything, why we have not left any stone unturned, right?

You want them to understand why you're thinking the way you're thinking. And that's why so many of my clients and so many people at this stage will offer too much information, too much background at the beginning. And so what ends up happening is as you're presenting or as you're communicating, the room will go quiet for a little while. Maybe too quiet, right, as they're trying to understand where you're going with this. Or what often happened to me was someone just cuts you off because people do not have patience, especially seasoned, very senior people, like they just don't even care, right? They just cut you off. They ask a question, and they force you to get to the point.

Or you might get through the whole thing because they're being kind to you, but then nobody says anything right away, which is also like, you're like, oh, I've been talking all this time, and nobody has anything to say. That also can be a little bit derailing for your confidence in that moment. So someone might say at that point, You know what, I'm confused. I don't understand. Can you go back to this? And you start to realize that you lost your audience partially through what you're presenting, and you didn't notice. Or even worse, what ends up happening is that you get through the whole thing, there's silence, and they're like, okay, we're going to circle back to this, or we'll get back to you with what our thoughts are.

We need some time to process this. Or someone just goes off on a tangent and talks about why they don't like your idea, and you lose the room completely. Then you just leave wondering, Oh my God, how come they didn't get this? This was such a brilliant recommendation. There was so much smart thinking in it.

This is the right thing to do. Why didn't they get this? And the major problem that you're having is that the more you explain, the less impact you're going to have, and the less likely it is that you're going to get your recommendation approved because a confused mind always says no. That is so important to remember.

A coach told me once, and I thought it was the best advice ever. It just immediately clicked for me. A confused mind always says no. I think the reason it clicked for me, too, is because that's how I am. If I don't understand what you're talking about, if I've lost you, all of a sudden, I am skeptical.

I'm going, hmm, this doesn't sound right. That's where my brain goes, and then I just start to question. Or if I don't really understand the issue, I will defer it because I don't have time to sort it out right now, because I have a million things going through my brain. I'm like that. So when I heard that, I'm like, yes, of course.

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Of course, a seasoned person, or rather a senior person, would say no, or I don't know right now, or no, not yet when they don't understand what you're talking about. When you ramble or overexplain or circle your point, senior leaders aren't hearing how smart you are, how thoughtful you are, how you covered every base. They're hearing things like, This person is wasting my time. And they're not trying to be dismissive. Okay, I'm going to give you a little example, like it's just as a home example. Paul, my husband, whom I talk about a lot, poor guy. He is also an overexplainer. He needs to start from the beginning and tell me every step about everything before he gets to the punchline.

And I am the opposite. I'm like, give me the headline. I'll ask the questions I want to ask. So the other day, we were getting someone to restain our front door because with the weather here in Canada, there was a lot of water damage to the door and its wood. And so we were getting someone to come and stain it for us.

And he started from the beginning. He posted on Facebook to find the person, who the person is, where they live, what they've done in the past, all these things, just to get to the point to tell me he found someone. They're coming on Tuesday. That's really all I needed to hear was he found someone, they're coming on Tuesday.

And then if I needed to ask, okay, what's their experience? Where did you find them? You know, what do they do? All this kind of stuff, or I wanted to know more about them or whatever, I could ask, or he could tell me the main salient points after he gives me the punchline. But not only did he tell me how he found them, what they do, he told me about the conversation they had and how he called the guy, but then he called him back right away, and I'm like, oh my God, I don't need to know all of this. This is like one of the biggest challenges in our relationship. I'll have to be honest with you, like it's not a make-or-break challenge, but it's one of the things we often disagree about, is that he needs to give me all the information.

I just want the headline. And he takes it to mean that I'm not interested in him. And I take it to mean like he doesn't think I'm smart enough to get it, or that he's wasting my time. And I don't mean it to be dismissive at all. I'm not trying to dismiss him or his feelings. It's just that, hey, I get this.

Just tell me what happened. So a lot of the time, what they're hearing is not how smart and thoughtful you are. They're hearing this person is wasting my time. Like, get to the point. They're also hearing this person is not ready for bigger rooms. This is not a person I can put in front of the board or the global person, or someone bigger than me.

They're not ready for the bigger rooms. That's another thing that they're hearing because if they don't know how to communicate with me, I'm not going to put them in front of someone else. So if you're wondering why you're not being invited to bigger rooms, it could be the way you communicate. They're also hearing, instead of thinking about how smart and thoughtful you are, they're also hearing this person doesn't know what's important, which is speaking to your ability to strategize, your strategic thinking, your ability to influence an audience, right? That's another thing they're thinking: this person doesn't know how to influence an audience. They don't know how to connect with an audience. They don't think about what their audience needs to hear. They're thinking about their own ego and what they want their audience to hear. I think that's a really big distinction here. When you communicate that way, you are doing it for yourself.

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You're not doing it for your audience. And when you are in these bigger rooms, when you're communicating with senior management, you need to be thinking about what they need to hear. How do I need to communicate with them to get their buy-in? No, this is what they need to know, or this is what I think they need to know.

Right? Do you see the difference there? So then what ends up happening is they might give you the not now or ask questions or things might get derailed, and ultimately, they move on to the next voice in the room, the next person in the room that maybe sounds clearer than you or more grounded or more ready.

And even if that voice or that person is recommending something that isn't as smart as yours or isn't as thought out as yours or isn't going to be as effective as your recommendation, or maybe they're even presenting the exact same recommendation as you, or saying the same thing as you, but they're being heard because they're presenting succinctly and you're like, okay, how did that just happen?

How did that person get heard and not me? How did that recommendation get approved and not mine? It makes no sense because these recommendations get approved not because they're always the most strategic thing; they're getting approved because they are heard and understood and likely are effective to some degree, and probably behind the scenes, the person recommending it did some influence work.

So I want you just to understand that's the issue that you're having. That's the issue that not communicating clearly has. That's the impact it has on your growth. It's not just a communication issue; it's a credibility issue. And so I want to offer you four strategies to be able to start to impact how you communicate.

And the very first one is simple. I want you to think in headlines, not paragraphs. Lead with the point, not the backstory. Very similar to what I said about my conversation with Paul about our front door. Lead with the headline. I found a guy. He's coming on Tuesday. Great. And now I get it, right?

This is the recommendation for the launch this spring. This is a recommendation we're going to be sharing with you today. This, this, and this. You don't need all the backstory before you get to the punchline. They're going to lean in when they know what you're talking about, and that's going to give them a filter for everything else you say after that. When you start with the backstory first, they don't know how to filter what you're saying. They don't know where you're going with it. Senior leaders don't need the full tour. They just need the takeaway and why it matters. And you can add a bit of context if it's needed. If it's needed.

So we're making this recommendation for whatever it is you're recommending. I often will say if I need context, it'll be something like pros and cons. Like not explicitly, here are the pros and the cons of this recommendation, but why this works, and what the risks are we need to manage. Because if you've done your job right, you know around the table, there are people already not agreeing with your recommendation.

There are people who may just want you to actually recommend something different. You know they're going to be disagreeing with you, right? And if you know that, then you can call it out. Here are the risks that we see, and you can address the risks based on it could do this, it could do that.

This is the concern for this department, and we are going to address all of that today. Okay, very clear. You're starting with the headline. You're talking about why you think it's the right thing to do and where the risks are going to be that you're going to address today. And then anybody who's in the room that doesn't agree with your

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recommendation is already sitting back in their chair, going, okay, well, at least they know what's important to me, and let me see what their solution is for it.

Okay, so now you've got an engaged audience who's actually already listening to what you have to say. The second strategy that you can use is to make sure that you're anchoring your recommendation or your main point to the business, not just your logic. Your logic is great, but the business is more important, so they don't need to hear how you thought through it.

They need to know why it matters to them. Like, right now, with this issue. It matters to where the business is going, where the industry is going, and where the resources need to be disseminated and prioritized. So frame your point around impact, timing, and risk. Those kinds of things. You should really be focusing your recommendation around why this, why now. Okay, why this, why now?

And you should also—number three, this is number three—get comfortable with silence. You don't need to fill every pause. Think about putting a beat, just a quick beat, behind a big point. Just stopping for a second, letting it sit, or putting a beat behind a big question, like a rhetorical question.

So we asked ourselves, da, da, da, da, da, beat. Especially if it's a high-impact or a disruptive question, let it sit for a beat. And then I like to do this. I've done it a few times today in the podcast already. Repeat the point to underline it. I said, a confused mind always says no. That is so important, right?

A confused mind always says no. When I stop, like I say it, I give a beat, and then I repeat it. You're listening to the point. And then once you've made your point, stop talking. If you have a mic-drop moment, let the mic drop, and then stop talking. Now, the reason we often want to try to fill the pause is because either one you want to convince them. You just want to keep going until they're nodding. You don't want to give them a chance to disagree with you. And that's really partially the second reason we want to fill the pause, is because we think someone's going to jump in and derail things. We think they're going to come in and say, Here's why I disagree. This is a stupid idea. Or add their own agenda into the mix. You know, if that happens, let it happen. You can bring things back. You can practice bringing things back to the point. That's a great point. I like where we're going. Let's come back to here and start to integrate what they're saying into the recommendation or into the discussion.

But don't let it get too far off topic. But we're not talking about like long pauses that become awkward. We're talking about putting space behind what you're saying to create emphasis, right? My husband, who's Québécois, is French. He's always talking about putting the emphasis behind the right syllable, right?

It's really just for emphasis points, putting a beat, letting it land, letting it sink in, and then if you've actually finished talking or you have a mic drop, just let it sit. Silence doesn't weaken your point; it strengthens it. All right. Silence doesn't weaken your point; it strengthens it. See what I did there?

I hope you're getting the point. And then the fourth strategy for you is just to rehearse your big points out loud. All right. Say them out loud. Let them land. Decide what you want to emphasize. Put a little underline underneath it. Clarity comes from practice. You tend to ramble under pressure.

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That's when we tend to ramble the most. Prep your main points in advance. Put them as bullet points. Maybe a couple of sub-bullet points, so you know what not to ramble into so that you can stay succinct. Say them out loud. Practice them. Practice pausing. Hear what it sounds like in your own voice, if you want.

I put stickies on notebooks or a note, like for myself, if I'm presenting by video, I'll just put it on my computer, or I'll put it in my notebook just to keep me on point, to keep my energy in the right place. And if, as you're presenting, you get off course, you see yourself rambling or going down a rabbit hole, don't freak out.

Don't judge yourself. Don't tell yourself you're doing it wrong and that you blew it. Just bring yourself back. It's like when they teach meditation. At first, a lot of people get intimidated by meditation because their brains will go off into thought rabbit holes, and they'll get off track from just focusing on their breathing and staying centered.

That's okay. That is normal. When you're meditating, what people will say to you is, just as soon as you notice that your brain has gone down a rabbit hole, just bring it back. Bring it back to the center. The idea is that you just keep bringing it back, and the more you bring it back, the less you have to bring it back because your brain is getting trained.

And that's the same thing here. You're not going to get one opportunity to present to senior management, okay? Or to present to the people that you're presenting to today. Just keep trying. Just keep trying to get focused. And the minute that you see yourself going down a rabbit hole, bring it back. Get centered.

It's okay. You just have to practice thinking what you want to say, speaking what you want to say, and then tighten it up as you go and give yourself some space to get it wrong. Because you probably will, and that's okay. You're just learning as you go. But just bring it back and don't judge yourself.

Okay, so those are the four things. It's really about thinking in headlines, not in paragraphs and backstory, anchoring your point to the business, getting comfortable with silence, and rehearsing your key points out loud. I think that the key thing to remember is you don't need to say more. You need to say it with purpose.

Everything you're saying has a purpose. And I know you're saying to yourself, That's how I feel right now. But you're saying it for you because you have something to prove, and you think they need to understand it the way you need them to understand it. Think about what they need. Think about what's going to give you the most credible voice to your audience.

Because your voice isn't just about being heard and communicating information. When you speak, it's about reinforcing your audience's ability to trust you to take you seriously. All right? And the leaders who speak with clarity and direction and calm authority, those are the ones that keep getting invited back to the room.

All right? So I want you to think about leading with less, communicating with less, but having more impact. It's all about scaling. When I think about seasoned leaders and what I talk to them about, I talk to them about scaling their emotional capacity, scaling their leadership skills, and scaling their brand.

And I think when it comes to communication like this, we're talking about scaling your impact with how you communicate. And the more things you say, the less impact you're having. You're using more words, but you're having less impact, and we want to have more impact with fewer. That's all about scaling. So try that.

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Let your presence do the talking for you. That's what I have for you this week, my friends. And one last thing before you turn me off—make sure you get on my mailing list. So go to melsavage.com and get on my mailing list for my weekly *The Leading Edge* newsletter, because I will be announcing all the information that you need to get yourselves into my upcoming *Doer to Leader* Leadership Group Program.

It is going to launch in September. It is going to be fabulous. I'm putting all my years of work into my first leadership group program. Oh my goodness, it's going to be so high impact for my hundreds of one-on-one clients. I am bringing all of the learning that I've had into that program. So make sure you get on my mailing list so you can hear all about it and not miss a thing.

I will talk to you next week. Bye for now.

Hey, if you want to simplify leadership while amplifying your value, then you need to get your hands on my free training. Head over to melsavage.com/simple for instant access to the training and get a taste of how I help my clients lead with ease and make more money in the process. I'll see you there.

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