

SPEAK STRAIGHT

Speak honestly in a way that helps to make progress. Say what you mean, and be willing to ask questions, share ideas, or raise issues that may cause conflict when it's necessary for team success. Be courageous enough to say what needs to be said. Address issues directly with those who are involved or affected.

I absolutely HATE confrontation. On the other hand, I love the liberation that comes when someone has the courage to be honest. There is a great saying, "Your actions speak SO loudly, I can't hear what you're saying." This saying is especially true and powerful with kids who always "do as we do, not as we say." In general, if we are acting in a way that isn't congruent with our values or stated goals, our hypocrisy is hard for us to see or admit, but it's almost always visible to everyone around us. It takes courage to point out those inconsistencies to others.

Speaking of which, David already began exercising his SPEAK STRAIGHT "muscle" when he pointed out to me today that it's already Wednesday and where's this week's fundamental?!

I love that for a few reasons. First, I had a good laugh, second, he's absolutely correct and third, he obviously looked at our list of fundamentals anticipating this week's email. Great work, David!

Years ago, one of my mentors called me into his office. He had a copy of a letter I had written and mailed a week or two before to a lawyer on an important insurance case. I recognized it immediately and was wondering why it was sitting on his desk, especially since it had many red marks all over the page. "Ken, sit down, you're not going to like this conversation (I just love when someone starts a conversation this way), but this could be one of the most important discussions of your young career."

I gulped and took a deep breath, "Ok, what did I do?" He started, "Well, this letter you wrote to an attorney is just, how should I say this nicely, is umm, terrible." The blood started to drain out of my face. "Really? I worked hard on it, but I really want to learn how to do better." I said with some hesitation. Then he added, "It won't be hard to do better than this!" He went on, "The attorney who you sent this letter to is a good friend of mine and he sent it back to me so I could "give you some constructive feedback." He then went on to show me line by line, word by word what I had done that "could have been better."

I had taken and survived freshman English in college, but no one ever taught me how to write a business letter. It was remarkable how many things he found wrong with my letter. Everything from the structure to grammar, to the logic, the flow and even the spelling was wrong. I left his office with a difficult but remarkable writing lesson. However, as I thought about it, I realized the most important thing I learned that day was not about writing, it was about integrity and caring enough about another person to be honest, open and to speak straight. My mentor could have just ignored the letter or could have simply blamed me for sending an embarrassingly bad letter to his friend, but instead he SPOKE STRAIGHT to me and I learned a great set of lessons.

