

Transcription details:

Host: Bill Coppel, First Clearing Chief Client Growth Officer

Guest: Matt Abrahams, Professor of Organizational Behavior at Stanford

Transcription results:

Intro Welcome to The Next Frontier, where we examine what the world of the financial advisor will be in a world that's being disrupted by artificial intelligence and algorithms. Our mission is to spark new conversations that create stronger connections and build greater client confidence. Join us as we look at our industry and others through a new lens and explore the opportunities emerging at the intersection of high tech and high touch. It's time for a new conversation. Are you ready?

BILL COPPEL Hi. This is Bill Coppel, and welcome to this episode of The Next Frontier. Today, I want to start with a story. It probably took place a half dozen years ago or so when I was trying to engage my then 20-year-old son in a conversation. It went something like this. I call him on his smartphone, and it went to voicemail, and I said, "Hey, Kevin. It's Dad. Give me a call." Within about three seconds, a text message comes back on my phone, and it says, "What do you want?" And I thought naively, "Oh, he probably couldn't get to his phone in time, which is why I went to voicemail." So what did I do? I just dialed his number again. It goes to voicemail. "Hey, Kevin. It's Dad. I just thought you texted me. I want to talk." A few seconds later, another text message comes back. It says, "Okay. What do you want to talk about?" And at that point, I got pretty frustrated, and probably, some of our listeners have experienced a similar thing. What I realized was that my son's mode of communication was very different than what I was accustomed to. After I got over the initial shock that he didn't love me anymore, I realized that it wasn't an issue of that. It was really an issue of where he felt he was most effective with his time in communicating with me. And again, as I said, after weeks of therapy, I got over it and began to realize that, wow, if I want to connect with him or other people of his generation, I have to start thinking differently about how I communicate.

BILL COPPEL Traditional forms of communication are clearly evolving. That's obvious. We see that all the time. What may not be so obvious is the impact it's having. With texting and Skyping and email and a variety of forms of social media, we are talking, sharing, and connecting very different than we ever did before. New technology has given us many challenges to get our messages across expertly, and we have to evolve with these changes. How we connect depends on our audience also. Texting is the preferred method, as I mentioned, for younger generations, while face-to-face meetings or phone calls are favored by older generations. And the real question is, how do we cope with it? In fact, by 2020, we'll have five generations in the workforce. And regardless of the mode in which we want to communicate, we hope our message is clear, it's understood, and we can move forward with whomever it is we're trying to connect. Our guest today is an expert in this area, and he'll share with us his insights and shed some light on how effectively connecting today is very different in an ever changing world, and the skills we need to be cognizant of to ensure our message is heard, and, I think more importantly, we are able to hear the message that someone is sending to us. So please let me welcome Matt Abrahams. Matt, welcome to The Next Frontier.

MATT ABRAHAMAS Thank, Bill. Excited to be here.

BILL COPPEL Well, we're really happy to get you on the show today. Let me start with this sort of overarching basic question on this topic of communication. There's a lot going on out there that's affecting the way we communicate. Clearly, the traditional way of face-to-face is slowly sinking into the sunset, as they say, for good or bad reasons. But as you reflect on your experience in this field, give us an overview of the state of communications as you see it today.

MATT ABRAHAMAS Well, there's certainly a lot of change, as you have indicated, with the advent of new technologies. There are many, many ways in which we can communicate with folks all around the world now. So while we have greater access and more tools by which to communicate, it is getting much more difficult and much more confusing in how to actually communicate effectively. So you're right. We are doing less face-to-face communication. Although when we do, it's still very important and critical that we know how to do it well. But with new technologies, be it webinar tools, Slack, other types of immediate communication, it is becoming very challenging. In some ways, we all have to be multilingual, not in terms of the language we use, but the channels and modalities through which we communicate.

BILL COPPEL As a professional in this business, and also, as an educator with your role at Stanford, what are you seeing on the frontline as you work with firms, organizations, and individuals for that matter? What are you seeing some of the challenges that this different modalities are creating?

MATT ABRAHAMAS So one of the biggest challenges people have is getting attention. The most precious commodity we trade in today, I believe, is attention. And how do we get people's attention to our messages? How do we focus those messages in a way that is relevant to the people we're talking to, but also takes into account the channel and modality through which we're communicating? So a lot of the time I spend coaching and teaching is really helping people to figure what's the best way to make the content relevant. And that's a really big challenge. Because a lot of us, when we communicate, we take a very self-centered approach. We think, "Here's what I want to say." And really, in this day and age, it's more about what does the audience need to hear. So as communicators, we really have to put on that audience-centric view to help us really get our messages, at least, into the attention space of the people we're trying to talk to. So I spend a lot of my time in what I teach and what I coach on how to really appreciate the audience and their needs.

BILL COPPEL So how do you go about that? The way I interpret what you just said is that the audience creates the context in some respects. They're looking to hear something, or your goal is to get them to hear something. Talk a little bit about-- or break down what are those kinds of steps that you advise folks to use in order to get the audience's, I guess, tone or sentiment before you begin to share your thinking.

MATT ABRAHAMAS Yes. So excellent question. And to me, there are really three ingredients to doing this properly. First, you need to change your mindset and say, "It's not about me. It's about my audience." And if you do that, you immediately then have to ask yourself questions about who they are, what they expect, what they know, what time of day it is for them, etc. So you really have to understand where they're coming from. Next, you have to factor in the context, and that context has to do with timing, how long do I have, what time of day, what sequence will my message hit them relative to other messages. So if you were the third in line to speak to a set of executives, might what comes before you influence what you need to say. So context becomes very important, and part of that is the channel. Is it in person? Is it virtual? Is it a hybrid combination, or some are present physically, some are present virtually? And then

finally, once you know that information, once you've reflected and done reconnaissance on that information about who's in the room and what their needs are in the context, then you create a goal, and goal is tailored specific to that event and to those people.

MATT ABRAHAMS

And to me, a goal has three foundational parts. It has information, emotion, and action. So you need to think to yourself, "When I am done communicating, what does my audience need to know? How do I want them to feel? And ultimately, what is it the action that they need to do?" So regardless of type of communication - written, spoken, in person, or virtual - I believe those three steps need to take place in order for effective communication to happen. You have to reflect on the audience. You have to think about the context. You create a goal based on the information that you derive from that thought process. That's how we get people's attention and increase the likelihood of retention of the messages that we communicate.

BILL COPPEL

Ah, retention. I mean, that's really the heart of it, right? That's what we're trying to do, is get them to remember or attain that information.

MATT ABRAHAMS

That's correct. Yeah. Ultimately, we want people to act upon what we're saying and/or remember the content.

BILL COPPEL

In one of the challenges that I'm seeing, and I think that advisors - in our case, the financial advisors - are coping with, as you think about this context, as you view the audience, whether it's a group, a large audience, or an individual, is that there seems to be a growing amount of natural distractions that are occurring in our lives, a lot of it driven by digital. So reflect for a moment, if you will, Matt, on coping with these distractions, either on the front end as you prepare, but throughout that conversation.

MATT ABRAHAMS

Absolutely. So part of this notion of gaining attention and retention is you have to think about the distractions that factor in. And those of us in the field I come from, we've looked at this for years in terms of this notion of noise - and you've heard the idea of signal versus noise - and digital distraction is just another form of noise. So part of what we need to do as communicators is make sure that our message is crisp and clear and concise so that it can pierce through the distraction. Similarly, we need to be thinking about, how do we repeat ourselves or use examples of varying types to really reinforce the message.

MATT ABRAHAMS

You know, Bill, when you and I were growing up, we listened to music on Hi-Fi stereo. It was the best way to hear music. And that Fi in Hi-Fi stood for fidelity. Accuracy and clarity in the transmission in the case of the quality of the music. But fidelity is the F word that underlies all of our effective communication, and distraction - digital distraction, other types of distraction - get in the way of that fidelity. So we need to make sure that we have a clear and concise message. We need to make sure that we have support for that message that allows us to repeat the idea without saying the same thing over and over again. And further, we need to make sure that that support that we use is triangulated. So it's not just data, data, data, chart, chart, chart. It's stories. It's third-party testimonials. It's data but in context. So the way in which you help your audience - one person, 100 people, whatever - to stay focused and not be distracted is to make sure that you are striving for fidelity, have a clear, concise message that is then supported amply through repetition.

BILL COPPEL

I think one of the things we fall victim to often, particularly in the role of an advisor, is we tend to focus on the information as being the most important aspect of our ability to communicate. I want you to talk a little bit about emotion. Because it seems to me

that emotion is also, perhaps, an effective strategy around dissipating the impact of distraction in a conversation.

MATT ABRAHAMS

That's actually a great insight and very, very true and relevant. There's some interesting research that has been done over the years that says, in any communication situation, we are, as the task, as the communicators, balancing two very important things, and that is warmth and competence. So most of us err on the side of competence. We want people to see us as smart, as relevant, as knowing what we're doing, and so we do a lot of things that emotionally distance ourselves from the people we're trying to connect with. We put up charts with lots of bullet points. We turn our back and read material instead of focusing on the warmth. And in the warmth, it's about the connection. It's about empathy. It's about conveying vulnerability and your true openness. And that in it of itself really can make a big difference.

BILL COPPEL

And oftentimes, we find, Matt, in our business, in the financial service world, it's really about the emotional impact, not about the money. What we advocate, and we have been here at The Next Frontier, is really helping advisors to find a new value. And this value is often focused on helping clients achieve, not just financial success, but well-being. And there's a big, emotional connection to that. And oftentimes, information really squelches that, and the client ends up walking away with another Me Too experience or another experience you can get in any other place out there. I want to--

MATT ABRAHAMS

Yeah. Not a Me Too experience, but I absolutely believe that what you're saying is that what we need is to really appreciate the emotional impact of what our communication can have, and therefore, make sure that we bring that to the table just as we do the content that is devoid of emotion and pair those two together. From millennia, since people were running around in togas, we have known the importance of balancing emotion with fact. Yet, it often is easier for us to fixate on the fact, and for many of us, it's just uncomfortable to deal with the emotional sphere. So thinking about how you can bring emotion to bare is really important.

BILL COPPEL

Yeah. I'm going to ask that question again because I misspoke when I said Me Too. That's not what I meant to say.

MATT ABRAHAMS

No, I know.

BILL COPPEL

Not intentionally.

MATT ABRAHAMS

I tried to turn it into a joke because I didn't want it sitting out there.

BILL COPPEL

Yeah, right. We don't even want to go near that one. So let me try to do that again. Oftentimes, in our business, Matt, we gravitate information, as you just pointed out. It could really be the thing that squelches the entire conversation. We lose the client in that process even though the information may be valuable. We lose sight of that emotional impact. And if we don't bring that in, clients, will often interpret this as just the same old thing again just coming from a different talking head. So this emotion seems, to me, to be the real secret, particularly in our space, providing advice, to make that connection. Can you comment on that?

MATT ABRAHAMS

Absolutely. The power of emotion is very, very strong. It really can connect people together. There are pathways in the brain that are accelerated when emotion is involved, and it's a way to really reinforce the points that you're trying to make. Yet, it is far easier for most of us because of anxiety, because of lack of experience to focus on the facts, to focus on the bulletpoints, the charts, instead of really empathizing, connecting, and making sure that the people we're communicating with feel a sense

of respect and validation. And that, as you mentioned, Bill, is really the secret sauce that makes communication work. It makes people feel good about the communication.

BILL COPPEL

You know, it makes me think of this issue from the context of, why is it so hard? Why is it so difficult for people to effectively communicate today? And you touched on this, obviously, with your book *Speaking Up Without Freaking Out*. People often come to me and say, "How is it you can get up in front of an audience of people and be so comfortable?" And the answer is, well, I'm not sure I define myself as comfortable, but it is in our ability to connect with the audience that we're speaking with, not to. Remember, I think we're speaking with. Share with us and our listeners what you've experienced in your professional career around this notion of, "Why is it so hard?"

MATT ABRAHAM

Research suggests 85% of people feel anxious when they speak in front of others. It is the norm to feel nervous in high-stakes communication situations. And certainly, the situations your advisors find themselves in is high-stakes. I personally believe that it's innate. It's part of being human. Whenever you speak in a high-stake situation, there's a lot of risk involved for you in the short-term and the long-term. And that invokes anxiety, and your body responds as if you're under threat. And in some cases, there is a threat in terms of consequences that can befall you based on it. The nice thing is, or the good news is, there are things that we can do to learn to manage our anxiety effectively, and we have to take a two-pronged approach. We have to focus on the symptoms - what happens as a result of the anxiety - and then the sources, the things that actually exacerbate our anxiety. And in the book, and in the coaching and the teaching that I do, we spend a fair amount of time talking about how to manage both sides of that equation. Again, with time, with practice, people can learn to become less nervous and more confident in their speaking, and it is well worth taking the time and effort to do it.

BILL COPPEL

So practice is a big part of this.

MATT ABRAHAM

Absolutely. Practice, but the appropriate type of practice. But before you ever practice, there are things that need to be done to help you feel better. But in terms of practice, let me just give you a couple of specific suggestions. One, build time into practice. Most of us just work up to the last minute creating the presentation. We think a slide deck is the same thing as a presentation, and in fact, they're very different. Just because you created fancy slides or a fancy document, it doesn't mean you can deliver it effectively. So you must give yourself time to actually practice. And to me, practice includes vocalization. It's speaking it out. I don't know about you, Bill. But in my mind, I'm amazingly eloquent. But sometimes when I open up my mouth, I'm not so lucky. So we have to actually practice that. You need to make sure that when you practice, you record yourself, either video or audio, so you can see and hear what you sound like. Interestingly, we are not very good judges of our own manner in which we come across. We are too invested. And so it's very helpful to record ourselves.

MATT ABRAHAM

The final practice tip I'll give is, you need not always memorize your content. In fact, I am very against memorizing content. Rather, I would have you speak from an outline or some key points. In fact, what I do when I give a lecture or a key note or something of that nature is-- my outline is simply a series of questions that I answer, and I like this approach because it puts me in conversation with my audience. I am simply answering their unasked questions. So when I practice, I have a list of questions that flow in the structure I wish them to flow in, and I just practice my presentation with the questions as prompts. So practice is critical, but prompter practice is what's most important.

BILL COPPEL And I'll bet that those unasked questions from the audience, that you just mentioned, that you're going to answer are probably deeply rooted back to some emotional component that makes the message that you're giving to the audience resonate with deep meaning.

MATT ABRAHAMMS Absolutely. The questions have both a very factual content piece but also an emotional hook. And to me, one of the keys to being effective in answering any question is to always connect it back to the audience, and that's that emotional bridge you're talking about. So if somebody asks you a question, you answer the question, you give details so they can really understand it, and then you bring it back to them and what it means for them. And that emotional connection is what really cements the information in their psyche.

BILL COPPEL And this is as important as-- this is a very important point you're making, Matt. And what I'm trying to say here is that whether you're speaking to a large audience of people or a room of, say, 10 or 12 or an individual, this techniques you're talking about don't change. You need to be prepared, regardless of the size of the audience, to deliver an impactful set of information, if you will, to whoever the audience may be.

MATT ABRAHAMMS Absolutely. And sometimes we can do that preparation in advance. We can sit down and be very mindful and go through a process. In other situations, our communication is spontaneous. It's just in the moment. Somebody asks you for feedback or asks you a question. And in those spontaneous situations, you still have to rely on some foundational principles, again, regardless of context. Big audience, individual conversation, etc. But taking time to manage the anxiety, to be thoughtful about your audience and their needs, and then create a structure that's targeted towards the goal you come up with, those are the ingredients for success in spontaneous communication or planned communication.

BILL COPPEL You use a very interesting word in that answer, and I want to reflect on that for a moment. You said mindful. In practicing mindfulness, I have found-- historically, for me personally, puts me in the moment and takes me out of myself. So I'm no longer focused on myself, which lower my anxiety. In fact, it eliminates my anxiety, and I put all of my senses into the very moment of whatever it is we're doing. And you mentioned mindfulness in your book. Talk to us about that connection with being mindful and being effective as a communicator.

MATT ABRAHAMMS Thank you for the opportunity to talk about this, and I will try to be as concise as I can because I'm very passionate about this particular topic. There's a lot of research into mindfulness and present-oriented, and that has direct relevance to the conversation we're having today. Let me give two examples. When you begin to experience anxiety in a high-stakes situation, what practice and mindfulness teaches us is that you actually can greet that anxiety. What happens for most people is, when they begin to feel nervous, that anxiety actually provokes more anxiety. We start feeling more nervous because we're nervous. We feel the sweat on our brow, the beating of heart, and we start saying to ourselves, "Oh no. I'm getting nervous. How did I get in this situation? I should have prepared more. Why is Bill not doing this presentation instead of me?" And all of a sudden, we're spiraling. And if we do what mindfulness teaches us, which is, when you have an emotion, to greet it, experience it, and then move beyond it, it can really help. So when you begin to feel anxiety, rather than run from it or fight against it, simply say, "This is me feeling nervous. It makes sense that I'm nervous. It is normal and natural in this situation." And by doing that, you actually defang the anxiety and get yourself into a place where you can feel very comfortable.

MATT ABRAHAMS

Secondarily, being mindful puts you in that present moment. And being in the present moment can help you really connect with your audience. It allows you to be empathetic. And there are lots of things you can do to help invite that present-orientation. Something I'm a big fan of is I make sure to greet those in my audience. If I'm doing a presentation in front of 5, 10, 100 people, I'm always out walking around shaking people's hands. It brings me in the present moment. Most communicators refer to their notes, stand behind the stage, and go inside themselves instead of getting present-oriented. So being mindful in terms of how it affects your anxiety and how it affects your connection to your audience really, really can help you be more effective.

BILL COPPEL

You know, I have found-- and I agree 100%, Matt. What I have found, for me personally, as I prepare to have a conversation and I take a moment to practice mindfulness, the anxiety actually turns into energy for me. And once I get past it, as you've said, that becomes the fuel, often, that gives me-- that level of energy, I think, is important to connect emotionally with your audience and to really be in the moment. And what I find is, basically, if I'm in the moment, oftentimes, I get my audience in the moment.

MATT ABRAHAMS

Yes. So two comments to what you said there. First, regarding the last bit of what you provided, part of what you do is, when you're in the moment, you invite engagement and participation. And that is infectious, and people will tend to join you in that present moment. So absolutely. And then the notion of re-framing the physiological feelings of anxiety from being those of anxiety to those of excitement is well known. And if you can tell yourself, "This is me feeling excited. Think about the opportunity I have rather than the potential threats and challenges," can really change people's approach to communication in general. And I've worked with a number of highly-reticent and nervous people who, once they see the opportunity or feel invited to participate in it - in other words, re-framing that anxiety into excitement - they become different people. They communicate in a way that is much more open and is deeper in both meaning and information, and it makes a transformational change. So that notion of re-framing from anxiety to excitement is really powerful too.

BILL COPPEL

Let me take our conversation to a slightly different direction and touch on something we haven't spoken about yet. Today, it's estimated that by 2020, perhaps, there'll be five generations in the workforce. When you think about communication across generations, I think it raises an entirely different challenge for many of us, particularly, for example, boomers are relating to millennials or Gen Xers are relating to boomers. Talk to us a bit about what you're seeing out there and how we are navigating these generations when it comes to communications.

MATT ABRAHAMS

Very, very perceptive question and an important one. First and foremost, it's about awareness. Just understanding that not everybody communicates the same way you do is really critical. I had, recently, a discussion, a debate in my class at Stanford on the appropriateness of emojis in formal business communication, and it was quite a lively debate. And in my classes, I do have an age range. And I don't know that we settled the decision, but I can tell you that 10 from now, emojis will be part of normal business communication. Where we stand today is debatable, but the wave is coming. And the reason I share that story is, the way in which we communicate and interact is always evolving. We happen to be in a unique place where we have a lot of distinct cohorts co-mingling in the workplace, and we have to become multilingual. We have to understand that people communicate differently and have different expectations and rules for communication. It is not unusual for my millennial students to, in a midst of a conversation, respond to a text and keep the conversation they were having with me going at the same time. That's something that those of my generation

might find offensive and challenging to do. We need to understand that there are lots of different ways to communicate. Again, to me, it comes down to, one, understanding what your message is and how it's relevant for your audience, and then thinking about the different modes by which you can communicate it.

MATT ABRAHAMS

So it may be the case that you have to learn some new technology and figure out how to use Slack to communicate your point in a very piffy, concise way. It may be that if you are a younger person working with folks who have been around a while, that you may have to sit down and have a conversation. And before you get to the point, connect personally first. So it's about creating a whole repertoire of tools that we can leverage depending on the context and the people we're speaking with. But it starts with awareness, and then it moves on to making sure the message is clear and concise.

BILL COPPEL

So what I'm hearing you say, Matt, is that trying to fight that process is not going to be productive. And in fact, the example you gave of a millennial student in your class texting in the midst of a conversation you're having with them - not only is that distracting to you, certainly to me, it would almost be insulting - stop judging. And perhaps take a step back at that very point to say, "Boy, if my message is going to get through, I better wait. I better understand what's going on, not be so judgmental," and then resume or begin to continue to share information at a point where you believe you've got that connection back.

MATT ABRAHAMS

Right. There was some Star Trek phrase, "Resistance is futile," and I do think resisting this change is-- it's not going to get us anywhere. I think taking time to embrace it and understand it will help. In the situation that I brought up and you then highlighted, if I were speaking to a millennial student who texted in the midst of my conversation, in that moment, I would do exactly what you suggested. I would say, "How can I better engage this particular person?" So perhaps, rather than finishing up my thoughts as declarative statements, I might turn them into questions to invite the person to participate. So there are things that you can do to help. Think about ways of leveraging technology that you might not have thought about using. For example, if you're giving a presentation to a decent-sized group, 20 people, 100 people, there are tools on people's phones that allow them to respond in real time to polls that you create. So rather than feel as if you're fighting the pull of people's cellphones to distract them from you, think about, "Are there ways that I can use the technology to actually engage them more? I offer a poll. They respond on their phone." All of a sudden, they feel connected because their information's being projected on the screen. So again, resisting is not the wisest approach. I think it's adapting and figuring out what tools to put in your toolkit to help you.

BILL COPPEL

How do you interpret a text message or an email, perhaps, that's in all capitals today [laughter]?

BILL COPPEL

I think it still means the same thing as it did. It means somebody is very impassioned by it. Unless, of course, it's my father who is still struggling to figure out where the Caps key is and just everything comes in caps.

BILL COPPEL

Right. I've had that experience as well with folks who find it easier not to have to use upper and lowercase. It saves time, apparently.

S3: 33:47

Well, what you're highlighting is a very important point. As digital communication becomes more pervasive, we lose the emotional channel. And we have to find ways. We are an emotional species. We have to find a way to convey emotion. And that's the power of emojis, like it or not, is they signal information that we don't have in the moment. Now, it's not as clear as the information we have when we're in front of

somebody in person. But there will be, over time, more and more ways to gauge people's emotional take on our communication to help us figure this stuff out.

BILL COPPEL

One of the things I've noticed, Matt, is millennials, in particular, are less comfortable often in a face-to-face conversation than, say, a Gen Xer or a boomer. And I guess my question around that is, in light of all these digital modalities that are available in which we exchange information and communicate, if you will, what is the fate of that face-to-face communication down the road, in your opinion?

MATT ABRAHAMS

So I would challenge you a little bit, Bill. I agree that the metrics that we use to assess a successful face-to-face communication, we being people of our generation, when applied to millennials, seems like they're failing. It's not working. As somebody who lives among the natives, if you will, and spends a lot of time with millennials and people of other generations than myself, I think part of it is, there is a different way of communicating face-to-face, and that communication looks different, feels different, interacts differently, and it's more transactional. The older generations communicate more through relations, relationships, and I would say the younger generations communicate more through transactions. And if you take that lens to your interaction with somebody of a younger generation, it's not that they're not communicating well face-to-face. They're just communicating differently. And so we have to appreciate that. And quite frankly, there's some research that suggests that that transactional nature can be more efficient and effective in accomplishing certain types of goals.

MATT ABRAHAMS

So I do think that at the highest level, it is changing. It is changing in the direction that some of us who have a different set of characteristics by which we evaluate successful face-to-face interactions see it as a loss of something. But we do need to just be open to the fact that there are different ways of doing face-to-face communication, and we, again, need to broaden our toolkit to be able to converse in that way. Now that said, I do believe millennials and others do need to understand how to connect more emotionally, to listen more empathetically, etc. So it's not just, those of us of an older generation have to change. We do have to change things up. But I'm not sure that it's 100% accurate to say that younger generations just can't communicate face-to-face. They certainly have challenges doing it in the way that we are used to.

BILL COPPEL

Well, I think you've characterized it accurately. And there's this question between this notion of a transaction where, perhaps, I, for example, would feel more comfortable in a situation where I could see someone's face or see their eyes to get a better read on how they're reacting and receiving information. To your point, it's not wrong or right. It is the reality, and we have to get accustomed to managing through that. So let me wrap it up with one final question for you, Matt, that's really around this notion of-- obviously, there are many challenges out there, and the art of communication continues to be challenging for all of us because of the various ways we communicate or can communicate today as well as the different generations that are in the mix. What's the one thing you would suggest our listeners who are concerned about this or want to improve their ability to communicate-- what's that first step along this journey to become more effective at getting your message across to your intended audience?

MATT ABRAHAMS

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts on this. To me, it really is taking time to focus on your communication. A lot of us take our communication for granted. It's what we just do. In my whole work that I do, both teaching my students at the business school and coaching people in the industry, is really around taking habits and making them choices. We need to be aware of the different ways in which we can communicate, and then make choices on how to do it. And in order to develop those choices, you have to focus on your communication. And just like any skill-- take

a sport, for example. To get better at it, you have to do three primary things. You first have to give yourself time to get repetition. You have to practice. It's drills. It's practice. It's taking the time to really focus on the craft. After you've got some repetition, you then have to do some reflection. You have to think about what's working and what's not working based on the tools that I currently have, and where do some work better than others. And then finally, you have to solicit feedback from others. You have to get feedback from those who are like those in the audience as you communicate and really understand what they are seeing as effective and ineffective in terms of your communication. So it's about turning habits into choices, and really repetition, reflection, and feedback. And those are the tools that help people be more effective in their communication.

BILL COPPEL

That was extraordinarily well stated, and I appreciate that. And I hope our listeners do as well. We take communication for granted, or often, it seems like it should be something natural like walking, but it really isn't. It really requires thoughtfulness, mindfulness, and preparation. So Matt, tell me more about the work you do and the work of your company. Where can our listeners go?

MATT ABRAHAM

Let me point you and your listeners to three locations. First, as was mentioned by Bill, I've written a book called Speaking Up Without Freaking Out. It's designed to help people develop the tools to communicate more confidently and in a compelling manner. Two websites I'd like to point you to-- the consulting practice I co-founded is boldecho.com. We want people's messages to be bold, and we want them to echo long after they've left the room. And then finally, for whom anxiety is an issue, there is a website I curate called nofreakingspeaking.com, and that's a place where there are lots of free resources, and my blog, etc., to really help people feel more comfortable in their speaking. So the book Speaking Up Without Freaking Out, Bold Echo, and No Freaking Speaking are good places to get started.

BILL COPPEL

Well, that's terrific. Thanks again, Matt, for sharing your insights, your experiences, and your guidance with our listeners today. I'm sure they will all take away very, very valuable information to help us all become much better at communicating.

MATT ABRAHAM

Thank you so much, Bill.

BILL COPPEL

That's terrific. Thanks again. And until next time, be well.

Outro

If you liked this content, share it or like us. If you want to join the conversation or connect with us, please visit us at www.firstclearing.com. This content is provided for general informational purposes only. The views expressed by nonaffiliated guest speakers are their own and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of First Clearing or its affiliates. First Clearing and its affiliates do not endorse any guest speakers or their companies, and therefore give no assurances as to the quality of their products and services. This channel is not monitored by First Clearing. For more information on our podcast, visit firstclearing.com. First Clearing is a trade name used by Wells Fargo Clearing Services, LLC, Member SIPC, a registered broker-dealer and non-bank affiliate of Wells Fargo & Company. Copyright 2019. Wells Fargo Clearing Services, LLC. All rights reserved. First Clearing provides correspondent services to broker-dealers and does not provide services to the general public.