



Sherpa Strength: The Newsletter of Executive Coaching

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The Three Sentence Rule

By Brenda Corbett, 'Sherpa Guide' author

When you talk with people, keeping them involved is important. This is especially true in business, where you are not supposed to talk for the sake of talking, or listen just to be polite.

Keeping people involved. It seems simple, but it can be hard for people who go into too much detail . . . or those who like to hear themselves talk. Balanced, effective communication does not come naturally. It's a learned behavior. If you are a coach, or a boss, it's up to you to teach it.

People have to be taught to stop, be aware of how they communicate, and have memorable ways to make their message better.

The Sherpa Coaching process for coaching includes one tool which forces people to do exactly that: stop and think about the way they are communicating.

The Three-Sentence Rule is a framework that allows people to:

- Slow down,
- Think about what they want to say,
- Package it in a way that makes sense and engages others.

Simply stated, the Three-Sentence Rule helps you to speak more succinctly, three sentences at a time. So how do you structure those three sentences?

- The first sentence in the sequence is the introduction: the big-picture idea.
- The second sentence is the theme: the specifics you'd like to get across.
- The third sentence is a question.

Study this tool, and put it into play. Be aware of the way you address people, and follow the Three-Sentence Rule. Then, you will be able to teach it others.



Let's get in to the details:

1) Your first sentence: We call this the INTRO. Grab your audience. Make sure they understand that what you are about to say is important. Get their attention. This is called the "effective introduction".

"I think this project will make you more valuable to the company."

"I'd like your opinion on something important."

2) The second sentence: We call this the THEME. State the goal. Validate what you just said with some data, facts, or important information. Make it simple and straightforward.

"By learning this simple design process, you will add value to everything else you do".

"We are looking to revamp customer service, with you in the lead."

3) Finally, you will ask a QUESTION, and then stop. Wait as long as you have to for a response.

"How do you see us proceeding?"

"What do you think?"

Stay there. Wait until you have a response from the person you are communicating with. Now, you have people engaged in a dialog.

Keep your messages short and simple. Instead of going on for an hour about your new puppy before you get to the point, try something like this:

"I have a new dog at home.

I'm taking him to obedience training tonight.

Is it a problem if I leave a few minutes early? "

The final sentence, in the form of a question: "Is it a problem if I leave a few minutes early?" allows the listener to say yes or no, or to get further information. If the listener wants more information, all they have to do is ask. However, you haven't offered up more than they need.

The listener can ask: "Is this the only day you can go?", or "Is this going to happen every week?". They can say 'yes', and move on.

One more thing about the Three-Sentence Rule. When you look for opportunities to use it, you are being self-aware. The quantity of words in your dialog will be just right... and the quality will go up, too.

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