



# Gabrielle Dolan Real Communication

Why we need it now more than ever.





Real communication has always been important in business, but it is needed now more than ever. We are in a time of unprecedented change, where we are constantly asking our employees and customers to follow us into uncharted territory.

# Four Global Trends

There are four trends occurring that means it's more important than ever before to communicate in a way that is real and lead with authenticity.

## **TREND 1 – Decline of trust**

We're surrounded by alternative facts, fake news and cover-ups. Edelman, a global communications marketing firm, conduct an annual global study to determine levels of trust. The 2018 results revealed that we are in a battle for the truth and knowing who we can trust to provide this. The research showed the highest overall decline in trust measured over the 18 years of this study.

Findings from the Australian Banking Royal Commission in 2018 that revealed years of systematic deceit, lies and betrayals. It's no surprise then that we are sceptical and mistrusting of large financial institutions. Leaders need to be mindful of this cynicism when they are communicating to employees, customers and peers, especially in times of change.

## **TREND 2 - Evolution of expectations**

Over the past decade, our expectations of how we work, lead and communicate have changed dramatically. The challenge is how we respond to this. Leaders need a new mindset and skills to communicate and lead differently, while companies need updated processes and structures that encourage everyone to feel and become involved, regardless of their age or background.

Companies can no longer afford to take days or even hours to deliberate over what should or shouldn't be communicated. They need to be timelier with their communication as silence is dangerous. Employees and customers respond to transparent and timely communication, as opposed to contrived and controlled communication.





### **TREND 3 - Rise of jargon**

In the everyday business environment, jargon is often used in three unconscious — and also sometimes very deliberate — ways. These include;

1. acceptance to help us fit in;
2. avoidance so we don't need to say what we really should say; and
3. importance to make us sound smarter or credible.

The overall result is often miscommunication and the feeling of isolation as we struggle to understand what is being said by the people we work for, the companies we buy from, the peers we work with and even the kids we parent.

Make no mistake, unless everyone around the table understands the jargon you are using, you are potentially disconnecting and isolating people.

### **TREND 4 - Addiction to acronyms**

Like jargon, acronyms can also lead to miscommunication. Every acronym has a multiple meaning or interpretation. When you read the acronym, SME, do you automatically think of Subject Matter Expert or Small to Medium Enterprise. What about STI? Do you think Short Term Incentives or Sexually Transmitted Infections?

If everyone has the same understanding of the acronym, then they can become an efficient way to communicate. However, if they are not (the vast majority of times), using the acronym can lead to inefficiency, miscommunication and, in some cases, very embarrassing situations. Tread carefully when next interviewing someone. Think twice before you ask them what STI's they currently have and what STI's they would be looking for in the new role.







# Leaders of the Future

Just as organisations need to respond to the disruption they are facing, individual leaders must also deal with the changes. Consequently, what leadership looks like is in transition as people respond to these trends.

It is therefore necessary to lead and communicate differently during this time of flux. We need to find better ways to engage and connect with our employees, peers and customers. **Real communication** is critical to success.

As Richard Branson once said:

*“Communication is not just about speaking or reading, but understanding what is being said – and in some cases what is not being said [...] It facilitates human connections, and allows us to learn, grow and progress. Master the art of communication and you’ll experience great success in all aspects of life.”*

Leaders who are prepared to communicate in a way that is real and lead with authenticity, tend to demonstrate the following four traits.





### **TRAIT 1 – Use Real Words**

Real leaders don't hide behind corporate jargon and acronyms because they know this isolates and disengages people, and often leads to miscommunication. They are clear about what they want to say and communicate this in a way that is easily understood so people can understand and engage with it.

What it looks like in reality:

- Expand all acronyms unless they are common knowledge to everyone.
- Have the courage to ask when you don't know what something means.
- Review all your communication to anyone outside your business to ensure it does not contain any confusing jargon or acronyms.
- Ensure everyone working with you understands the current jargon and acronyms you use internally.

### **TRAIT 2 - Deal with what's real**

Authentic leaders are prepared to admit their mistakes and say sorry. This is not a partial apology along the lines of, 'I am sorry if what I said caused offence' but rather, 'I am sorry for being offensive'. Leaders who deal with what's real show a huge amount of courage.

What this looks like in reality:

- Ditch the plastic apologies when a mistake has been made and make a quick and genuine apology instead.
- Follow any apology with genuine action.
- Create a culture where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities so your team feels safe to admit mistakes.
- Understand how hard it can be to rebuild trust once it is lost.







# BE REAL, BE YOU!

### **TRAIT 3 - Show what's real to them**

Another common aspect of authentic leaders is that they are aware of what is important to them and they are prepared to bring that to their leadership role. Congruence exists between their professional and personal values and, in some cases, they are prepared to take a public stand for what they believe.

What this looks like in reality:

- Be consistent with the way you act at home and at work.
- Ensure your words and actions are congruent.
- Take a public stand if that is important for you.
- Seek council to understand any potential consequences of your actions before you take them.

### **TRAIT 4 - Know what's real for others**

Finally, authentic leaders are good listeners who take time to find out what is happening with the people they lead and the customers they serve. They have a genuine focus on understanding their people and building a genuine connection.

What this looks like in reality:

- Understand the strong human instincts of self-preservation when asking for feedback.
- Create a safe environment where feedback can be shared.
- Ask probing questions and be prepared to sit in silence. Become a good, non-judgemental listener.
- Spend real time with your employees and, if necessary, schedule it in your diary, especially in times of change and uncertainty.



# The benefits of real communication

Real communication and authentic leadership is easier said than done. It takes true commitment, clarity, consistency and courage but the benefits are worth it.

A considered and authentic approach to communication will, at a bare minimum, lead to increased productivity. Without doubt, confusion is removed when we use less jargon and acronyms in business. What's more, when we start to share personal stories we can increase engagement in relation to values and purpose in business.

Demonstrating the courage to show what is real to us as leaders and take the time to find out what is real to those we lead or serve, will also increase trust and connection. Ultimately, as these aspects improve, so too will the loyalty of our employees and customers.





# Are you ready to get real?

Communication is the most important skill any leader can possess and it takes ongoing self-awareness to keep learning and developing your authentic leadership. It's worth the effort as the people you lead and the customers you serve deserve nothing less.

However, real communication and authentic leadership is easier said than done. Putting yourself out there can be daunting. Sharing personal stories can seem indulgent. Admitting your stuff-ups can be challenging. Taking a stand on what you believe in can feel scary. Not hiding behind acronyms and jargon and instead using real words can be conflicting. Asking for feedback and being prepared to listen to the truth can be confronting.

However, having the courage to embrace real leadership means we are seen as more approachable, human, engaging and inspiring.



**Gabrielle Dolan**

If real communication and authentic leadership sounds like something you want to explore for your company or team then there are a few ways we can help.

- Book Gabrielle to deliver an entertaining, educational and motivational keynote for your next event.
- Conduct tailored in-house real communication and business storytelling workshops.
- Order bulk purchases of *Real Communication: How to be you and lead true*. Receive significant company discounts for orders over 500.
- Contact us by calling **+61 3 8383 2128** or send an email to **[enquiry@gabrielledolan.com](mailto:enquiry@gabrielledolan.com)**.





# About the Author

Gabrielle Dolan can tell you a story or two.

In fact, it was while working in a senior leadership role at National Australia Bank that she realised the power of storytelling in effective business communication. Since that epiphany, Gabrielle has found her calling as a global expert on strategic storytelling and real communication.

A highly sought-after keynote speaker, educator and author, Gabrielle's extensive client list includes Telstra, EY, Accenture, VISA, Australia Post, National Australia Bank, Amazon, Vodafone and the Obama Foundation.

Gabrielle holds a master's degree in management and leadership, an associate diploma in education and training and is a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School of Executive Education.

In 2024 she launched the successful podcast *Keeping it Real with Jac and Ral* that

consistently ranks well in the best business podcast charts. Episodes explore different topics such as personal brand, public speaking, energy management, negotiation and other great ways to keep you real.

Gabrielle is also the bestselling author of seven books. Her latest title, *Magnetic Stories: Connect with customers and engage employees with brand storytelling* was published by Wiley in March 2021 and debuted at number two on Australia's best-selling business books.

Bringing humanity to the way business people communicate isn't just a career, it's a calling. Her dedication to the industry was recognised when Gabrielle was awarded the 2020 Communicator of the Year by the International Association of Business Communicators Asia Pacific region. The ultimate expression of her passion for the cause is her Jargon Free Fridays global movement ([jargonfreefridays.com](http://jargonfreefridays.com)).





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## Books by Gabrielle

