

Episode 203 | Joel Schwartzberg
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0:00 Shye: Good morning, Joel, welcome to Business Owners Radio.

0:03 Joel: Good morning. It's my pleasure to be here.

0:04 Shye: Well, we're loving your book, *The Language of Leadership: How to Engage and Inspire Your Team*. And this is your second effort, Joel, tell us what inspired you to write this book.

0:15 Joel: Well, I've been teaching public speakers for a bit over 16 years now. And I began, as most public speaking trainers do with focusing on your gesturing and where you stand and speaking with conviction. What I found a few years into it was that when I asked my clients, my students for their point, they would give me something that is not a point. They would give me a theme or a topic or a category, sometimes a catchphrase, but they did not really know what a point is. So that's when I began to shift my own thinking and my own education and my own work into this idea of what is the point? How do you identify it? How do you sharpen it? How do you champion it? Because at the end of the day, if you don't have a point, no matter how charismatic or confident you are, you are rendered pointless. So that culminated in a book called *Get to the Point*, which I wrote in 2017. And the language of leadership is really about contextualizing those ideas about making strong points, which can be for anyone, from students to CEOs, really contextualizing it for leadership. What are the mindsets? What are the tactics? What are the techniques that leaders can use to leverage those powerful instrument they have to inspire and engage, and that's their voice.

1:29 Shye: Yeah. And I love the way that you really give people tactics in this book. So you take it beyond your strategy and give us things we can actually do to improve our communications.

1:41 Joel: Yeah. Do's and don'ts. It's one of my favorite things to write and one of my favorite things to read.

1:44 Shye: Well, it's a great way to communicate, right? You talk about the power of brevity and simple communication, and so you really model that in this book. Before we go there, though, I want to talk about why is this so hard? We grow up communicating. We learn communication skills as soon as we're born, we start to communicate with our ears and our eyes, even before we can speak. Why is this such a difficult topic for so many of us?

2:07 Joel: I think part of it goes back to our education, frankly, when we were asked to write those three or five paragraph essays, compare and contrast, define this, explain this, book reports. And I use that phrase, particularly a bit comes up often in my training, **the best presentations and speeches are not book reports, because book reports are written to inform, and the best presentations are created to inspire.** And it's a whole different

set of tactics and techniques. So I think we come out of school thinking that information on its own inspires, and it does not. So I think that's one of the factors that gets there.

The other thing that gets in the way is our own brains. You know, I write about the voice in our heads, and I give it a name, I call it Roy, apologies to anyone who's actually named Roy out there in the audience. But I say Roy is up to a lot of mischief in your head, telling you your audience is bored, telling you that you may be a fraud, that you're not interesting, that you need to be more exciting, that you need to change your vocal variety, where you need to sound more like Michelle Obama or Steve Jobs. These are all wrong directions and lead you astray. So there are just a lot of dynamics from the past and the present and from media. We look at other speeches and we say, I want to speak like that. And that is not a great way to elevate your own public speaking prowess. So yeah, there are a lot of pitfalls out there that's why it's my pleasure to share the ideas in the book and on my Twitter stream, in any way possible to help people be in the right direction and move in the right way to make sure they are championing their points.

3:46 Shye: You know, the book is divided into sections. And in the first section, you really level the field here. You give a good starting point, because you say, you know, let's talk about how we develop a leadership communication mindset. And so you've already introduced a few of those thoughts. But there's a few that stood out to me that I thought were interesting. You talked about purpose and power and how those things interact. And also this idea of understanding what your audience wants and needs, it's so fundamental. Can you give us some examples of how you engage around those things?

4:19 Joel: Sure. I'm going to make up a word here, let's *tacticalize* that idea of focusing on your audience and not on yourself, because that's a philosophy and I want to give tactics. So the tactic there is that when someone sets out to write a presentation, particularly leader, a CEO, they often start out with this question—what do I want to say? What do I need to say to my people? That is the wrong question, because that's an exercise in which you are putting out words from your mouth, and the chips will fall where they land. The right question is—what does my audience want and need to know? And I choose those words carefully, because what they want to know is something they're probably already aware of, but they want to hear it like appreciation, recognition, inspiration. What they need to know, maybe something they're unaware of—information or details about a reorganization. So once you decide what your audience wants and needs to know, you identify it, maybe with the help of your executive leadership team, maybe with the help of your HR or people team leaders, then you work backwards. Because at the end of the day, it's not about you putting words out there and hoping for the best. It's about you connecting to your team, to your employees, understanding what they want and need to know matching that. And that's the definition of engagement. And that is the route to inspiration. And by the way, those are the two words that I've identified in terms of what a leader wants to do with their voice to engage and inspire. What are the specific words? So there are a lot of words out there, but I think those are the two most important ones for leadership—engaging their team, and then inspiring them.

6:01 Craig: Joel, you mentioned about the language and the right language to convey and the methodology. When I look at the great leaders I've had in the past decades that I've really been inspired by and impressed with their communication skills on stage in different formats, some come to mind. And I was wondering, from your side, what are some of the images that come to mind as being great leaders from your standpoint, and which ones do you think are not great?

6:30 Joel: Well, I'm going to start with the great, and great is what I call a *badjective*. And I encourage my clients, my students, and my listeners not to use badjectives like great or very good or important, because they're so broad, they're almost meaningless. So what do we mean when we say great? **A great speaker and a great leader to me is someone who leaves me, the audience, with an idea that changed my mind, made me think anew, or inspires me to action in some small or large way.** So when I think of speakers who have done that, they're sort of across the board. Ronald Reagan was particularly skilled at that. I think President Obama was particularly skilled, Steve Jobs. My favorite, though, is Michelle Obama. I've heard her speech writers speak at various conferences, I forget her name. But it always leaves me with an impression of something I want to do or think. And sometimes we say, well, that's about the speech writer and the content of the speech. But there are also techniques that these speakers use to make their point clear so that I can take it away. And if you'll give me a moment, I want to talk about Michelle Obama's speech at the virtual 2020 Democratic National Convention. And three things she said, which were not content items but rhetorical techniques to make sure people were with her. And there were three of them in one speech. And first one was, "And let me once again tell you this, and otherwise, let me be as honest and clear as I possibly can." And later in the same speech, she said, "If you take one thing from my words tonight, it is this." And I love to share that because anybody can say that, not anyone can say all the words in their speech but anyone can use those what I call attention magnets to draw attention to the point of your speech. And whether you're a Steve Jobs or whether you're an intern who have been tasked to talk about yourself at a meeting, you always need to recognize your job is not to be a great public speaker so don't compare yourself to Ronald Reagan or Michelle Obama or Steve Jobs. You are you. And your job is not to be seen as a great public speaker, because your goal is not to get more public speaking gigs. Your goal is to successfully convey your point, the point you're qualified to make, the point you know all about, you know something they don't. So it's just your job to move it from point A to point B, not unlike a bicycle delivery person. That's why we say deliver a speech, not perform a speech.

So those are some of the great speakers. And you asked me to identify a speaker I was not impressed with or did not get a good impression from, and I will not name names sadly here. But I will say that I used to work for an organization, where there was a senior leader who was supposed to speak to us at a quarterly meeting about where the organization was heading and going. And he had actually notes in his hand crumpled up, and he never

referred to them. And boy did he ramble, and we were hostages, basically. And when you're a hostage to a rambler, that makes you the worst of all, that makes you angry, and I left angry. And I share that story to make this point. That senior leader was experienced, was confident, had given speeches before, but chose the wrong path, did not know the point he was there to make. And thus he failed. So great presenters, it's not about how confident you are, how experienced you are, how many times you've done it. It's really about do you know your point and are you going to convey that point?

9:58 Craig: A rush of memories back to my mind as you're talking about this. It's amazing. And as business owners, we are constantly aware that why do people leave from our organizations, and it's usually not money. It's usually the leadership. And so the element of this communications capability really rises up as being a key factor. Looking at our present world of COVID, what's your view of our hybrid world becoming a lot of Zoom meetings and so forth? And boy, I'd love to hear this.

10:34 Joel: Sure. And it's becoming more important. I was just talking with my team yesterday, and there's no doubt, and I think there's data to back this up, that we are having more meetings now on Zoom than we would have ever had in rooms in real life. And we could dive into why that is, but I'm more interested in how people can elevate their points in their presence on Zoom. And one of the things to realize is, there isn't ism, and not all isms are substantial. But there's something called Zoom fatigue, and I believe it's real. It's your brain trying to reconcile having your body at home, perhaps in your pajamas or with your cats as I am, but having your brain at work. It's also about this idea that we're looking into each other's faces directly as if holding a meeting in an elevator. You'd never hold a meeting in an elevator because we're too close, and gesture, and it's just too tight yet that's what a Zoom environment, what I call the Brady Bunch of grid is like.

So how do we overcome that? First is recognizing that we are at work. So, I recommend people dress at least in the direction of how they would dress at work. I recommend that people not put too many distracting things behind them. What I say as my rule of thumb, and I have a lot of rules of thumb I find useful. This one is whatever in your Zoom environment is not supporting your point is stealing from your point. So make sure your background is neutral or it has books or something that reflects your knowledge or your experience or your expertise.

And one of the final pieces I like to share there is about your camera. Now, we know that eye contact is important. We've heard that before, even when we were in school, but on Zoom, eye contact is not looking at the other people. Because we know from Zoom, that means you're looking off camera, looking people in the eye means looking at that cold black dot at the top of your screen or on another camera, that is eye contact, and that is uncomfortable to look at. But when you get to your point, which is the most important part of your presentation, that's when you want to move up and use that eye contact. In fact, I recommend everybody, put your notes and your Zoom screen, everything as close to that camera as possible so you're not turning your head or your neck to look at your notes or

your PowerPoint. You're only moving your eyes from camera to notes, camera to notes. And that's the best way to maintain eye contact in a Zoom setting.

12:59 Shye: Joel, I was reading that one of the most important elements of the communication from leader is centered around the first 10 seconds. And I know it's in your book, there's a lot of projection and how do they sound, and elements to that. What are your thoughts about that first 10 seconds?

13:19 Joel: Critical. You know, what I often say in my trainings is that people remember the first thing you say and the last thing you say. And we understand what to do for the last part. That's where you want to reinforce your point, leave people with the critical takeaway. But as you begin in the first 10 or 20 seconds, that has a number of other burdens. If people don't know you, that is a place to briefly establish your credibility of what Aristotle would call ethos, but more importantly, to bring out your point. "I'm going to show you today why this approach is going to raise our revenue in the fourth quarter. By the time I'm done today, I want to show you how adopting this new technology will elevate our ability to save lives." You know, it's not a movie, where you're going to spoil the ending. It's not like you're giving the ending to Squid Game, so you need to save it for the end. Your point is the one thing you have to leave so open with it. Who am I? What is my point? Why is that point relevant? Often I will ask people to memorize that first 20 seconds. Now to be clear, nobody should ever be memorizing a presentation ever. It's just too perilous and it's not what this dynamic is all about. But if you want to nail that opening, so you don't say, "All right, hello, everyone. Thanks for being here. Yeah, we got a number of things to talk about. Let me share the agenda. Yeah, let's see what's on the agenda. Let's see point one." You know, that is saying to your audience or your team or your employees, I'm not really sure what I'm doing here, what my job is. So if you memorize that first part—who am I, what is my point, why is that point relevant, then you could at least start on a role where your audience is set. They know your point. They know what they're there for. And then you can move on to proving that point and illustrating that point.

15:04 Shye: You know, you speak a lot in the book about authenticity. Authentic is a word that gets thrown around an awful lot. And I know that you study language and the way it affects us. What do you feel is a powerful technique for someone to make sure that they come off authentically, that their words and actions are congruent with how they want to be seen?

15:29 Joel: Yeah. Authenticity is critical, because it's what most builds trust. In fact, my colleague, Allison Shapiro, who teaches at Harvard, she says that authenticity plus logic plus empathy equals inspiration, and I'll buy that. But it's critical because your team wants to think of you as a human being. Human beings relate to human beings, we don't relate to cartoons or catchphrases or things as much as we do human beings.

So how to be authentic? Let's get into it. The first rule is to skip the script. Your team does not want to be read to, that is not what a presentation is about. They want you to share your ideas, and most critically, your point in a way that seems spontaneous. If you write it out

word for word, it will not seem spontaneous. And by the way, when you are reading, it is very hard to also be emoting or showing passion. For most people who are not classically trained actors and actresses, it's very difficult. So first, you want to skip the script. And I've written a lot about that for Harvard Business Review. A second is say what you believe, don't let something come out of your mouth that is something you do not believe, because your speech writer wrote it, or your team thought, Oh, this is something you should say. If it does not feel natural or comfortable coming out of your mouth, don't say it, because your audience, your team, your employees will know it's not authentic if you say something that's not truly you. Ultimately, you want to sound like you, make those points using your words. If you're funny, be funny. If you're not funny, do not be funny.

I work with a CEO who I originally was writing little puns for and other clever things, little jokes. And finally, I realized that's me, that's not him. So I need to write in his voice. You know, if you go to speech writer conferences, the magic trick they teach you is don't worry so much about writing something your client would say, focus on never writing the thing they would never say. That's much easier, by the way, so I focus on that. And then finally, a way to create authenticity is to tell personal stories. Or if you don't have a lot of personal stories in your personal locker in your head, at least your reaction to non-personal stories. This thing happened in the meeting. This thing happened when I was growing up. This thing happened in school. This thing happened to someone else and here's how I reacted to it. When you as a leader share personal stories, you're connecting to your team on a very human level that elevates authenticity.

17:56 Craig: Joel, another item that I read from your book is the element of gratitude. So many times there is none. Where does it best apply and how do we make sure it's relevant and original?

18:10 Joel: Right. That is another place where you want to apply your authenticity. But here's the problem—either leaders are not showing recognition or appreciation enough, or they're doing it in such a shallow way that has almost no impact. And I'm talking about those two words. Thank you. Sometimes Thank you very much, sometimes just thanks. Now, think about all the time someone has said, "Hey, thanks" to you in an email or out loud, how long did that have a lasting impact on you? A few seconds, a minute at best. So we need to recognize that just checking the box with words thank you is not doing the trick, because we know that from receiving things ourselves. So how do you elevate your thanks? The answer, as in many cases, is the word why. Why are you thanking that person? But for leaders, you want to say two things—why are you thanking them, and what impact did their action have on your advance toward your goals, your advance toward profit, or just your progress in general? So three elements. I want to thank you. Here's why I want to thank you, what you did. And here's how you contributed to our bottom line or our goal.

Now, this will take more work and apologies, but the impact of a statement that has the why in there, that talks about how that is elevating the entire organization or progressing them toward goals, that will be remembered, that will increase morale, that will increase trust and

appreciation for the leader. So, the benefits of that are multiple if a leader takes the time to be very clear about the why and the impact. And one other strong thing that leaders should remember, you want to make that recognition public. You want to say it at a meeting. You want to see people on that email for two reasons, one of which is you want to double down on those benefits so that person's manager or that person's colleagues know they did a good job. Maybe other people want to model themselves after that good work. But here's another benefit—if a leader shares appreciation in a way that is public, that leader is seen like someone who cares about their people, about their employees, cares about the contribution of their teams, and cares about the feedback of their teams. And that's what you want as a leader. You want people to see you as someone who's paying attention to what the team is doing so much so that that leader can recognize and honor particularly good action.

20:43 Shye: Joel, one of my favorite sections of this book is when you talk a little bit about technology and how to best use technology and different kinds of tools available to us, right? And we touched on this a little bit earlier, we're talking about Zoom fatigue and your advice about really knowing when to look at that black dot, the abyss, when you're trying to make your point so you're really connecting with people. What I think is really interesting is as you dig deeper into this and start thinking about the modes of communication, and when do you decide should I send us an email? Is this best served by text? Is this best served by video? Share with us some of those insights and maybe some of the mistakes people make.

21:25 Joel: Sure, and I'm glad you asked that, Shye. Because the book is not called *The Language of Public Speaking*, it's *The Language of Leadership*. And when I use the word language, I don't even mean words all the time. I talk a lot about how to listen effectively. But to your question, you can communicate as a leader through a text, through a meeting, through an email, through a video, through a chat, through a post. And there are more ways than ever but we can't treat them all the same, the same way we can't see a room the same way we act in a Zoom.

I'll give you one really good example. Often, we think video is the answer. If a leader has a communication to make, let's do it in video, because everyone loves videos. But if that point is detailed and you need to make sub points or you need to get into the minutiae of something, video is not a good vehicle for that. Because then, a leader has to rely on a script or information that they're looking off camera to receive, that leader may want to try memorizing things. What we found, and I find this through my day job as well as through my training and my extracurricular life, is that videos are best for impressions. We're celebrating this. Here's a thought I had that I want to be in your heads as we go forward. Here is a national event that we have this response to it. Something very brief, very singular that you want to share with your teams. If it is detailed, if there are sub-levels, if you're announcing five leaders have been elevated to new positions or rearranged, then that's best for an email, where people can read.

Remember what happens in a video, you're perceiving things that are happening. You're not picking up all the details, maybe you're remembering one or two things. That's why you only want to share one or two things in the video. But when we read, we can stop, we could process, we can reread, we can highlight. To an email, a message from the leader is a better platform for detail in minute information, similar to a post, whether that's on an internal intranet or externally, that enables you to link to things, link to articles, link to other videos. So consider that maybe you want to introduce something and then link to a speech you made or an email you made. And then you can overlap things as well. I wouldn't overlap an email and a video, but it would overlap a post with an email or a video because then you're linking out to more information. The bottom line is always judge your platforms by their functionality and by your need to your audience. If you can identify what you want your audience to do, read, study, think, or receive and process on their own, or link and click, then that should inform you what platform you want to use, text meeting email, video, post, and judge them accordingly. So that's really about literacy. Let's call it platform literacy. And that's not just for the leader to decide. The leader should be working on those decisions with their internal communications team, with their people or HR team, and with fellow executives, everyone should learn so that everybody is ready to understand what platform best serves that message.

24:41 Shye: Yeah. It sounds like we should be as deliberate about this as we try to be with marketing, right? What you're reminding me of is how I've heard marketing described as how we make the promise of our brand, what vehicles we use to make that promise. And of course delivery is delivering that promise, right, and that's where the proof is. And so much of this, you talk about engaging and inspiring, I think were the two words that you said when you think about the language of leadership. I really feel like this point about being deliberate in the use of our platforms is almost treat them like marketing channels. You know, maybe marketing has a negative connotation. But if you're trying to persuade people, if you think of it as making the promise, how do I best make the promise of this message?

25:27 Joel: Right, Shye. And as always, recognize that the answer is not in what platform do you want to communicate on, or what platform is best for my team to receive. Put yourself in the shoes of the person watching the video, reading the email. And by the way, you brought up an interesting thing, Shye, about marketing. It's not a bad word, and something I often tell all of my clients and all of my students no matter who they are or what their job is, hey, some of you may not like this but we're all in sales. Because great ideas just like great products need to be sold, not shared. And so we need to use the tools of selling to make sure that the audience is buying what we're selling, not just hearing an idea that's thrown out there.

26:11 Shye: Well, Joel, we want to thank you so much for joining us today. We're so excited about this book, and we really appreciated the time you gave us.

26:19 Joel: Thank you Craig and Shye. It was a pleasure and a privilege. And you know, the IT people in the audience will appreciate this. I like to consider my work open code. That

is, I like to share it for free or in very accessible ways as much as possible. So I invite people to go to my website, which is www.joelschwartzberg.net, J-O-E-L-S-C-H-W-A-R-T-Z-B-E-R-G, joelschwartzberg.net. There you can see the podcasts I've done, the articles I've written for Harvard Business Review or Fast Company or Toastmasters, more information and tips. And I also encourage people to follow me @TheJoelTruth on Twitter, TheJoelTruth. And the latest book is called The Language of Leadership. If you go to my website, you can find information about the book there as well as my first book, Get to the Point. I'm happy to share the information because we don't need to compete with each other. We can all be strong leaders who engage and inspire if we learn what our point is and how to champion those points.