

## Transcription - Accurate-Speaking

---

Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. Today we're going to be very brave and explore some ideas around communication but particularly around accurate speaking. This is a hobby horse of mine at the moment. It's about making sure that when you are talking about specific things, that you don't drift into generalities, so that you don't use the terms like, it "always" happens this way.

Let's say the weather. The weather forecast today said that for me that it was going to be very windy and so I brought a jacket along with me and that hasn't eventuated. Now I could and as most people do, revert to saying, "That's always the case. They always get it wrong, the weather report's never right" and that's just not accurate. It sets a precedent that you unconsciously think about a situation in the wrong way.

But that said, we always still go back to the weather report. We always still look at it. We've probably all got apps on our phones that tell us what the weather is going to be like or the temperature or whatever else it is. We do make decisions based on that information. If our knee-jerk reaction is something that is less than accurate when we talk about things that don't fit into that category, how can we improve our communication so that it is more accurate? Because whilst that is a lighthearted example, in a business sense, in a work sense, you can get very detrimental reactions if you are not accurate in your speaking about a work situation.

It might be that you are waiting on a particular report to finish an activity and it's a day late. What do you say about that other group, about their work ethics, what impression are you creating about another group of people by not speaking accurately? If they are always late, then the thing to say is, "I wonder why they are always late." Because you are still saying the same thing but you are putting a different spin on that expression of your frustration. That is what it is. It is an expression of your frustration. Do you have the right to express that to the team? No, you don't. All you can say is the report is not here. The accurate speaking, in this situation, is that the report is not yet available. "I will find out when it will be available now, even though it has not met our deadline. I wonder why it is always late". That is the accurate speech. That gives the rest of the team a different way of approaching the situation.

The accurate speaking actually can work better for you. The non-accurate speech is lazy. It is not thinking about a situation. It is just going with whatever is the accepted current idea or the easiest thing to say, without actually thinking about the situation. That is lazy. It is lazy in terms of your work ethic, it is lazy in terms of your team and it is lazy in terms of anyone else that it relates to. It is also irresponsible because you have covered the bit where you are creating a negative image of that area that is giving you that report. But what you are also doing is, you are setting your team to go in the wrong direction by saying that. I would be sitting there saying, "My boss knows what she is talking about. In that case, it is always late, so I will allow more time or I will give them a different deadline." A lot could be the idea of saying it the way you are rephrasing it. To be accurate, you could say, "Look, I have only used them twice and both times they were late. I have not had the chance to find out why." That is fine because it is twice. So anybody listening to you saying, "No, they are always late." gets a completely different impression. In fact, if they had been late on previous occasions, you should really have found out why. To be really accurate, you could say, "Well, they were late

last time because of this. They were late time before because of this." And again, that starts to, in general, give a different idea about maybe there is a reason. It is a bit more positive about why it is late, rather than it is late.

In a more general sense, communication wise, we know that what we hear and what we process and understand can often be two very different things. And you know that is the case in your own personal lives. You know that you will tell your children one thing and they will just do something else because they are processing it in a different way. They are processing it in terms of their environment and their understanding. And that is no different in a work situation. So we need to really think about how we communicate, what we are communicating and making sure that what we communicate is being understood the way we wanted to be understood. And if it is not that we explore that a little bit further. That is important, because then you get the right outcome.

I am talking to you about this because, or I want to share this information because I want you to do something with it. And if I don't clarify and make sure that you heard what I said the way I want you to understand, I will get the wrong outcome. And I think that is the danger of not communicating accurately.

So as an example, you say you will need that "as soon as possible". Well that is a bit loose, "as soon as possible". Somebody could say, well, two days. Why two days? Because everybody knows that this process takes two days. But the person that asked for it, said "as soon as possible" meaning in the next day. If that what you mean, say that. Then the person has the opportunity to say, it is not possible, I can get this much in an hour, or I can do this. Double check it is being heard and knowing that you have been heard and we are both talking about the same thing. Because most of the time, like you said, what I am saying is in my head or I find that when you are telling people directions, you will say, oh no, it is on the left hand side. Okay but which direction you are coming from? My eldest boy is at me all the time because I will say, you just go down this road and turn at the corner where this over petrol station used to be. He will look at me and say, "how long ago was "used to be?" If you don't double check your accuracy, you will end up in the wrong place.

I do have another story. I have to be even handed with my two children. My youngest son, I think I have told the story before, he answered a question for a maths exam once. The points that he got for this answer meant that he topped the class. But it is a case in point. The question was about a book and the teacher obviously wanted you to work out how many pages were in the book by working out what the equation was for the information that was given. Rather than do that, his answer was, "this book has a lot of pages". And if you know this man, now he is a man, then you would know that is exactly him. But the teacher, to her credit, gave him points because he wasn't wrong. The book did have a lot of pages. It wasn't the answer that she was looking for but he answered the question that she asked.

I don't want to create another topic here, but accuracy can come with verbal and non-verbal communication. So if you are asking me, you really think it is a good idea. I had a really negative look on my face. My arms are folded. I was sitting in the chair with a really negative attitude but said, "Oh, absolutely, 100%." Well, that is not accurate because my body is saying, "Not on your life." And then my verbal communication is saying, "Definitely." And again, we often do that and then we wonder why people either didn't respect what we

said or didn't hear what we said because we are sending mixed signals. Be careful of your combined message because a lot of communication, as we know, most of it is non-verbal. Or it is a single word. At home I am banned from using the word "fabulous" because, apparently, if I am asked how I am and I am frustrated or angry or irritated or not having the best day, I say "fabulous" in a certain tone of voice and they all know that this means don't go near her. It is interesting and unfortunate for them, but it is interesting that it has been a real struggle for me not to say that word, not to use that word. It is obviously my automatic reaction. It is my way of not snapping at them and saying just leave me alone. It sends the message that really this is not a time to be interacting with me at all. In this case they understand what fabulous means. Another similar example, somebody I know, they're either sweltering or freezing, there is nothing in between. But neither of those statements is accurate for the climate, if you like. So again, if you say I am sweltering, that means somebody needs to do something drastic about the air conditioning. If you are freezing, bring out something very warm.

We talked mostly about verbal communication, but the written communication is as important. We will talk a little bit about that now. In written communication, many organisations have a style manual and so there is a set of way that you communicate internally as well as externally and the words that you use. We still need to be mindful, particularly, I think, with email and whatever you use within the office that is your inter-office communication device, that we don't do the same patterns, that you don't use acronyms.

There is grammar and there is punctuation, please, there is punctuation, please use it. Email is electronic mail, it's a letter, it's not a text message. Think about the appropriateness and probably, I guess, in some senses, you can be a bit more accurate with those forms of communication because we are taught to be a bit more accurate because we are restricted by the length of a text message. It's not so much with the email although I think we move into an environment where we don't read a long email, just look for what's the main point. I know from my own experience, that if you ask two questions in an email, only one will get answered. That just seems to be what happens. So if you have to communicate more than one thing in an email, make sure you put it in a dot point fashion so that people can respond the same way. We're conditioned to follow a path, if a path is there. That's my take on the written communication side of things.

And if you're looking at, we're talking about accuracy here, and whilst we can laugh about grammar and punctuations, I think it can give you a completely different meaning. I have been caught a couple of times where I was texting people and I haven't read it before I press send or accidentally press, you know when you press, you want to go to the next line, sort of, about you end up sending it. And it was completely different to what I'm trying to say. It's very much the case with predictive text. I actually got one this morning where someone was asking me if I was on the train yet and it actually said, are you a twin yet? So I just wrote back and said no, I'm not a twin but I am on the train. Is that what you were asking? I think we've all got stories in that case, but it is something to be aware of and it's not something that you want to happen in a business sense. There are situations where you can't laugh and you can't come back from what that situation causes.

Accurate speaking, I think we'll leave you to think about that. There are a number of very good TED talks and books about it if you're interested in those. Just drop us a line and we'll send you the links for those. For now I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside

Exec.