



Episode #24

***The ABCDEs  
of  
COMMUNICATION***  
*with*  
***Dr. Andrea Wojnicki***

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abc-des-of-communication-  
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## ***SHOWNOTES***

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- References & Links
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# *The A.B.C.D.E.'s of Communication*

- A. **A**sk Qs
- B. **B**reathe
- C. act **C**onfident
- D. no **D**istractions – stay focused
- E. use your **E**ars – listen



## References & Links

### Communication Skills & General References

- [Professor Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist at Harvard](#) on power posing
- [Stephen Covey and his 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#) - Habit #5 was “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”
- [Epictetus, a Greek philosopher](#) said, “We have two ears and one mouth - so that we can listen - twice as much as we speak.”
- [FastCompany](#) on communication skills (such as asking questions, displaying positive body language, and active listening)
- Virgin CEO Sir [Richard Branson](#) says that communication skills are the most important skills any leader can possess.

### Research on Benefits of Deep Breathing

- <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/relaxation-techniques-breath-control-helps-quell-errant-stress-response>
- <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.851.7680&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- <https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.2975%2F28.2005.399.402>
- <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/acm.2005.11.189>

### Talk About Talk Episodes Referenced

- [#24 “The ABCDEs of Communication.”](#)
- #1 Body Language with Cynthia Barlow
- #2 USING YOUR VOICE - with baritone opera singer Bradley Christensen.
- #4 LANGUAGE with Dr Josep Gonzalez
- #9 YOUR PERSONAL BRAND with Michael Boydell
- #10 COLOUR with Daryl Aitken, Jenn Purkis & Lori Ryerson
- #11 STORYTELLING - with Harvard professor Jerry Zaltman
- #16 FASHION with Toronto Fashion Week’s Carolyn Quinn
- #17 POSSESSIONS with Professor Russell Belk
- #21 TRUST with Baron Manett

### Talk About Talk

- **Weekly Email Blog** - <https://talkabouttalk.com/blog/#newsletter-signup>
- **Andrea** - [Andrea@TalkAboutTalk.com](mailto:Andrea@TalkAboutTalk.com)

## Dr. Andrea's Commentary

Hey there, I'm Dr. Andrea Wojnicki. You can call me Andrea. Thanks for listening to [Talk About Talk](#). This is where we come to learn and talk about all things communication. Because when we communicate effectively, we can be a better friend, parent, partner, manager and work colleague.

This is Talk About Talk [episode #24 and I'm calling it "The ABCDEs of Communication."](#) Why am I calling it "the ABCDEs" instead of the "ABCs"? Well, there are 5 steps. And yes, they start with A and B and C and D and E.

**After you've listened to this episode, you'll learn this simple but *incredibly* powerful formula that I promise will help make you a better communicator.**

If you're listening to this, I'll bet you're what we call a lifelong learner. You might be done your formal education, but you're always looking to step it up a notch. You're one of those people who know that learning takes effort, but it's worth it. There are benefits.

Here are 3 benefits, 3 ways, that becoming a more effective and confident communicator will help us:

1. It will help us accomplish our goals (be it connecting with our family, contributing effectively at work meetings, surviving small talk at a party, or making a positive impression at a networking event). When we communicate more effectively, we can accomplish our goals.
2. Being a more effective communicator is simply more fun. Would you rather feel inept and shy, or effective and confident? EXACTLY. You *can* enjoy yourself when you are effectively and confidently communicating with others.
3. As a more effective and confident communicator, OTHERS around you will also enjoy themselves, and frankly, they will enjoy your company. THAT's a good thing, right?

Alright - Here's a question for you. Have you ever been seated around the breakfast or dinner table with others and you noticed that no one's talking to anyone? You know what I mean - I mean beyond the "pass the salt." Whether there are devices on the table or not, have you ever felt like no one's connected or engaged? Yet, we know that these people are important to us and we should be connecting. (Hmm. Yes, it happens to all of us.)

Here's another Q. Have you ever been at a meeting, whether there are 3-4 people or a dozen or more, and you noticed there's **someone who seemed so confident and effective in their communications** – and you wished you felt the same? Because of my research, I'm constantly monitoring what people are saying. And lately I've been observing their body language. It's fascinating how some people make it seem so effortless. (Yes, **you** can be that guy!)

And here's one that happened to me recently. Have you ever been at a party or a networking event where you knew absolutely nobody? And you felt dread when faced with a room full of strangers?

Hopefully some or maybe all of these examples resonate with you. Our desire to improve our communication skills transcends across both personal and professional contexts. Of course it does.

Because remember - when we communicate effectively, we can be a better friend, parent, partner, manager and work colleague.

Here we go with the ABCDE's of Communication. Yes, again, there are five steps. And the alphabet will help you remember them. And YES, you should think of them in order.

## **“A” is for ASK questions.**

I love that this one is first, because it's so simple. If you're seated at the table with your friends or family or co-workers, just ask a question. CHECK! You've already accomplished the first of the ABCDEs. Bam.

If you want to get really good at this, ask open ended Qs. You may've noticed that's what I try to do when I'm interviewing Talk About Talk guest experts. Here are some examples. Instead of “how was your day?” Try, “What was the best thing that happened to you today?” And instead of saying “how are you?” (*Fine thanks, you?* – boring!), try “So – what brings you to this conference?” or “What's your connection with the host?”

In a previous TalkAboutTalk podcast, **episode #11 with Harvard professor Jerry Zaltman, we learned about the power of storytelling.** People love hearing and telling stories! So we should be looking and listening for cues that could spark a story-telling opportunity. Like maybe after you've asked, “How do you know the host?” You could try: “You must have some *great stories* about that relationship?” Or after someone told you about their crazy commute to work today, you could ask them, “Really? What happened?”

Or perhaps there's a story behind one of their **possessions** – like a unique bag or the colour of their clothing. Try: “There must be a story behind that yellow bag you're carrying?”

And while the person's answering the Q you so skillfully asked, you can think about the second of the ABCDEs.  
A is for ASK questions.

## “B” is for BREATHE.

Is it just me, or is the advice about “breathing” everywhere these days? We heard advice about breathing – slowly and deeply – from many of the podcast guests, starting with the **voice episode (that was episode #2) with baritone opera singer Bradley Christensen**. Bradley encourages deep, mouth breathing, right into the belly. And he explicitly says, “It's ok to be a mouth breather - when you are speaking or singing”.

Before I go any further – I just have to say – this one - “*breathe*” - is so obvious. I completely agree. Of course we are breathing. In fact, recently when I presented the ABCDEs of communication, someone said “agree. But breathe?!? Really?” I had one word. YES.

Taking that deep breathe will help relax and prepare you for the conversation. As Bradley the opera singer says, deep breathing will also make your voice sound better. But it goes beyond that. Deep breathing oxygenates our blood and helps us think more clearly. This is important for communication, *yes?* Research shows that slow, deep breathing helps reduce anxiety, reduces stress, and improves your mood, amongst other things. I've included links in the shownotes to lots of that research backing this up.

So, take a slow, deep breathe while the other person is answering the question you just asked. You're done “A” - Ask a question and “B” – breathe. As you are expanding your chest to breathe, you might want to think about

## C. act Confident

Here's the thing. People *want* to communicate with confident people. **Confident people are open and positive, with both their words and their body language.**

So how do you do that? Well, you might want to listen to TalkAboutTalk podcast #1, BODY LANGUAGE with executive coach Cynthia Barlow.

- Start by taking up lots of space. Be open. Sit or stand up straight. Uncross your legs and unfold your arms.

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- Cynthia also mentioned several times that we shouldn't hide your hands – keep them in plain view, on the table, or if you're standing, outside of your pockets.
- Also, face the person who's talking. Look them directly in the eye. Nod in agreement and mirror the person with whom you are conversing.
- Be positive. Smile. And not just with your lips. Make direct eye contact and smile with your eyes.

Did you get all that? It may seem like a lot, but practice makes perfect. Take up lots of space. Keep your hands visible. Face the other person, and smile.

I called this one “**C**” **ACT confident** (instead of just confident), because of a little known secret: if you ACT confident, you will become more confident. In other words, our body language is not just communicating to other people, but also to our own brain. **Our brain is also listening to our body.**

- [Professor Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist at Harvard](#), has studied this phenomenon in detail. One of the things she says is “Don't fake it till you make it, fake it till you BECOME it.”

So whether you are having dinner with family or friends, sitting in a board room, or at a party or networking event, you should know that just by breathing, taking up space, and smiling, your body and your brain will start to internalize and exude confidence.

So now you've gone through A-B-C. You've Asked a question or two. You've taken deep breathes. And you're acting confident. Time to move on to “D”

## “D” stands for no Distractions.

You need to be mindful.

Ask yourself: why am I here? What do I want?

This is less about being opportunistic, and more about being engaged or focused on the opportunities inherent in this interaction. **This is about reinforcing your personal brand.** This is about ...being mindful.

For example, when I'm enjoying myself at a bookclub meeting, I can also be conscious of the opportunity to re-connect with cherished girlfriends. I've found that when I'm mindful about why I am where I am and with whom I'm spending my time, I end up much more satisfied.

So When I'm eating dinner with my family, I'm mindful of the opportunity to listen to what's going on in my kids' lives.

We all need to put our phones away and be present. Focus.

If you're in a meeting or at a networking event, ask yourself, what would you like to get out of this experience?

- Maybe there's a particular person with whom you need to reconnect?
- Maybe there's an accomplishment you wanted to highlight to your boss?
- Or maybe there's an opportunity you want to mention to a potential client.

So now you've gone through ABC & D. You've (A) asked questions. You're (B) breathing deeply. You're (C) acting confident and you're (D) avoiding distractions. You're focused and mindful.

## E. use your Ears – listen

This is something that's certainly been reinforced for me from doing podcast interviews: Listening is tough, but there is a big payoff for listening. And listening means a lot more than just waiting for your turn to say something. And yet, this is what so many of us do.

Someone asked me recently what I think the most important skill is - for effective communication. I said it then and I will say it now. If I had to choose, the *most important* communication skill - is listening.

Several of our past Talk About Talk guest experts mentioned that listening skills, truly focusing on what others have to say, is a critical communication skill. And that stands across virtually *all* social contexts – both professional and personal.

You've probably heard Parenting experts often say that children need to feel listened to.

Do you remember [Stephen Covey and his 7 Habits of Highly Effective People?](#) **Habit #5 was “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”** That means listen. Really listen, to what people are communicating. Ask questions to seek insight.

Years ago when I was interviewing for a job after my undergraduate degree, one of the career counsellors told us that “recruiters tend to prefer candidates who ask good Qs and who spend less time talking and more time listening.” I found that fascinating, and I kind of created a game in my mind during my job interviews – where I would try to ensure that the ratio of the *employer* talking versus *me* talking was heavily weighed to them talking.



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That reminds me of two clever quotes I've heard about using our ears and listening. (Yes, if you haven't figured it out yet, I do love quotes!!!)

One is from **Epictetus, a Greek philosopher born way back in 55AD**. He said, **“We have two ears and one mouth - so that we can listen - twice as much as we speak.”**

The other is printed on one of my daughter's t-shirts. She is a huge Hamilton fan – you know, the Broadway play. In that play, **Aaron Burr, who was giving advice to Alexander Hamilton famously says, “Talk less, smile more.”**

In other words, use your Ears. LISTEN.

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## **YAY! We've done it!**

Now, I encourage you to take a moment to memorize these: ABCDE. Do you have them memorized?

- A – ASK Qs**
- B – BREATHE**
- C – act CONFIDENT**
- D – no DITRACTIONS. Focus.**
- E – use your EARS. Listen.**

It takes practice. But it's worth it. For me, the ABCDEs of Table Talk has worked like magic. In retrospect, I wonder if the ABCDE's has provided me with *confidence*, like a secret tool that I had in my mind, to keep me from feeling nervous or awkward.

I've used the ABCDEs of Communication when I'm eating meals with my family. I used it last weekend when I was seated around a big table with a bunch of friends and acquaintances for an informal meal.

I also used the ABCDE's of Communication recently when I was at a business conference where I knew no one, except the host, who happened to be **Baron Manett, the TalkAboutTalk guest expert from episode #21: TRUST**. Baron is a friend from my MBA days and he invited me to his conference called Ensemble, which was phenomenal, by the way. I learned lots and I had fun. I also used the ABCDEs of communication.

Let me tell you what happened.

I remember it was a hot day a few weeks ago. I took the subway to the conference venue. I registered at the door, then walked in and got myself a glass of wine. Then I turned around - to a sea of *strangers*. I spotted some space at a cocktail table with a

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few people chatting. Thankfully, I was armed with the ABCDEs. I slowly walked over - rehearsing the **ABCDE's** in my mind! *Guess what? It worked!!!*

I looked one of the friendly faces in the eye and (A) Asked “so, what brings you here? Have you ever been to an Ensemble conference?” Then I (B) took a deep breathe. I smiled and remembered to (C) act Confident. I stood up tall and made sure my hands weren't hidden. Honestly, I started to feel confident at that point. It really was so easy!!! (An aside – I do often get the comment that I come across as confident. But the truth is, of course, I do not always feel confident.) Anyway. Then I moved on to (D). No Distractions. I reminded myself of why I was there. My objective was to network on behalf of Talk About Talk. This came easy, since I had just asked people what their connection was to the conference. They then asked me the same. This was a great opportunity for me to tell people about Talk About Talk. *“I just interviewed Baron Manett as a guest expert for my podcast, called Talk About Talk...”* (Yes, I handed out business cards and connected with conference speakers and attendees on social media – right there and then!)

I also tried to focus on (E) – using my ears and listening. I met some fantastic folks, with a variety of careers - including at least one future guest expert and a future collaborator....! YAY!

Honestly, I mean this, I don't think this would've just fallen on my lap if I hadn't been focused on the ABCDEs.

But memorizing the ABCDEs isn't the hard part. The hard part is reminding yourself to use them.

You know what I do when I want to remind myself to do something? I put it on my TO DO list on my phone. So I wrote ABCDE in my notes app on my phone. Some people send themselves meeting requests with alerts. You could do that – with “ABCDE”, so only you know what that means. You could also print the one-pager that's in the shownotes - and pin it to your bulletin board. Or take a photo of it so you have it on your phone.

Like I said, It takes practice to be mindful. So I encourage you to do whatever you have to do to remind yourself of the ABCDEs.

Why's it worth it? Well, communication skills are critical.

**According to [FastCompany](#), communication skills such as asking questions, displaying positive body language, and active listening, are VITAL.**

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And Sir **Richard Branson** says that communication skills are the most important skills any leader can possess.

So equipped with these ABCDEs of Communication, you now have a simple, step-by-step process to follow to make you one of these effective and confident communicators.

You're welcome!

Here's my challenge for you. When you find yourself in one of these social situations – whether its personal or professional - at the breakfast or dinner table, at a meeting, or at any event, try to be mindful. And think “this is a great opportunity to test the ABCDE’s of communication.”

Try these five things ABCDE, in order, and see what happens. I would love  to hear how it goes! Please [email](#) me or post on one of the [Talk About Talk social media pages](#) and let us all know, ok?

**THANK YOU for listening!**

One last thing - If you're not already signed up for the TAT email blog, you really are missing half the fun! Just go to [TalkAboutTalk.com](http://TalkAboutTalk.com) to sign up for the blog and to access all of the past blogs.

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