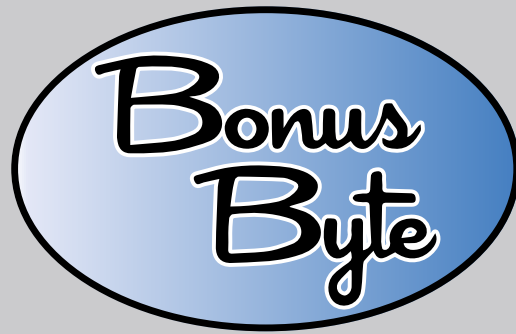


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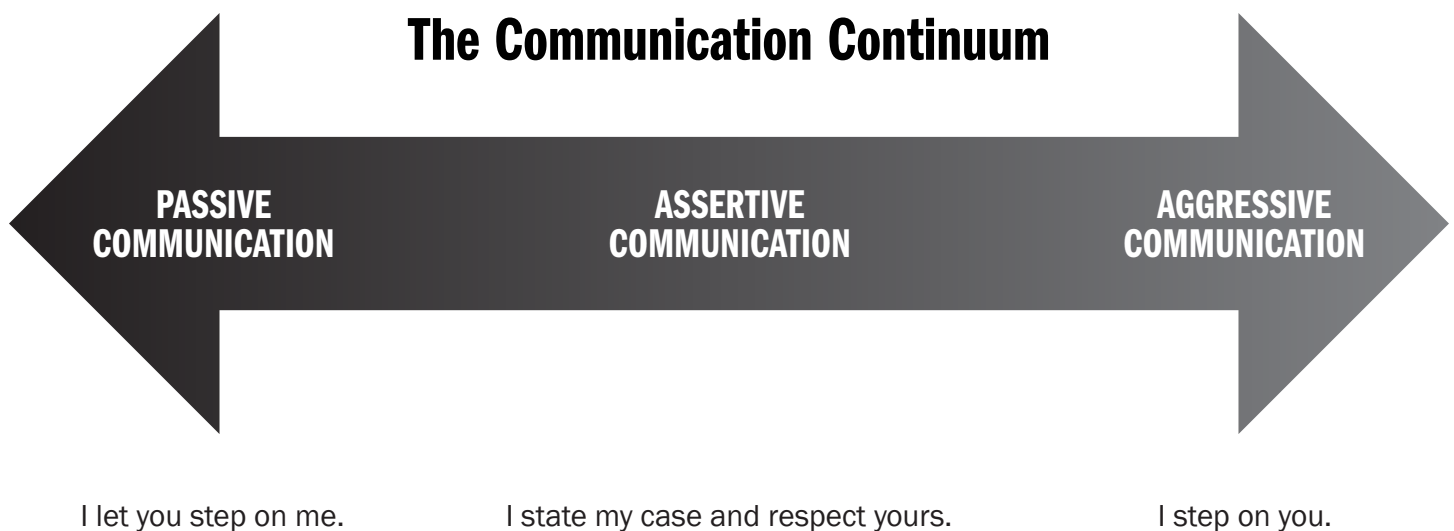
**Insights to Help You Communicate Assertively**

# INSIGHTS TO HELP YOU COMMUNICATE ASSERTIVELY

by Guy Harris

In this Bonus Byte, I have included a quick review of what Kevin and I wrote in From Bud to Boss.

This is the “communication continuum” with passive communication on the left to aggressive communication on the right. The goal in assertive communication is to find the middle ground between the two.



The rules for assertive communication:

- Use “I” statements.
- Focus only on behaviors.
- Keep your responses short and focused.
- Monitor your tone of voice.
- Watch your nonverbal messages.
- Listen!
- Maintain eye contact.
- Respect the other person.

For example:

“When you (*their behavior*), I feel/felt (*your feeling/interpretation*).”

The last rule – respect the other person – is the foundation of assertive communication. However, to make this concept work, you must remember the concept of unqualified respect. Respect you give to another person without expecting or waiting for them to behave in a way that earns respect. Unqualified, or unearned, respect is both difficult and critical to apply in your efforts to communicate assertively.

In addition to the assertive communication rules, here are some general concepts to remember as you work to communicate assertively:

- Listen first. Speak second.
- They don't have control over you. Don't give it to them.  
You might be angry or hurt. They did not make you angry or hurt. Remember to own your emotions.
- More questions and fewer statements.  
Beware of “why” questions!
- Avoid jumping to conclusions.
  - Assume misunderstanding rather than bad intent.
  - They are not “crazy”. (Negotiation Genius by Malhotra and Bazerman covers this really well.)
    - They don't have all the information you have.
    - They have constraints you don't understand.
    - They have interests you don't understand.
- Make it safe for the other person to speak.
  - Private matters stay private.
  - Discuss sensitive issues personally.
    - Face-to-face best
    - Video chat next best
    - Phone third best
    - Never by email!
  - Let people “save face” – avoid direct challenges
  - Sarcasm, verbal attacks and gossip will seldom help.
- Take full responsibility for any miscommunication.
  - To make sure you are understood: “Would you please say what you heard me say, so I can be sure I was clear?”
  - To make sure you understand: “Let me say back to you what I think you just said, so that I can be sure I understood you correctly...”

- Check your perspective. Beware of...
  - Pygmalion Effect – Remember that people often live up, or down, to your expectations of them. Expect the best.
  - Your Reticular Activating System – You tend to see what you are looking for. Are you seeing the best or the worst in the other person?

In many situations you may find the need for assertive communication when you are in a conflict or potential conflict situation. As a result, your emotions will likely be a little more elevated than usual.

Here's a four-step process you can use to chart your course toward applying the assertive communication rules and concepts:

## **Four Steps to Assertive Communication**

### **1. Inquire**

In Concept...

- Adopt a curious and wondering perspective rather than a judging one.
- Ask questions.
- Listen.

In practice...

- Other than assuming bad intentions, what are some possible reasons this person is behaving in a way you need to assertively address?

### **2. Acknowledge**

In concept...

- Demonstrate that you understand their thoughts and feelings

In practice...

- What could you say to initiate a conversation with this person to better understand their perspective?
- How can you acknowledge his/her viewpoint without making excuses for or accepting a "bad" behavior?

### **3. Make your case**

In concept...

- State your concern in a non-threatening, respectful way that moves you towards problem solving.

In practice (in this case, an example)...

- "If I understand correctly, you think I am trying to block your progress and that I try to make you look bad in front of the team. After listening to what you had to say, I can see how you came to that conclusion. I had no intention to do either of those things. When I introduce problems with a project, I'm thinking about its longterm success. I don't mean to be a critic. I understand now how I might sound like one. Can we talk about how to address these issues so my intentions are clearer, and we make more progress together?"

#### **4. Solve the problem**

In concept...

- Work together to find a solution to your communication problem

In practice...

- What are some potential outcomes that would meet both of your needs?

Assertive communication is about finding balance between protecting your interests and respecting the other person's. It takes work. It can be very challenging. And, it's worth the effort when you want to maintain a healthy working relationship with the other person.

# ABOUT BUD TO BOSS

*Bud to Boss* provides new leaders and organizations looking to develop new leaders with insight, resources and powerful learning opportunities designed to specifically address the challenges of successfully transitioning from peer to leader.

To speak with someone about how we can help you or your organization, send a note to **info@BudtoBoss.com** or call the number on this page.

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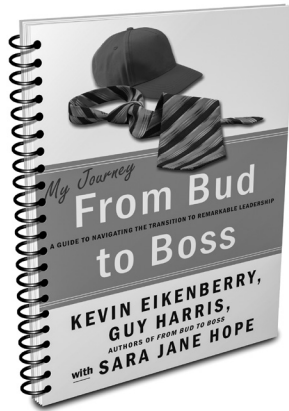


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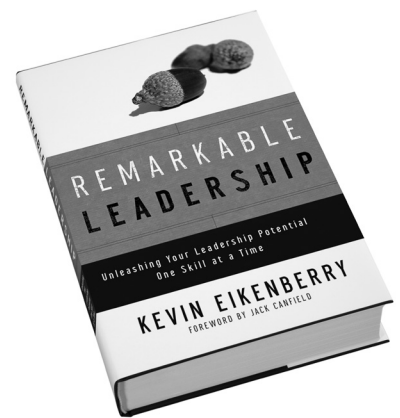


## My Journey From Bud to Boss

A companion volume to the From Bud to Boss book, the Journey is a workbook designed to help you apply the knowledge gained to actual work experiences. It includes activities, questions, and exercises designed to take you beyond the concepts introduced to you during the Workshop or the book. And while this book is completely designed to be written in, all of the templates and tools are available in both PDF and Word document form so that you can use them over and over.

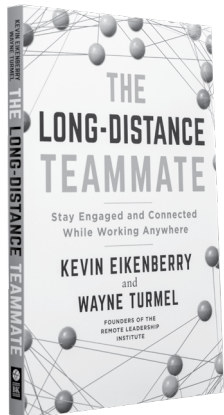
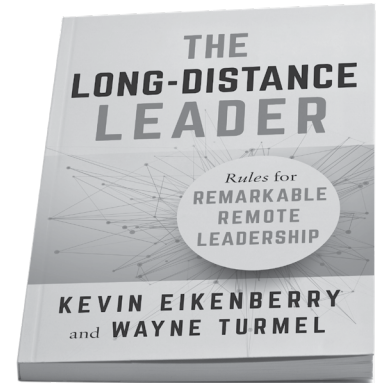
## Remarkable Leadership

is a practical handbook written for anyone who wants to hone the skills needed to become a remarkable leader. This book outlines a framework and a mechanism for both learning new things and applying current knowledge in a thoughtful and practical way. It explores real-world concerns such as focus, limited time, incremental improvement, and how we learn.



## The Long-Distance Leader

is a practical, candid look at what it takes to lead people, projects and teams in today's dispersed workplace. The book showcases 19 rules for being a remarkable remote leader, and offers practical models, tools, and best practices to tackle the real-world challenges from how we work and communicate virtually.



## The Long-Distance Teammate

Written by the founders of the Remote Leadership Institute, this book is the most authoritative single resource for helping remote workers get work done effectively, build relationships that are both productive and satisfying, and maintain a career trajectory when they are not in constant close contact with their leader, coworkers, or the organization in general.

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