

## Generating and Granting Voice Creating Powerful Patterns of Communication

*Royce Holladay*

In today's hurry-up, busy world, how can you be sure you connect with others in your life? In the diversity of your day-to-day experience, how can you listen deeply to those around you to build understanding across differences? How do you interact with those you care the most about to be sure you hear and understand what they communicate? How do you share your needs so that you are more likely to be heard? How can you generate and sustain patterns of clear and meaningful communication in your relationships, families, organizations, and communities?

In HSD when we talk about communication, we often focus on the idea of "voice" as the essence or meaning of communication at all scales. We talk about "generating voice" and "granting voice" as the foundation for building powerful relationships with your family, at your work, and in your community. These concepts are simple to understand but sometimes difficult to carry out in your day-to-day practice.

**Generating voice** is about communicating in ways that increase the chances that others will understand your message. It requires that you pay attention to what you know about the needs and expectations of the "audience" you address.

**Granting voice** is about paying close attention to the message another person is trying to convey. It requires that you check your own assumptions and biases, receiving the message without filter and allowing the other's meaning to come through.

Granting and generating voice doesn't only occur in verbal engagement. Consider the many ways you interact with others:

- **You speak, and you listen.** You are probably most aware of your verbal interactions with people you encounter in the course of your day.
  - You have a way of talking that is most comfortable for you. The jargon you use, the rhythm of your speech, and the idioms that make sense to you all shape your patterns of language. If you want to generate voice, you pay attention to your "audience." What jargon meets their needs? What rhythm of speech are they accustomed to? What slang or idioms have meaning to them?
  - It's generally true that what you expect to hear, rather than what you really hear, frames the way you listen. Your past experience and expectations about word choice, meaning, and delivery create how you listen to others. You grant voice when you recognize your preferences, and set them aside to hear the message more clearly.
- **You act; and you observe.** Non-verbal interactions make up a large portion of how you give and receive messages.
  - Are you highly animated and dramatic in your exchanges? Do you stand silently, expecting others to engage first? Is your preference toward high levels of frenetic activity, or are you relatively calm and quiet? In the same way that you have a preference for activity level and style, those with whom you interact also have their own preferences. You generate voice through your actions as you find ways to match the activity levels and styles of those with whom you wish to communicate.
  - Given your own preferences and experiences, you know you have expectations for how people "should" behave. When an individual or a group does not meet those expectations, the temptation is to use that difference to frame how you interpret the communications. You grant voice when you put those expectations aside and seek the message in another's actions.

- **You give; and you receive.** The third way we share messages lies in how we give and receive.
  - Whether it is in the feedback you share, the instructions or directions you give, or the gifts or compliments that express your appreciation, how you give to others carries meaning as much as what you give. To generate voice is to give to others in timely and generous ways, according to your needs, rather than your own.
  - If you are on the receiving end of the feedback, instructions or directions, or someone's gifts or compliments, your response also carries meaning. You grant voice when you accept what they have to offer in the way they intend it.

Consider issues that might arise in some of the following situations:

- A teenager who is interested in hip-hop language and spoken word goes to a very traditional bank to ask for a loan
- An elderly person who has been relatively sheltered in life steps into a community where the individuals use physical contact and “rough-housing” behavior to express affection and fun
- A teacher and students in a traditional classroom in a rural community welcome a student from an urban, highly chaotic background
- A top-down, power-driven boss provides annual feedback to a new employee who is accustomed to a more collaborative and loosely connected working relationship with past supervisors

It's important to remember some tips and traps about generating and granting voice.

- Making choices to grant or generate voice does not mean that:
  - You abandon your own identity or style
  - You have to accept what others offer if it is abusive or hurtful
  - You act in ways that are dishonest or inauthentic
  - You walk away and avoid communicating with others who are different from you
  - You can plan and control every interaction
- Making choices to grant or generate voice does mean that:
  - You make choices based on your understanding of others' needs and perspectives
  - You remain true to your own needs and communicate them clearly in a timely manner
  - You acknowledge differences and negotiate expectations and agreements about communications
  - You step away, remaining open to the other's messages when patterns become intractable
  - You make moment-by-moment choices to move toward more generative, powerful communication

Granting and generating voice is a way of thinking about your impact on others in all aspect of your life. It's also a way of reflecting on the degree to which you allow others' messages to influence your thinking or actions. It's a simple concept to grasp, and yet has powerful implications for your own choices about interacting with others.

Try using this model to shift patterns of communication to move toward greater fitness in your environment. Let us know how it goes.

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	<b>Generating Voice</b>	<b>Granting Voice</b>
Speaking & Listening	Speak in ways others can understand, so your message has meaning to the audience.	Listen carefully to the whole message. Go "past" your preconceptions, bias, and expectations.
Acting & Observing	Behave in ways that respect the culture and expectations of your audience.	Observe others' actions, putting your own behavioral expectations aside.
Giving & Receiving	Give to others what they need in timely and respectful ways.	Accept graciously what others offer, according to their intentions.