

## **If You Can Find 20 Seconds of Courage, You Can Do Anything**

Most of us have experienced times when we avoid a particular conversation. Typically, people avoid raising issues because of fear: fear that they will hear something they don't want to hear, or fear of telling someone something he doesn't want to hear. The ostensible recipient could be a client, a direct report, a business partner, or even a spouse, friend or family member. For example, what about the time that you weren't quite sure that your boss or a client was happy with your work. Having a direct conversation not only clears the air, it demonstrates a commitment to service and clarifies expectations. Not only that, you could find out that your boss or client was thrilled with your work.

Intellectually you know that you are only hurting yourself or the other person by not starting the conversation and that it is better to know the "bad news" than not. Avoiding the sticky issue often means missing an opportunity to deepen a valuable relationship and leads to bigger problems that almost everyone sees coming, but can't seem to avoid. Avoiding the issue results in a focus on the discomfort rather than what's important. Yet, we all have times when we avoid raising the issue.

The key is to find that 20 seconds of courage. With 20 seconds of courage, you can have those conversations with clients about how to improve your service, strengthening rather than damaging the relationship. With 20 seconds of courage, you can tell a direct report his performance is lacking and work together to find a solution. With 20 seconds of courage you can tell a spouse, friend, or family member that something they did really hurt you, and avoid

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resentment.

The real question is: how do you find that 20 seconds of courage? Some people jump right into the deep end and assume that they'll be able to swim. Others strategize, run through the scenarios, the options, and the range of outcomes. While too much of the latter can increase anxiety, a little preparation can be valuable.

First pick your timing and place. Be sure to have enough time to discuss the issue in private. Starting a potentially difficult conversation in a busy hallway, when you or your colleague is running out the door to catch a flight, or on the heels of another difficult situation is doomed.

Second, be sensitive to what is going on in both your life and the life of the person you need to talk to. Find a time to talk when you are both *relatively* relaxed. At a minimum, do not try to have a meaningful conversation when it will interfere with an important deadline or personal matter.

Third, figure out how to deliver your message without judgment and using neutral language. This requires you to state "just the facts," avoiding the word "should" or any other language that could be perceived as critical. You want the other person to open to working on solutions with you, not defensive.

Saying what you need to say can be the difference between being seen as a leader and getting to the next level, and hanging in the background. Be bold. Be brave. Find those 20 seconds of courage and step into power!

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Arudia

tel. 202.449.9751    anne@arudia.com    arudia.com



# STEP INTO POWER

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tel. 202.449.9751    [anne@arudia.com](mailto:anne@arudia.com)    [arudia.com](http://arudia.com)