



Episode 68 Show Notes: Strengthen Your Leadership Language – Who’s In the Empty Chair?

Leadership language expert Chris Westfall shares how he launched his current career. He explains what an elevator pitch is and how leaders can share their vision in a compelling way by harnessing leadership language. Chris offers tips and practical advice to engage with your audience, accelerate your results and be more persuasive. How to understand your listener’s agenda and who sits in the ‘empty chair’.

Chris Westfall is a sought-after business consultant, communication coach, keynote speaker, and the author, co-author, or publisher of eight books. Advising hundreds of thousands of leaders from high-growth entrepreneurial enterprises, Shark Tank startups, and Fortune 100 companies, he has helped create multi-million-dollar revenue streams for businesses on four continents. He is the U.S. National Elevator Pitch Champion and the author of the new book *Leadership Language: Using Authentic Communication to Drive Results* (Wiley, 2018).

Key Learnings From This Episode

- **How the National Elevator Pitch Competition launched Chris’s current career.** Jeffrey Hayzlett from Bloomberg TV created the contest called 118 Pitch Competition, for which Chris is now producer and co-host. In online voting. While Chris’s video earned a 2nd place, the competition panel felt he was the 1st place winner and ultimately selected him as the National Champion. This launched Chris’s career.
- **What is an Elevator Pitch?** An elevator pitch is a short, persuasive introduction to a product, person or idea. The belief is that the perfect elevator pitch is 118 seconds long – 8 seconds to grab someone’s attention and 110 seconds, which is the average length of time of an elevator ride in NYC, from the time you push the button to the end of the elevator ride.
- **How can HR leaders use elevator pitch concepts to influence?** The elevator pitch is not about sales in HR – it is about persuading, leading or enticing someone, speaking from a place of influence, credibility, and connection.



- **Where does leadership come from?** Leaders need to be able to share their vision in a way that is not just informational but is also compelling. Leaders are in place to make a difference. People are the greatest resource of any organization. There is nothing more important than a persuasive conversation about getting the right people in the right roles, creating the impact needed by getting and retaining the right employees, creating the engagement that matters. That leads towards the kind of influence that HR professionals seek but are sometimes lacking.
- **If you are presenting an impactful program, it is about getting people’s attention.** Chris shared that during a client presentation, he was only able to get to slide 3 in a 47 slide deck he had prepared. This presentation became a conversation - a conversation about what people want. People don’t want to be ‘pitched’. If you want to know if you are having an impact, you can judge by the action the listener takes. When they say, ‘tell me more’, it becomes a dialogue. **You should not have the conversation you want to have. You should have the conversation the listener wants to have. His/her perspective is the one that matters most.**
- **Harnessing leadership language** is when you speak in a way that helps people come to their own realizations and see things for themselves.
- **How do you prepare for what you want to say?** The story you tell teaches people how to treat you, how to buy into your ideas, and how to get engaged with your presentation. When you start with what matters most, you create the engagement that is strongest. Learn, understand, and use ‘you’ language. ‘I’ is the ‘first person’, ‘you’ is the second person. ‘You’ language makes the 2nd person 1st. When you acknowledge expertise, common ground and understanding, you create uncommon results. Start with what your audience knows, sees, and believes so that you can create new results.



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YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE THE CONVERSATION YOU WANT TO HAVE. YOU SHOULD HAVE THE CONVERSATION THE LISTENER WANTS TO HAVE. HIS/HER PERSPECTIVE IS THE ONE THAT MATTERS MOST.



Start with conversational prompts such as, ‘You know how when ...’ or ‘Have you ever noticed ...’ What lies beyond your credibility and your authority is your opportunity to create the connection that brings your ideas to life. Steve Jobs would go onstage and say, ‘have you ever noticed how we see the world a certain way? But how do you like the world when I pull my laptop out of my folder?’ He would articulate the ‘steady state’ and then say, ‘but this is what we have for you’. Start from what is known, then create the new frame or lens from which anyone from anywhere can create. Come from a place of common ground. This is the first ‘yes’ in persuasion. Ideas come from the audience. This is known as high concept.

- **What is the Empty Chair?** The ‘empty chair’ is about harnessing the ability of human nature to read minds. Metaphorically, it is about the ‘empty seat at the table’ – not being in the room and having the opportunity to advocate for yourself but being impacted by the decision. The empty chair is the seat at every table in every conversation. We are wired to work in our own self-interest, but we think of the people we care about, the people that matter the most to us.

If you want to elevate your meaning, accelerate your results and be more persuasive, think about the people who sit in the empty chair. When you think of your internal clients, think of the empty chair as the seat for your client’s client. When you show you care about their client, it brings trust, acknowledgment, expertise, and strategic thinking into the conversation.

If you and your client are both looking in the same direction, you never know what you might find together. It is about enabling and empowering people to reach their goals, starting with realizing the importance of the listener’s agenda and who sits in the empty chair.

- **How do you know if you are being viewed in a strategic way?**
 1. **Make sure you have done your homework.** What are the real puts and takes? Look at the people who sit in the empty chair
 2. **Harness permission marketing.** Ask the questions that can help you answer the strategic questions. Get your audience to express they are buying in and committing in front of you and their peers – it creates instant accountability. Never leave the meeting unless you know where you stand.

Ask:

- Have you . . . ?



- Are you seeing what I am seeing?
 - Is this fulfilling your needs?
 - Is this providing you with what you are looking for?
 - Can you think of any reason why we would not go forward with what is being proposed?
 - Can you share with me what you see is the next step for you?
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- **Abraham Lincoln was known as ‘honest Abe’ because**, as a litigator, in his opening remarks he would present his and the opposing counsel’s case. He would articulate the issues. Isn’t the strategic leader the one who articulates the issues? The strategic leader doesn’t ‘duck’. He/she ‘calls out’ what they know is in the room and boldly moves forward with the conversation. If you cannot have an honest conversation, you cannot have a productive conversation.

Recommended Reading and References From this Episode

- [Chris Westfall’s website](#) – where you can download a free book chapter from Chris’s latest book.
- [Communication Mini Course](#) – four exclusive videos on effective communication by Chris Westfall. No opt-in is required.
- [Leadership Language: Using Authentic Communication to Drive Results](#) by Chris Westfall
- [The New Elevator Pitch](#) by Chris Westfall

To Follow Chris Westfall

- [Chris Westfall on LinkedIn](#)
- [Chris Westfall’s Youtube Channel](#) – lots of great videos, including elevator pitch examples. Over 2M video views.
- Twitter: [@WestfallOnline](#)
- Facebook: [@therealchriswestfall](#)
- Instagram: [Westfallonline](#)



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