



BRIDGING THE GAP

OF DIFFERENCES AND PERSPECTIVES
IN THE WORKPLACE

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The depth and quality of your relationships matter, especially in the workplace.

Rarely can you do it all alone—pioneer a new idea, create that product, manage a successful practice, write policy, hit the key performance indicators, fix the copy machine, post the social media, file taxes, manage the pipeline, fundraise the dollars—you need diversity of talent, skill, knowledge, and perspectives. It's highly likely that you need people who are different from you to help you accomplish your work and goals.

And frankly, our experiences of working with clients for forty combined years show one unifying theme: the most successful people in their careers are great communicators who are able to bridge the gap with people they struggle to:

1. Understand
2. Like
3. Respect

You often don't get to choose your boss, colleagues, or clients, nor do you get the luxury of cherry-picking your professional relationships based on your particular preferences or needs. In fact, it's likely that you spend large parts of your workday with people who do not share your background, values, way of doing things, and/or perspective.

And what about those people who frustrate you to your breaking point: How do you communicate through those relationships?

Ignore them? Bad-mouth or gossip about them to your work buddies? Find every which way to avoid having to interact and speak with them?

Those strategies are train wrecks. The more you distance yourself from them, the larger the gap grows between you, and your quality of work suffers.

Minute by minute, hour by hour, you have many opportunities to make a different choice about how you show up and bridge a gap in your relationships using clear and structured communication. Unfortunately, it can be dicey to get started because there are many internal and external factors at play that we are often unaware of.

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It is a little bit like the iceberg analogy. What you see above the water is only a fragment of what is below the water. There are large unseen iceberg-like factors—invisible forces—at play when you try to bridge the gap with the variety of people you work with daily. In our new book, *Bridge the Gap*, we explore the internal and biological factors that impact human behavior, decision-making, and communication. We will give you tools, metaphors, and strategies to use to show up differently and communicate with more clarity when bridging the gap seems almost impossible.

However, we would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge some significant external forces at play that are impacting your efforts.

LARGER EXTERNAL FORCES THAT WE'RE UP AGAINST

Navigating professional relationships these days is becoming increasingly bumpy.

- *Four generations of people wake up every day to go to work, together.* Boomers, Gen X, millennials, and Gen Z are converging in one shared workplace. In real time, we're contending with different generational and philosophical forms of management and leadership. We each seem to have different solutions and reactions to similar challenges. We are often attempting to achieve a similar ambition or goal but have wildly different communication styles and approaches. We're addressing gaps between skill, experience, and knowledge at any given moment. Essentially, we are not on the same page while attempting to achieve a shared outcome.

- *The personal and the professional are intermingling in new and surprising ways.* The rise of social media had already given us a glimpse into people's personal lives. Throw in a global pandemic, which created a warp-speed shift of "work-at-home" that many of us had never experienced, and we're seeing more of people's lives than we could have ever imagined. In particular, video-conferencing platforms invite us into people's bedrooms and kitchens. We're witnessing how neat or sloppy they keep their personal space. We hear their kids, dogs, and toilets flushing in the background. We may see something personal that triggers us to question whether or not we can understand, like, or respect their character. In this landscape, the lines between the professional and personal are blurring, which can make communication even more tricky or awkward, especially if you're having to deliver feedback, present a professional presentation, or go through a formal evaluation.
- *We are working under the conditions of an increasingly polarized landscape of politics, race, and media disinformation.* Today, we are contending with "cancel culture," which makes so many people afraid to speak or ask questions for fear of misspeaking and offending someone. Cancel culture threatens to immediately discard and dismiss anyone who expresses a difference of opinion, even if that opinion is underdeveloped or expressed incorrectly. It's become extremely easy to dismiss, cancel, and/or criticize others who we believe are against us, not like us, or too different to understand.
- *Last, we're blind to the fact that each of us are part of the problem.* Sometimes we fail to see how our own preferences and perspectives, lived experiences, and personal agendas affect how we communicate to others. Communication starts long before words leave our mouths. It's well known that, more often than not, it's not what you say in a conversation that matters as much as how you show up in the conversation. We simply are unaware of how we show up and the energy that we radiate to others.

Hands down, everyone (both at work and even at home and in our communities) needs updated skills to better navigate our relationships in this environment. Communicating with people in a fast-paced and stressful world is challenging and complex.

You're not alone though.

Most of us didn't consciously acquire communication and conversational skills—or sharpen them with repetitive practice on a consistent basis. In addition, very few of us ever learned how to be present with another person, to ignore internal and external noise and distractions, and to connect and converse with others in useful or collaborative ways.

Every interaction you have has the power to improve or deteriorate a critical professional relationship. You have the power to propel the work forward by showing up with an intention to connect, engage, and communicate—even through tension, conflict, or awkwardness. Equally, you also have the power to shut people down, build divisive walls, create drama, shame and blame, and stonewall your own success and the company's progress.

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Most of the time the choice is truly yours.

Of course, there are times when you may not have a choice—the other person might be sabotaging you, harassing you inappropriately, or thrashing your values because they are mean spirited. However, overwhelmingly, most people are able to bridge gaps and enhance their work (and life) experience using tools like our 5 strategic tips to improve work relationships (and avoid blame or shame):

1. Listen for solutions to the immediate needs of the situation and let them offer the first one.
2. Replace “but” with “and” to best collaborate when you offer ideas.
3. Be transparently open, calm, and present to engage throughout the interaction.
4. Avoid asking “why” (which places others into defense and debate mode—instead use “tell me about” as a question opener to let them lead the conversation for what’s top of mind for them.
5. Suspend your need to be correct: Listen without distraction to truly hear another’s perspectives (without the need to be right).

You can improve your relationships and communication, fundamentally shifting workplace dynamics for the better. And who knows? If you implement the tools, you may even like your job more. You might even make some new friends. You might even get tapped for a

promotion or a raise because you're so good at bridging the gaps. If anything, you'll sleep better knowing you did your best, ready to wake up for another day at the office.

We believe that how you show up—from your energy and presence to your listening and language—shapes most interactions and outcomes. In addition, we acknowledge that everyone is bound by the limitations of being human. We are forever inside a human suit that we can't zip off, and so understanding your own sense of personal psychology and biology are of the utmost importance if you truly care about bridging the gap and communicating with others who are different.

Our premise is that YOU—whether or not you're the manager, decision-maker, or boss—can be an impactful leader in nearly all your professional relationships by:

1. Taking personal responsibility for how you show up in the relationship and/or in each interaction.
2. Using curiosity as a reliable tool and intentional filter for how you listen, speak, and engage in relationship building.
3. Communicating openly so that all parties can speak their minds and truths to find a way forward.

You can apply and integrate these tangible skills with your work colleagues (and beyond) to bridge gaps of differences and perspectives.

Why do we believe so strongly?

Because we have witnessed time and time again the power of regular people showing up differently to communicate better.

Our work as trainers and coaches has been vast but always singularly focused on accelerating performance by bridging gaps and communicating effectively. Working with CEOs, boards of directors, employees, and teams across Fortune 500 companies and smaller organizations, we have helped equip them with tools that transform their work and increase productivity and workplace satisfaction. And, whether you're a founder, in the C-suite, a manager, realtor, graphic designer, educator, headhunter, executive director, pastor, fundraiser, secretary, entrepreneur—or any of the millions of roles to play in an organization—each of us play an important function. All of us need meaningful relationships with people who are different from us because that is where collaboration, growth, and expansion happens.

And us authors are no exception to that rule.

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We couldn't be more different from the outside looking in; we, Jennifer and Katie, appear like different sides of a coin: Republican/Democrat; Christian/spiritual explorer; executive/creative; conservative/liberal; country/rock 'n' roll; polished/tattooed; and upper class/working class.

From the inside looking out, we are two entrepreneurs who desire to work for purpose and prosperity. We've grown into "work-wives," which is our way of defining our relationship. It's a "marriage" with a lot at stake. Our open communication methods have allowed us to traverse hard stuff and real tensions that arise nearly daily in this crazy world. The tools, skills, and strategies we share in our book allow us to consistently disengage from toxic rhetoric (internal and external) and miscommunication that threatens our work.

We wish the same outcome for you—in your business, your work relationships, and in your community—because quality communication is the lynchpin of success and it begins with YOU.

You always have a choice, and therefore, power is always in your hands. 📖

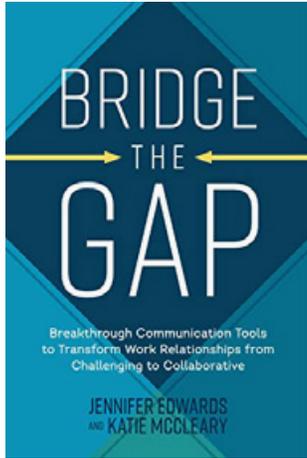
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jennifer Edwards is a business advisor and leadership coach who works with Fortune 500 companies, brokerage firms, multi-level marketing clients, and entrepreneurs—teaching and equipping them to manage their biological reactions when pressure, stress, and anxiety hit. She’s worked with top leaders at Microsoft, NuSkin, WeWork, and other major corporations.

Katie McCleary, MFA, is the founder of 916 Ink and Paper Wings Creative, two impact-based companies that transform ideas and stories into tangible experiences that enrich human lives and strengthen communities. She’s the co-founder and host of “The Drive” podcast on Capital Public Radio, in partnership with The American Leadership Forum. In 2017, she won the Heart of a Hero award from Sacramento’s local PBS channel, KVIE.

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