



Say Anything: How Leaders Inspire Ideas, Cultivate Candor, and Forge Fearless Cultures

Doug Crandall, Matt Kincaid PhD

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What if some of the most powerful words in your organization were, “I’m not sure,” “I need help,” and “I have a new idea...” What if people could simply communicate what they are really thinking without having to run it through verbal Photoshop first?

When you have the upper hand in the relationship—when you are the leader—your people should be able to Say Anything to you. It is your responsibility to create an authentic environment characterized by honesty and trust that encourages everyone to share their ideas. When your people don’t speak up—it’s not their problem—it’s yours.

Say Anything connects you with leaders from a diversity of backgrounds. You’ll learn from top executives in Silicon Valley, an NFL kicker, and simultaneously find brilliance locked inside the walls of a Washington State penitentiary. You’ll read compelling research involving a murder mystery scenario, and explore the quiet wisdom of a renowned horse whisperer. You’ll travel along as we unpack lessons from the Civil War and the U.S. Navy, then you’ll laugh with us at our own Reality TV debacle. The collection of lessons packed into this book will leave you better than they found you. We promise.

Ultimately, this book is a letter to leaders—filled with experience, research, and practicality. Working inside the walls of a vast array of organizations for the past decade, we have seen time and again leaders are failing to draw out ideas from their introverts and, at the same time, shutting up their extroverts. It’s happening in all organizations—including yours. And, rest assured, the losses resulting from timidity and silence are immense.

Three key dynamics stand between your people’s thoughts and your ears:

- **The suffocating aura of your own power,**
- **The stinging bite of past experience,**
- **The fear of judgment and disapproval.**

These three inhibitors make candid communication unsafe. You must recognize and acknowledge the complex dynamics inherent in being the leader, then work tirelessly to mitigate the aforementioned obstacles. The first step—the force that holds everything else together—is to assume (and thus create) positive intent. Nothing will kill fearless communication more quickly than the way in which you interpret words (and the resulting look on your face and tone of your response). We make an impassioned yet research-backed case for the power of assuming positive intent, and then provide the tools to follow it up:

Prove It’s Safe: make your appreciation for fearless communication explicit, jump in first by speaking vulnerably, and, if needed, rope off some small boundaries.

Dignify Every Try: when your people start to speak up, dignify the slightest (or even most awkward) try.

Make a big deal of it.

Be Genuinely Curious: pocket your dynamite (a leader's tendency to dominate conversation), ask Authentic Questions (and then really listen), and draw in those who are normally overlooked (introverts and newcomers).

Leading well is no easy feat. We know that. We've learned many of the lessons in this book the hard way. Thankfully, this reality has paved the way to what we believe is the most powerful concept for leaders today. When people feel empowered to share what they're thinking, ideas thrive, sacred cows die, and decisions improve. Study this book. Keep its concepts top-of-mind. Building a Say Anything culture will pay a greater return than anything else you could commit to right now.

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