

SHUT THE F**K UP

The Art of Powerful Listening in a World That Won't Stop Talking

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CHAPTER ONE

Why Do We Have to Talk So Much?

“Brevity is the soul of wit, but anxiety is the mother of word vomit.”

MARIA'S NETWORKING DISASTER

Maria knew she'd lost the contract thirty seconds into the conversation, but she couldn't stop talking.

She'd spotted him across the room at the Chamber of Commerce mixer — John White, the corporate event coordinator for one of the biggest tech companies in the city. The exact client she needed. The kind of account that could change everything for her catering business.

She'd practiced her pitch in the car. Thirty seconds. Concise. Professional.

“Hi, I'm Maria Rodriguez. I run Sabor Auténtico Catering, specializing in authentic Mexican cuisine for corporate events. We've been in business for ten years, and our clients love that we bring both incredible flavor and cultural authenticity. I'd love to learn more about your event needs.”

Perfect. Confident. Brief.

But when she actually approached him, when he turned to her with that polite, expectant smile and said, “So, what do you do?” — everything fell apart.

"Oh! Hi! I'm Maria, I have a catering business, well, I started it ten years ago actually, it was right after my divorce, which was really hard but also really empowering, you know? And I just, I've always loved cooking, like my grandmother taught me all these traditional recipes when I was growing up in Guadalajara..."

She watched it happen in real-time. His eyes — attentive at first — began to glaze over around the fifteen-second mark. By thirty seconds, he was nodding on autopilot, his gaze drifting over her shoulder. By sixty seconds, he was checking his watch.

"That's great," he interrupted gently, already stepping back. "Why don't you email me your information? I've got to catch someone before they leave."

Maria stood there, business cards still in her hand, feeling the familiar burn of humiliation. She'd done it again. **Talked herself right out of an opportunity.**

Later that night, her daughter Isabela caught her staring into space and — true to form — Maria launched into a ten-minute recap of the entire evening. Every detail. Every detour. Until Isabela interrupted:

"Mom. What's the point of this story?"

Maria stopped mid-sentence.

"Like, what are you trying to tell me? That you talked too much and lost a client? Because you could've said that in one sentence. Instead, you just did it again. To me. Right now."

The words landed like a slap. Because Isabela was right. Maria had just demonstrated the exact problem she was trying to describe. **She'd rambled about rambling.**

THE UNIVERSAL TRUTH

If you've ever been Maria — if you've ever watched someone's eyes glaze over while you're mid-sentence, if you've ever replayed a conversation later and cringed at how much you said, if you've ever talked yourself out of a job, a friendship, a moment of connection — this chapter is for you.

And I need you to know: **I've been Maria too.** God, have I been Maria.

MY STORY: THE FAMILY TRAP

I grew up in a family where every word you said could and would be used against you. My family — both brilliant and hypercritical — had a particular talent for taking anything you shared and finding the flaw in it. The weakness. The inconsistency. The thing that proved you weren't as smart, as capable, or as together as you thought you were.

So I learned to over-explain. If I told a story, I'd anticipate every possible question, every potential criticism, and answer it preemptively. I'd give them so many details, such a complete picture, that there would be no room for misinterpretation.

"I thought if I explained it perfectly, they'd have to understand. They'd have to validate me. But here's what actually happened: the more I explained, the more ammunition I gave them."

And then there was the other thing — my words would come back to me, distorted. I'd tell my mother something in confidence. A week later, my aunt would reference it. A month later, my cousin would bring it up — except the story had changed. Details were wrong. Context was missing.

So I learned to say even MORE. More context. More disclaimers. More caveats — thinking that if I was precise enough, thorough enough, they couldn't possibly misunderstand or misquote me.

But here's what I didn't understand: sometimes people aren't misunderstanding you. **They're deliberately misunderstanding you.** And no amount of words will fix that.

THE GASLIGHTING LAYER

Here's something we need to address before we go further: **not all rambling is nervousness. Sometimes it's survival.** Sometimes you talk too much because you've been gaslit into believing you're never clear enough.

Gaslighting is when someone makes you question your own reality, your own perceptions, your own sanity. In communication, it looks like this: you say something clear and direct. They respond as if you said something completely different. When you clarify, they accuse you of being confusing, dramatic, or

"too sensitive."

Examples of communication gaslighting:

Example 1:

You: "I felt hurt when you didn't call me back."

Them: "I never said I would call you back. You're always putting words in my mouth. You're so dramatic."

You: "No, you specifically said — let me explain —"

Result: You end up rambling, giving a timeline of the entire conversation, trying to prove you're not crazy. Meanwhile, they've successfully made you look like the unreasonable one. *The truth: you communicated perfectly. They were deflecting.*

How gaslighting creates over-talkers:

When you grow up with people who gaslight you, you develop a pattern. You learn that clear communication isn't enough. You learn that no matter how precisely you speak, they'll twist it. So you start adding more context, more explanation, more justification.

"The cruelest part of communication gaslighting: they accuse you of being confusing and unclear. So you over-explain to prove you're NOT those things. Which makes you LOOK confusing and unclear. Which 'proves' they were right about you all along. It's a trap. Designed to keep you trapped."

HOW TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE: ARE YOU RAMBLING OR BEING GASLIT?

You're rambling if:

- You lose track of your own point mid-sentence
- People regularly tell you (gently, kindly) that you give too many details
- You replay conversations and cringe at how much you said
- You do this with EVERYONE, not just specific people
- When you practice brevity, people respond positively

You're being gaslit if:

- You're clear with most people, but one person always "misunderstands" you
- That person twists your words no matter how carefully you speak
- You find yourself constantly defending things you never said
- You feel crazy, like you can't trust your own memory of conversations
- They tell others a different version of what you said
- You've started recording conversations or saving texts as "proof"

If you're rambling: This chapter will help you. **If you're being gaslit:** This chapter will help you recognize it's not your communication that's broken — it's the relationship. You might need Chapter 7 on boundaries. Or you might need to exit that relationship entirely.

THE HEALING: LEARNING TO DISCERN YOUR AUDIENCE

Here's what I had to learn the hard way: **not everyone deserves the full story.** Not everyone has earned access to your inner world. And some people will weaponize whatever you give them.

With my family? I learned to give headlines, not chapters.

"Work is good."

"The kids are fine."

"We're staying busy."

It felt cold at first. Like I was withholding. But then I noticed: they didn't actually want connection. They wanted ammunition. **Real connection requires good faith.** If someone consistently misrepresents you, they're not confused. They're malicious. And you don't fix malice with more words. You fix it with fewer.

"You're allowed to stop over-explaining. You're allowed to say less. You're allowed to keep things to yourself. You're allowed to give people the level of detail that matches the trust they've earned."

SECTION ONE

Rambling

When Your Mouth Runs Faster Than Your Brain

Rambling is **verbal hoarding**. You're keeping every thought, every tangent, every related memory — throwing it all into the conversation like you're packing for a trip and can't decide what to bring, so you bring everything.

Rambling is **talking without destination**. You start with a point, but by the time you're three minutes in, you've taken seventeen detours and forgotten where you were going.

Rambling is **anxiety wearing a talkative mask**. You're nervous, so you fill every silence. You're insecure, so you over-compensate with words. You're afraid of being dismissed, so you keep talking to hold the space.

In Maria's networking conversation:

- Started with her business
- Detoured through her divorce
- Took a scenic route through her childhood in Guadalajara
- Stopped for a pandemic trauma aside
- Wandered through a Tex-Mex cultural commentary
- **Never actually made the pitch**

WHY WE RAMBLE: THE PSYCHOLOGY UNDERNEATH

1. Anxiety

Your nervous system is activated. Your brain goes into overdrive. Words pour out as a way to manage the internal chaos. You're not thinking. You're purging.

2. Need for Validation

You don't feel inherently valuable, so you throw out MORE information, hoping something will make the other person see your worth. You're not communicating. You're auditioning.

3. Fear of Silence

Silence feels uncomfortable, awkward, dangerous. So you fill it. With anything. With everything. You're not conversing. You're performing.

4. Lack of Self-Awareness

You genuinely don't realize you're doing it. You're so inside your own head, focused on what YOU want to say, that you're not tracking the other person's response. You're not listening. You're waiting to talk more.

5. Unprocessed Thoughts

You don't actually know what you're trying to say yet, so you think out loud, hoping the point will emerge as you talk. This is fine in therapy or with close friends who've consented to it — but not in most conversations.

WHAT RAMBLING COSTS YOU

Credibility

People equate rambling with unclear thinking. And unclear thinking with incompetence. If you can't get to the point, why should I trust you with anything important?

Opportunities

Job interviews. Networking events. First dates. Pitches. You have one shot to make an impression. Maria lost a potentially game-changing client because she couldn't get out of her own way.

Connection

The tragic irony: you ramble because you want connection. But rambling kills connection. Connection requires presence, reciprocity, space. Rambling is monologue. Connection is dialogue.

Self-Respect

You know you're doing it. You walk away feeling embarrassed, replaying it and cringing. That self-directed shame is corrosive. You deserve better than that.

THE PRACTICE: THE THREE-SENTENCE RULE

Before you speak, ask yourself: "**Can I say this in three sentences?**"

If the answer is no, you don't know what you're trying to say yet. Clarify in your mind *before* you open your mouth. Trust them to ask follow-up questions. Don't pre-answer questions they haven't asked.

"Brevity is respect. Rambling is robbery. Every unnecessary word you speak is stealing someone's time."

SECTION TWO

Over-Detailing

When You Answer Questions No One Asked

Over-detailing is answering the question behind the question, under the question, around the question, and three questions nobody asked. It's providing a full documentary when someone just wanted a headline.

Over-detailing is evidence-presenting when no trial is happening.

MY EX-HUSBAND'S WAKE-UP CALL

Years ago, my ex-husband was looking for his keys.

"Did you see my keys?"

Normal answer: "Yeah, they're on the kitchen counter."

My answer: "Oh! Yes! So, I saw them this morning when I was making coffee, and I remembered you'd been looking for them last night and couldn't find them, so when I saw them on the coffee table I thought I should move them somewhere more visible so you wouldn't have to search again, and I was going to put them on the key hook by the door but then I realized you probably wouldn't check there because you usually just put them wherever you empty your pockets, so I put them on the kitchen counter next to your wallet because I figured that way you'd definitely see them when you grabbed your wallet, and I hope that's okay, I was just trying to be helpful because..."

He stared at me.

"They're on the counter. You could've said that in four words."

Later, he gently put his hand on mine after I'd given him a twenty-minute download about a work conflict:

"Why do you give so many details when you're explaining yourself?"

"Because I want you to understand the full situation!"

"But I understood the situation in the first two minutes. The rest was just... defense. In depositions, the best witnesses answer the question they were asked — and only that question. If the lawyer wants more information, they'll ask a follow-up. You don't have to defend yourself to me. I'm not trying to catch

you in something. I'm just your husband asking about your day."

"That conversation changed something in me. I started noticing the pattern everywhere: I over-explained to prove I wasn't lying. I over-detailed to prove I wasn't stupid. I over-justified to prove I wasn't wrong."

THE PRACTICE: ANSWER THE QUESTION. JUST THE QUESTION.

When someone asks you a question, answer *only* what they asked. Not what you think they might ask next. Not the backstory. Not the justification. Just the question. If they want more, they'll ask.

Question: "Did you finish the project?"

■ **Over-detailed:** "Well, I finished most of it, the main parts are done, but there's this one section that I'm still working on because I wasn't sure exactly what you wanted there and I didn't want to assume, and also I was waiting on feedback from Tom but he was out sick Monday and Tuesday so that delayed things a bit, but I should have it done by tomorrow, definitely, unless you need it sooner..."

■ **Clear:** "Almost. I'll have it done by tomorrow." — If they need more, they'll ask. Then you say: "One section. I'm waiting on feedback from Tom."

SECTION THREE

Monologuing

When You Forget Other People Exist

A monologue is a one-person show in a space meant for ensemble. It's talking *at* people instead of *with* people. It's hogging all the oxygen in the room. It's forgetting — or not caring — that conversation is supposed to be reciprocal.

Monologues are spotlight addiction. Dialogues are connection.

JAMES'S THANKSGIVING (BEFORE THERAPY)

James, the patriarch, starts talking at dinner. About politics. About "kids these days." About work ethic. He's been building this speech in his head all day and now it's pouring out.

Five minutes in, people are nodding politely, forks frozen mid-air.

Ten minutes in, his daughter touches his arm. He doesn't notice.

Twenty minutes in, someone tries to interject. He barrels over her. "Let me finish this thought—"

Twenty-five minutes in, his daughter finally interrupts: "Dad. Can we just eat? Please?"

James stops. Looks around the table. His face hardens. "Fine. No one wants to hear what I have to say anyway."

James doesn't understand what he did wrong. He was just talking. But here's what he couldn't see: **he wasn't having a conversation. He was delivering a sermon. And no one asked to be in church.**

THE PRACTICE: THE 50/50 RULE

In any conversation, aim for 50% you talking, 50% them talking. If you've been talking for more than two minutes straight, stop. Ask a question. Invite them in.

- Set a mental timer. At 60 seconds, pause.

- Ask a question: "What do you think?" "Does this resonate?" "Have you experienced this?"
- Actually listen to their answer. Don't just wait for your turn to talk again.
- Repeat.

"The person who talks the most says the least."

JAMES'S THANKSGIVING REDEMPTION

Fast forward one year. James has been in therapy. It's Thanksgiving again. He starts to launch into a speech — then stops. Looks around the table. Takes a breath. Instead of lecturing, he asks a question:

"Emma, how's school going? You still liking your art class?"

Emma, surprised to be asked, lights up and talks for five minutes. James listens. Actually listens. Asks follow-up questions. Maya watches her father with tears in her eyes.

This is the man she always wanted him to be.

The dinner lasts two hours. Everyone talks. Everyone laughs. Everyone feels heard. The best Thanksgiving they've ever had. Not because James stopped having thoughts. But because **he learned to share space.**

THE PROMISE

Listen. I know this chapter has been tough. If you're anything like me, you've been recognizing yourself on every page. The rambling. The over-explaining. The monologues. It stings to see it named.

But here's what I need you to know:

You're not a bad person for talking too much. You're human. You ramble because you're nervous. You over-explain because you care. You monologue because you're passionate. **The problem isn't your heart. The problem is your pattern. And patterns can be broken.**

But before you start working on the pattern, you need to discern something crucial: Is the problem YOU? Or is it THEM? Because if you're in a relationship where no amount of clarity is ever enough, where your words are always turned against you — **you can't out-communicate malice. You can only exit it.**

"Your words will have more power when there are fewer of them. When you learn to say less, what you DO say lands harder."

Starting today, you can become the person who:

- Says what needs to be said — and nothing more
- Answers questions without incriminating yourself
- Holds space for others instead of holding court
- Is heard because you've learned when to be silent
- Discerns which audiences deserve your full story and which deserve headlines

This isn't about being quiet. This is about being precise. Intentional. Powerful.

Your words are currency. Stop inflating them.

Less talking. More impact.

Let's begin. ■

EXERCISES & REFLECTIONS

Your practice begins here.

Exercise 1: The Conversation Audit

For one week, track three conversations per day.

How long did you talk vs. how long they talked?

Did you ramble, over-detail, or monologue?

How did the other person respond? (Engaged? Checked out?)

How did YOU feel after? (Proud? Embarrassed? Neutral?)

Journal the patterns.

Exercise 2: The Three-Sentence Challenge

For one week, practice answering simple questions in three sentences or less.

"How was your day?" → Three sentences.

"How's work?" → Three sentences.

"Did you finish the project?" → Three sentences.

Notice how it feels to be concise. Notice how others respond.

Exercise 3: The 50/50 Timer

In your next meaningful conversation, mentally track how long you speak.

Aim for equal time speaking and listening.

If you talk for 2 minutes, stop and ask a question.

Let them talk for 2 minutes. Journal: how did it feel to share the space?

Exercise 4: The Gaslighting Check

Think of someone you regularly over-explain to.

Do I do this with everyone, or just them?

Do they consistently twist my words?

Do they accuse me of being unclear when I'm being direct?

Do I feel crazy after talking to them?

If yes to 3 or more: you're being gaslit. The problem isn't your communication.

Exercise 5: The Audience Audit

Make a list of people in your life.

For each person: Have they earned access to my full story?

Do they handle my words with care?

Do they gossip or twist what I say?

Headlines for unsafe people. Chapters for safe people.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

When do I tend to ramble most? What triggers it?

Do I over-explain to everyone, or just to specific people?

What am I afraid will happen if I say less?

Who in my life gaslit me into thinking I was always "too much"?

Who in my life actually deserves my full, detailed, vulnerable stories?

What would change if I trusted people to ask follow-up questions?

How would my relationships shift if I talked 50% less?

Am I ready to become a person of fewer, more powerful words?

You are not your word count. You are the wisdom underneath it all, learning to speak with precision and power.

Next chapter: The attention you're actually seeking — and where to find it. ■