



# Give the Keys to Your Team: Empower Them to Succeed

## EDITOR'S NOTE:

Karen Friedman is the author of *Shut Up and Say Something: Business Communication Strategies to Overcome Challenges and Influence Listeners* and will be a featured speaker at the 2011 Enterprising Women of the Year Awards, leading a workshop on *Powerful strategies for getting your message across*. Karen describes her strategy for writing this book: "Most books tell you what to do; I wanted to write a book that shows people how to do it and reminds them to keep the end result in mind when tackling their own communication challenges. I used so many personal coaching and review notes from hundreds of sessions, published articles, real-life examples, and funny stories from my days on TV, boardrooms, and a quick run for political office. I thought it would be great to put it all in one place. Each chapter takes a different communication challenge and offers ways to overcome it."

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BY KAREN FRIEDMAN

When my 19-year-old son, who attends college in another state, called to ask if he could take his car to school I immediately said no. He asked why. After I danced around the explanation with no legitimate reason, he reminded me that when I was 19, I had a car at school. Well, times were different then, I told myself. The truth is he's a responsible dean's list student and I didn't have a reason other than he's still my baby and I worry when he drives.

While I am not one of those overprotective helicopter parents, I am a confessed worrywart when it comes to my kids. Like parents everywhere, I want to protect them from harm but have come to realize that if I pump the brakes too often, I might send wrong messages about trust, independence, and responsibility—character traits I so greatly admire in both of my boys.

It's not that different in the workplace when bosses and managers fail to let go and turn the wheel over to others, which may send silent signals that they're not confident in someone's ability to get the job done. But like children who are protected from falling and scraping young knees, employees who are robbed of responsibility may be prevented from growing into greatness and learning how to empower others.

So, I decided to take a page from my own book and remind all of us that leading means communicating forward. As parents, it's sometimes difficult to accept

that as your children get older, you lose control. While leaders can't always control what happens, like parents, they can foster understanding, shape perceptions, and influence outcomes through communication. It must begin with encouraging two-way conversations at all levels.

## Top Down

The front office may make decisions, but it's important not to leave middle management and other communicators out of the loop. These people can deliver your message and control rumors if they are kept informed.

## Hear It From You

Talk to people, not about them. If you have a problem with someone or want them to do something differently, let them hear from you to avoid second-guessing and misinterpretation.

## Be Direct

Provide feedback that is specific so people understand your expectations, what they need to work on, and what tasks you want them to tackle.

## Face to Face

It's easier to dash off an e-mail than pick up the phone or walk down the hall, but when times are tough or you have to deliver unpleasant news, nothing replaces face-to-face contact.

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## Easy Does It

Put systems in place to foster open communication where people are not embarrassed to ask questions, seek feedback, and create dialogue. You may be surprised at the problems they solve.

## Teach, Don't Tell


Think about mentors you've had in your life. They lead by showing and helping, not by intimidation and fear.

How your message is received can directly impact how your vision and direction is embraced. That's why it's so important to speak from your heart to their hearts so they understand how your message impacts, benefits, or affects them. In a chapter called 'Hug Me,' I point out that Mary Kay Ash, founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics, used to embrace top performers with vacations, jewels, and cars. While that may not be politically correct today, her employees helped her build an empire. Kay understood how to make others feel important so they were empowered to follow her lead. When we blend our smart self with our human self, we can infect the workplace with passion, energy, excitement, and respect.

I agreed to let my son take his car to school, but only after I shared my concerns. While I felt his smile through the phone, I knew he didn't fully appreciate what the fuss was about, but he recognized mom was slowly letting go when she turned over the keys. Perhaps as we enter this new year, it's time for all of us to take stock of our own key rings and lighten their load.

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**KAREN FRIEDMAN**, president of Karen Friedman Enterprises Inc., is the author of *Shut Up and Say Something: Business Communication Strategies to Overcome Challenges and Influence Listeners* and co-author of *Speaking of Success: World Class Experts Share Their Secrets*.

Karen's techniques have helped professionals on four continents become more powerful, persuasive communicators. She can be reached at 610-292-9780 or at [www.karenfriedman.com](http://www.karenfriedman.com). Karen is a 2011 recipient of the Enterprising Women of the Year Award. 

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