

## **Enterprise Talk: a handrail to authenticity and integrity**

Tom Drummond [tomdrummond.com](http://tomdrummond.com)

Taking care to craft what you say can revolutionize your relationships with others in the classroom, at home, and everywhere.

- If you undertake the challenge of Enterprise Talk, test if these guides work for you, and sustain a year of practice, you will make a lasting change in your life.
- If you are willing to count your habits of talk, you can decide upon the three that could use more practice and enjoy catching them before they occur.
- If you choose to build new habits of authentically speaking to others, you may find yourself being a more effective teacher and parent, with the added benefit that your children will naturally talk more authentically, too.

You have probably heard it: *"Do as I say, not as I do."* Often in times of stress, we can hear ourselves talking in the voices of our parents, using the same tone and words they said when they were under stress, too. Those knee-jerk responses are hard to change. You have in your hand the guides of Enterprise Talk, a path toward a more truthful and thoughtful way to talk to children, and adults. Enterprise Talk stops you from blurting the first habitual thought—to pause—to open a moment for you to communicate more honestly and respectfully. I think of it as a handy grab bar to rely upon when out of balance—a way to create a match between how you want to be and what you do.

*We have integrity when we act as we say we believe.*

*We are authentic when we are being in each moment true to the depth of our spirit.*

Teaching and parenting operate inside a human relationship. The quality of that relationship depends upon one's integrity and authenticity. Achieving those virtues challenges teachers and parents to act in the best interest of others and to be present to themselves, too, right now, in this moment, in good times and bad. Taking new steps in our personal growth is always hard, and sometimes it can be frightening. Yet we all know that new ways of being are possible when we accept working through our human mistakes and trusting



in our natural wisdom and kindness to guide our way. Gradually, as we are more able to walk our talk, be true to ourselves, and laugh at our mistakes, we build our integrity and authenticity in our own way.

To teach well or parent well requires an awareness of self, like having a security camera watching at every moment. This self-awareness enables us to anticipate what we are about to do, so we can pause in that very moment to preview our immediate reaction, and, if necessary, invent something better than what first came to mind. Our awareness in the moment and a brief pause to think allows us to lay aside ingrained habits and explore a more authentic way of being. These little moments of correction enable us to act less out of habit and more spontaneously fresh.

I liken the feeling to setting down a heavy suitcase. Relieved of the weight of habit, we gradually become more relaxed in the ambiguity and complexity of life with children. We become comfortable, flowing spontaneously and fearlessly, giving children the gift of being present for them with unconditional, positive regard.

### **Clarifying What We Want to See**

I have treasured discussions with my colleagues about what we are trying to do for children. Over years those spicy conversations gradually enabled me to articulate that in the clearest way possible, so I could align my actions toward ends everyone could see.

### **VALUES: I offer to you four visible indicators of children doing what I value.**

- I am most happy with education when I see children being who they are, individually and uniquely, engaged in actions that they choose, at once benefiting themselves and the group.
- I enjoy seeing children having fun, laughing and being playful while doing real work, alone and with others achieving group goals cooperatively.
- I like it when children step willingly into something new and stay focused at their intentions until they achieve their chosen ends.
- I am thrilled when children recognize the significance of their personal expression and when they spontaneously celebrate each other's achievements.

## **ALIGNMENT I can tell when I am doing well as a parent or a teacher if two things are aligned.**

1. *I see the learners doing what I value, **and simultaneously***
2. *I am being the person I most want to be.*

I define things being "right" when both integrity and authenticity are in harmony marking this moment as a life well lived.

### **Enterprising Children**

I can't imagine a more worthy goal for the early years of childhood education than to have all children enter common school with a passion to explore, express, and listen and with a disposition to participate in a cooperative, responsible community. I have often thought how essential it is to life on Earth if children at age six took initiative, cooperated with others, and persevered through difficulty, without passivity or resistance in any form. It's the dream.

Since we don't have a word in English that encompasses all of these dream dispositions, I decided to invent one. After working through my thesaurus I chose the word **Enterprise**. It's a word that encompasses it for me.

*Enterprise: Energy. Boldness. Ingenuity. Seizing the moment. Readiness to embark on new adventures.*

I use the word Enterprise to encapsulate a goal for the early years of childhood. My wish is for all children to be **Enterprising Children**. I think it is a realistic goal that's truly possible to attain. If a tipping point might be reached, say 15% of the environments for children, agreed that the cluster of values that I call Enterprise is vital, even crucial, for our children, we might re-create a healthy planet.

We can help each other create the conditions for Enterprising Children to flourish. But like a farmer growing a carrot, we cannot **make** these dispositions grow. We cannot **make** children be cooperative or curious. If we say, "*All right, children, work hard! Get things created. Work together and help each other when they need it. Be happy. And be proud of yourselves!*" it won't happen. We may find the opposite reaction. As the saying goes, you can't push a string. Rather, Enterprising Children grow in their own way, rise to their own fruition, by living in an optimum environment where adults care to see that happen.

I have personally seen over a thousand people take on the journey of Enterprise Talk and attain an ability to create a classroom or family of happy, energetic, enterprising children, who participate happily in their communities. If you share the values of a cooperative, democratic learning community, I invite you commit to practicing Enterprise Talk long enough to have it become



natural. Like so many have said to me, *"I will never go back to how I was before."*

## **How We Really Have Influence**

I think it is worth pausing here to examine effective leadership—how one wins friends and influences people, so to speak— and the words "teaching" and "parenting" when used as verbs. Both have a simple meaning when we think of them as nouns, a job description or the name of a role, but neither clarifies what one does to teach or to parent. How do you teach? How do you parent? Both are indescribable endeavors that some call an art, which we recognize and value.

I want to make a distinction here between what teachers and parents do behind the scenes and what they do in the moments of interpersonal action. Most of the real work in both roles is in setting the stage—the all-consuming work, time, and energy spent on ensuring great opportunities: planning, reflecting, documenting, gathering, and creating the physical conditions for others to experience. Enterprise Talk guides the "being with" side of influence—the facilitative leadership component—the way we bring ourselves to the children in the moments we are with them.

I have watched with students hundreds of hours of videotape in the pursuit of understanding how we best have influence upon children. Gradually, over 18 years of videotaping, I began to see general patterns of effectiveness within the complexity and uniqueness of people and circumstance. When I select recordings that illustrated effectiveness and showed them to parents and teachers, the groups agreed: facilitative actions have a basic core: people who are maximally effective, do three things:

1. **They model.** They act as they want the learners to act. If they want learners to be friendly toward each other, they are friendly toward each person. If they want people to laugh, they laugh. If learners do not know how to do something, they show them how themselves. If they want the community to create beauty and order, they create beauty and order themselves. Each aspect of their intentions is visibly present in their being.
2. **They inform.** They tell about things. They describe happenings. They recount events. They tell stories. They explain. They talk about opportunities, problems and possibilities. They share what they have seen and done.
3. **They respond positively to what they value.** Good teachers don't dwell much on inability. Rather they support incremental goodness in the

direction they wish learners to grow. Since teachers continually lead learners into areas of risk and incompetence, they take care to respond assuredly with warmth and support in a way that fits each individual. These acts of attentiveness are not rewards as much as they are as an expression of feedback for what the learner is doing with their life, creating a kind of vision back for the learner that enables them to go further.

When I think of the people who have had the greatest difference in my life, Ms Noris Daniel and Rita Smilkstein, for example, I can see them doing exactly this. Each was an example of someone who lived a rich, full life in accord with their expressed ideals (**model**). Each told tales of their lives and opened worlds of possibility and promise that I knew nothing about (**inform**). And when I tried new things, took my tentative steps in new endeavors, each was amazingly supportive in their attention and interest in what I was doing. I left encounters with them incredibly affirmed (**respond positively**). If we examine the lives of great leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Mahatma Ghandi, Desmond Tutu, and the late Superintendent of Seattle Public Schools, John Stanford, we see this, too.

Nothing here has anything to do with control. Nothing directs. Nothing demands. To model, inform, and respond positively is to choose a path that lets others be who they are. It leaves open choices for them and yet it influences them strongly. I believe unequivocally that those three fundamentals form the central basis of influence we have on other people. I believe this is true in all domains — in business, in school leadership, and in the classroom. It's that simple, but the challenge is to behave this way consistently—especially when things get dicey.

## **The Path of Habit**

We do as we have practiced, whether we like to admit it or not. We are our synapses and neurons and continue to impulsively react in the ways that have evolved in the years of our lives. It is hard for anyone to be any other way than what they have experienced. Although we may profess to have an intellectual understanding of great teaching, behaving spontaneously as the best teachers do can be tough.

Sometimes I can do it when everything is lined up in my favor: when I am healthy... when I am rested... when personal life is calm... when the children I am with are busy and calm, too... when magically the moon and stars are in alignment... and when the troublesome one is absent, I can model smooth confidence, inform without pushing, and spread good cheer.

But give me trouble, test me with the unexpected, cause me stress, and I become a person that is not quite so lovely. In my anxiety and discomfort I return to neural pathway talk; old words and voice tones of control and disapproval arise. Out I blurt and the children's spirit snuffs out like a candle. Immediately I am trapped in a battle of will. I am emotional. I want control. All these are the antithesis of helping others. As a result, at the very instant children could use great leadership the most, my habitual words and actions betray. The children see it immediately. They know, and they copy that way, too.

### **Being the Person I Most Want to Be**

In times like these, I want a way to self-correct, because in the dicey moments I am not receptive to anyone's help. I want a handrail just for me to get stabilized. I want something solid to guide me — something to help me set aside these dominant, ineffective habits — something to help me create a positive path, so I have access again to my humanity and my positive regard for the children. Like spilled milk, I want to clean it up myself. Calling attention to the mistake most likely would make me defensive and the situation worse.

I offer Enterprise Talk as a guide to maintain the path you have chosen for yourself. — a way for you to practice expressing yourself to children, inventing in the dicey moment, without having in mind only your old habits. Enterprise Talk helps you model, inform and respond positively to what you value.

## **The Prohibitions and Guides of Enterprise Talk**

### **THE PROHIBITIONS**

The foremost rule of Enterprise Talk is **No Directions. No Questions. No Praise.** I invite you to set aside whatever you think of this idea and take on the challenge of avoiding what doesn't work.

**I invite you to stop telling other people what to do.** Such talk is rampant: *Come in. Sit down. Hang your coat over there. Use your words. Stop that. Put it in the trash.* In some cases, directions constitute most of what teachers say to children. If you think about it, when a child is told what to do, he or she has only two choices: (a) do as requested — *acquiesce*, or (b) not do as requested — *rebel*. Neither acquiescence nor rebellion is a value I want to teach. They are not on my list of attributes of good character. I want children in my community to take the initiative to act responsibly for the good of themselves and the good of others. If adults constantly tell children what to do, they prevent the opportunity for initiative. In schools or homes or



workplaces filled with directions, underlings wait to pick up or brush teeth or act until they are told to by the boss.

**I invite you to stop asking questions about what to do.** *What are you supposed to be doing right now? Where does your coat go? How do you think she feels when you do that? What do you say to him?* Most of us have been told that asking questions is a good idea, and some types of questions are indeed worthwhile. However, most questions teachers ask are not. Here is the test I use: if a child successfully answers the question, the question may have been worthwhile. If the child does not, you have given the child a lesson that says, "I am not capable here." He or she is in an unpleasant spot and knows it. Those children you know who answer questions readily may already be doing well in your school. Those children you most want to engage often will not do so if you start with a question. ("What did you do in school today?") Questions are often the least effective means of eliciting what you desire. The guides of Enterprise Talk are fully testable. You can see for yourself they work. I challenge you to stop asking all questions of children, especially in free play times, until you fully acquire habits of talking of which you are proud.

**I invite you to stop praising what children do.** *Good job. That's a pretty picture! Lovely. I like the way Mary and Louise are sitting. Nice, Jenny!* I am not referring to stopping all positives. I wish to direct your attention to that subset of positive responses in which you make judgments. Being evaluative is the problem here. A statement that appraises the value of children or their work can be counterproductive. Imagine someone says to you, "*I love your hair! It looks great today.*" If you have just had your hair done, the words seem genuine and can be warmly received. If your hair is in its daily, regular condition, such words of praise are suspect: you may want to check the mirror.

Often the actions or works of children are not self-recognized as worthy. They don't usually think their painting is pretty, but it may have other qualities that deserve to be noted. Also, if one child's work is praised, the children who hear that may compare their own and wonder if what they did is less worthy. Over the long term praise leads children into seeking approval rather than pursuing their own intrinsic satisfactions.

For example, hoping to attract the rest of the class the teacher says. "*I like the way Mary and Louise are sitting.*" Effect? First, it is not likely to attract the other children to circle time; it doesn't work, but we do it anyway. Second, it may send exactly the wrong message to Mary and Louise. I am sure we have all seen how easy it is for some children to get trapped into becoming very, very good, extracting all the approval they can in pursuit of self-worth. If we look at this from above, the best message for Mary and Louise might be, "*Get a life.*"

The major problem with words of praise is that they are often not authentic.

**The purpose of the admonition to stop the directions, questions and praise is to open the opportunity of the moment to say something helpful, honest, and effective.** The challenge in Enterprise Talk enables you to prove or disprove this yourself. You can systematically research this proposition immediately with your own children, just as thousands of teachers already have. The proof is in the efficacy you find in your own life in becoming who you wish to be. You choose for yourself.

Most people at this point are somewhat aghast. We have a big empty hole. What is missing is a clear understanding of what you **can** say. The Guides provide the six kinds of actions to promote in your teaching or parenting.

## THE GUIDES

### DESCRIPTIONS

*You have a yellow bolt. Four of you are working together. Clouds of pink fill the page. Those are called quads. The pen dried out. It smells sour.*

**Descriptions convey in language what the child can perceive presently—what the child is now seeing, hearing, feeling, touching, smelling.** Here is the essence of being informative. This talk gives children a freedom to be who they are in the moment, attend to what they want to attend to, explore, invent, and create. The children hear the vocabulary for what they see before them, providing the fastest way to learn language and the tool language gives to think with.

### NARRATIONS

*You brought the stapler. Jenny is folding the scarves. You are filling it up to the very top. Mark is handing out the cups. Carlos joins us. You hung up your coat.*

**Narrations put the child's actions into words as the child is doing it—like a sports announcer delivering play by play coverage of events as they occur. Most narrations start with “You...” or the child’s name.** These statements are factual and objective, as descriptions are; however, they are about the child’s actions not perceptions. Descriptions are about input, what the children are taking in through their senses; narrations are about output, what the child is doing. Besides teaching verb vocabulary in a powerful way, this talk highly reinforces the child’s action. It recognizes and implicitly validates behavior. Most of the time, what an adult narrates will be repeated again and again. You can test that for yourself. Say, “You jumped



down!" after a child jumps, and the probability is high the child will jump down again.

This powerful reinforcing quality of narrations has two dangers. If you use it too much or for inconsequential, well-established actions, children may be annoyed. "You are breathing." But for the first time a child ties her shoe, "You tied your shoe!" Authenticity, again, is the criterion. The second danger is to use a narration for actions you do not value. People do it often. "You left your coat on the floor." "You bumped the table." "You spilled." "You knocked over their building." Narrations support these actions, too. The child may be more likely to do this again. You may have wondered why that child keeps knocking over the buildings. That is who they are, of course. The child learns to believe that who I am is a building destroyer.

## **SUBJECTIVE-TALK**

*I am watching you. I'll be right back. I have to go get the lunch. I saw you and Yolanda at the store. My cat keeps eating the butter. I enjoy seeing your paintings. I have towels if you need them.*

**Subjective-talk is about your own actions and thoughts that relate to the child's current situation. Most self-talk statements begin with "I..."** These are usually easy for teachers to include in their talk, although some teachers have never been told that sharing of themselves personally with the children is exactly what to do. Your gift to children is who you are uniquely. What you have experienced, what you see, think, and feel is the substance of what you offer that makes a difference in the lives of others.

### **All Three Together: Describe, Narrate, and Talk About Yourself**

Those are the three central ways of expressing you that allow others to be who they are and you to be more like yourself. Descriptions, narrations, and subjective-talk are the guides to formulating what you want to say, especially in situations where you are uncomfortable. Enterprise Talk says, "When you want to give a direction, question or praise, it is time to put a cork in your mouth and think. There must be a way to manage here without controlling what the children do or decide."

For example, Mark and Terrance are squabbling over something they found in the corner of the play yard. They are obviously upset and you know nothing of the cause. Because nothing is simple, you are headed inside with Shasha who has just hurt her finger and is crying, too. Enterprise Talk creates this kind of dialog internally: *"Mark give it to me... oops... direction... Knock it off you two... can't say that either... hmmm... all I can think of are directions or questions... ok... what do I say...this is hard... start with I... I... I... where am I in this?"*

In the interim, words such as these have a chance to be created: *"I am headed inside with Shasha. I can't help you boys right now. I want to know. Shasha needs a bandage. I would like you come along, if you want, so you can tell me."*

It may not be easy at first, but it does get easier. I trust that the change from talking the first thought to a form that follows these guides will allow you to authentically express what you truly think and feel. You may treat children with more respect, allow them to take more responsibility, and even have significantly fewer conflicts to solve. This I guarantee: if all the teachers you teach with follow the guides of Enterprise Talk, the children will, too, with each other.

You may be thinking, "How do I get children to do what they need to be doing if I can't tell them what to do? (Tom doesn't know what I really face.)" Yes, that is a problem, before I address it, I would like you to consider the next two guides in Enterprise Talk. These point to ways to be more effective in expressing positives. The more you support the children who are doing what you desire, the less you will feel the need to direct. Here are two effective ways to respond warmly when children take positive *initiative*, when they act *courteously and cooperatively* with each other, and when they *persevere* at difficulties. A third guide provides a sequence to follow when you want particular things to happen.

## **NON-VERBAL RECOGNITION**

Wink. Smile. Send a positive message in the way you hold your body, the expression on your face and the noises you make. *Wooo! Zowie! Yeah-yeah-YEAH!* Communicate your pleasure in valued behavior by facial expressions and body language. I think it is difficult to overstate the marvelous power and effectiveness of non-verbal positive communication. You can give a 'high-five' to children at the beginning of the year and still do it at the end of the year. It never seems to wear out.

I know a school that decided to try a Non-verbal Recognition Day. For one day all the teachers decided to give more non-verbal positives to everyone, each other, the children, the principal, the secretaries, the maintenance staff, the kitchen staff — everyone. Trying it once, they were convinced. They had the best day ever. The children were happier. They behaved better. They worked harder. And everyone was happy to be there. I would like to see schools make Mondays always an enhanced Non-verbal Recognition Day, to get everyone back in tune after the weekend.

## **INTRINSICALLY-PHRASED RESPONSES**



If you take a glance back at the values I described at the beginning of his article, you can see that what I want to see happen with children, as well as the Sixteen Capabilities, would ideally be self-perpetuating. The children would keep taking initiative and acting responsibly because they wanted to, not because the adults were artificially supporting it. Extrinsic means coming from outside. We want children to do educative things because it is *intrinsically* beneficial; they would keep doing it for inner reasons that may or may not be acknowledged.

We cannot provide intrinsic rewards, but we can talk about them as existing in our human mind. By talking about beneficial thoughts and feelings that are occurring for me, children may be more likely to notice something like that occurring for them, too. These acts of attentiveness are not rewards as much as they are as an expression of feedback for what we are all doing with our lives, sharing a kind of vision back for the learner that enables them to go further.

*I clean up the kitchen right away so I always have a clean kitchen to start cooking.*

*I floss my teeth because I have found I feel better. I am taking care of myself. I love it when I am finally able to do something that was difficult.*

I listed as many words as I could find that described those inner satisfactions that keep people doing the difficult and challenging things in their lives. When I culled the list to those that applied most readily to children, I found they generally fit into four clusters.

**ENJOYMENT** *"It's fun to do, isn't it?"*

pleasure ~ delight ~ happiness ~ thrill ~ joy ~ amusement  
~ gratification ~ savor the feeling inside ~ pride ~ satisfaction

**COMPETENCE** *"You did it!"*

success ~ mastery ~ know-how ~ expertise ~ accomplishment  
~ achievement ~ skillfulness

**CLEVERNESS** *"That's tricky."*

new ~ unique ~ brainy ~ smart ~ intelligent ~ bright ~ witty ~  
ingenious ~ quick ~ original

**GROWTH** *"You're sure getting bigger!"*

ready for new challenges ~ older now ~ more grown-up ~ more  
independent



To offer an intrinsically-phrased response, I place one of these ideas in a sentence that either talks about those feelings in myself or offers that as a tentative possibility in the child's experience. For example, a child shows me her painting; I can use the base idea in each of the clusters to invent an honest response.

*I sure enjoy painting, too!*

*You have become a painter.*

*It feels good to create something totally original, doesn't it?*

*You couldn't do that last year!*

I found this difficult to do at first, so I posted this list near the children's lockers where I could look at it every day, and parents could see it, too. When I highlight naturally occurring feelings of self-worth and self-satisfaction that accompany competent and socially constructive behavior in an authentic way, children light up like I flicked a switch. The wheels seem to turn inside.

## **DESCRIPTIVE CUE SEQUENCE**

Now to address the problem of getting children to do what you want them to do without directing. (Once you decide to not tell children what to do, you might as well include dispensing with those artificial standbys, "*you need to... wear a coat*" and "*it's not ok to... scream.*" Who is 'needing?' Who is the one with the 'ok' in mind?) Coats keep us warm. Screaming gives me a headache. We face the challenge to talk straight — to say what we really mean from deep inside.

Instead of giving a direction, try this sequence.

- **Signal.** The child needs a cue, such as, "*It's time to... get ready for outside*" or set some physical signal that means it is time to start — ring a bell, flash lights, play music, etc. I let the signal take effect. I wait 10 to 15 seconds, recognize those children that take desirable actions by describing, narrating or sending non-verbal recognition. I find that usually this works. If it is still not completed sufficiently, I go on down.
- **Describe what needs doing or where things are.** *The pens go back to the holder. Your coats are in your lockers.* In most cases this works.
- **Model the behavior you desire while describing your thoughts and decisions aloud with subjective-talk.** *This pen is left out. If it has no cap, it will dry out. I wonder where the cap is. Ah! There it is. I will put it on and place it where it is ready for use tomorrow.* This step is most used when the action is unfamiliar to model what is desired.

- **If, after a time, a child fails to voluntarily join the efforts, issue a clear direction.** For most of the things I want children to do, I can wait a very long time. Usually some children will take it upon themselves to do what is necessary for the community and some children may not. Whatever: this is today, and I trust that voluntary participation will grow if I remain consistently truthful.

*(Here is a general rule I follow. You can try it if you like. I count the non-workers, looking to see if the number of children who are not contributing in any way to the community work is greater than 20% of the class. I call it the **80% rule**: I want 80% of the class to function on the signals and descriptions, the first two steps. For a group of 20, if 4 children stay uninvolved, I think things are fine. Gradually, maybe months in the future, those four will come along with the majority. At that point if they join, they do so on their own initiative. If today the non-group is 5 or 6, I can only conclude that I am not in the lead. Like a drum major in a marching band, if the band turns left at the corner and I continue in a daze going straight ahead, I am no longer the leader.)*

- **Draw a line.** If all else fails, and I have been there with many very resistant children, I restrict participation in whatever is next in life until some level of action in the desired direction has been made. A tiny step seems enough. *When the water is off the floor, you can continue to play.* Community participation may be a new awareness for some children.

A posted chart of the Descriptive Cue Sequence has been helpful for teachers and parents to see. It cleverly stimulates a conversation about responsibility and facilitation among the adults who care for the children.

## **COMPETENCY ACQUISITION — MAKING IT NATURAL**

Enterprise Talk is testable. These are not personal qualities or abstract attitudes one is supposed to have, such as encouragement, creativity, respect, or patience. **These are actions**—specific observable and countable events. We can see them happen; we can endeavor to invent them in any moment; we can listen to ourselves do them; we can immediately observe their effects. We also get to make the judgment about their efficacy. If these 6 things work, you will see children spontaneously doing what you value and you will be more like the teacher or parent you aspire to be.

You have to do the personal research, however. Simply reading this article doesn't make the change. We all have brains that function habitually. Synapses and neurons connect through practiced habits. Altering habits takes a bit of time and consistent practice.



[Richard Boyatris](#) outlines 6 stages in competency acquisition, a flow natural to brains, so we might as well enjoy the train ride. Mistakes are essential to progress. I like to think saying, "oops," is a way to practice being present when discovering you have just made a mistake. No need to fret about it. Oops.

- **Recognition** — you have to find out some way exists that was previously absent from your thinking
- **Comprehension** — you have to understand it by trying it. Only by trying to create examples of these 6 guides will you begin to comprehend the distinctions
- **Self-assessment** — you can have the best intentions, but without actually devising a way to see the reality of yourself, it is difficult to isolate one's deficits and celebrate one's strengths.
- **Experimentation** — once you know what you do in reality, one enters a period where you play around with it, trying it this way and that, modifying, ignoring, or changing it, to see on how it works with children in different situations at home and at school.
- **Practice** — then once the intention is clear and you have discovered what works for you, it is time to practice. Practice is making a commitment to act this way 100% of the time. In my experience, practice takes at least a year.
- **Natural Ability** — now it is yours to use, stretch or disregard. It's usefulness as a guide can be discarded. The handrail is no longer needed when you can walk alone.

If you want to take this on, I recommend a tape tally method. You can attach a short piece of blue tape on the back of your hand. A fine point permanent marker works well to make a tally mark. Most people start by counting the number of directions they give children over 20 minutes of the most difficult time of the day. A couple more days of counts on seems to yield a representative sample of your reality. I usually recommend people count two things at once, such as directions and descriptions, or praise and non-verbal recognition. The tape makes it easy to keep record because you can simply stick it onto a wall or piece of paper with the date. If you make a mistake, It's no big deal: it's your journey towards your aspirations.

If a child asks you what you're doing, you can say, *"You discovered what I'm doing! I am working on how I talk to children. Each time I tell anyone what to do I mark this tape. I don't want to tell you what to do, because you know that*

*already. Sometimes it just comes out. I'm working on being the person I want to be." Usually they will want to help you count.*

All nine are easy to tally: three prohibitions to **decrease** (*directions, questions, and praise*); the six guides **increase** (*descriptions, narrations, subjective-talk, non-verbal recognition, intrinsically-phrased responses, and descriptive cue sequence*). Those who tally together can laugh at the mistakes and stay joyfully committed to the work.

## **The Possibility of Integrity and Authenticity**

I know of nothing that I can say or recommend that promotes as much possibility for transformation as Enterprise Talk. Following these guides one can take tangible steps everyday to being less controlling of children and more honestly representing of one's values for children and one's desire to be fully present. Nothing in Enterprise Talk tells you what to do in any circumstance, because you are unique, your children are unique, and your situation is unique. You are the only one who can bring your heart and soul to the children you love—being with them here and now with the gift of your genuine self.

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## **Reflections**

Thousands of leaders of all age groups, babies to adults, have taken on the challenge of Enterprise Talk. Every one I have ever encountered who has actually counted their talk habits and committed themselves to talk differently has become happier with themselves and more energized by being with their children. Here are some of their words.

*"Narration really stood out for me. Not only is it easy to do, but it takes the place of so much baloney I used to do. Much of that was simply to get my daughter to do things without igniting World War III. My old talk, "Good job, Tim. What a good boy!" has changed to "I see you cleaned your room." I had no idea this was so powerful. It works! Narration not only helps keep my children more aware of what is happening around them, it keeps them actively involved. My daughter starts to do all kinds of things when I start to narrate actions that I think are positive. My children love to hear me say what they are doing loud enough for others to hear. I have a lot of practice ahead, but I hope to be very good at using all the components of Enterprise Talk."*

*"The hardest part for me is not praising children's efforts, but I found yesterday that giving the children a high-five and smiling at them when they did a 'correct' action (looking both ways before crossing the road) worked much better than stopping them and praising them. They were quite right to*

*be proud. I did not remind them of anything, and they watched for cars by themselves."*

*"Enterprise Talk is a different approach to guiding children, and even adults, in learning. The idea of no directions, no questions, and not praise was foreign to my understanding of an appropriate way to teach. In fact, when I first heard about it, I was a little blown away. Of the six components, the most unusual for me was subjective-talk. I tried starting sentences with 'I think...' or 'I see...' to give the children suggestions on how to proceed in their activities. The results were astounding! I found the children were responding in such a way I never thought they could. Instead of giving an order, such as telling a child to pick up when she was done, I used self-talk. I said, 'I see the art center still has some tissue paper and glue left out.' The child I wanted to influence looked up, so I said, 'I think the art area would be so much nicer if it was tidy for the next person who comes to do art.' Then I stepped back and watched the results. The child I was directing the comment to (without a direction) stood up, walked over to the art area, and cleaned up the remainder of the tissue. He even straightened the papers in the paper box! I was amazed. Instead of saying, 'Great job,' I responded with 'I think the art area is a lot more fun to be in when it is straightened up.' The child looked at me with an expression of satisfaction on his face."*

I invite you to step into a new future for you in your teaching and parenting. The challenge lies in incrementally creating new ways of being at the very times one is stressed and challenged. The time when an ineffective habit arises is the moment of practice. The moment of error is a door. Only in that juicy instant can one invent something different and, maybe, grow a bit. Since emergent ways of being are like seeds that need a timely bit of nurturing, others may enjoy helping you. If your discouraging struggle continues far longer than you thought, I can relate: it took me four years to finally get it down.

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