



Book Excerpt:

Finding Clarity (or Focusing Your Communications Lens)

In the Woody Allen movie, *Deconstructing Harry*, one of the characters, Mel, played by Robin Williams, is an actor about to shoot a scene. The cameraman is agitated because Mel looks blurry. The cameraman thinks at first that there must be something wrong with his lenses. Soon, however, he realizes there is no equipment failure. The problem is Mel himself. He has gone soft because he's out of focus. The director tells Mel to go home, get some rest and "sharpen up."

Many of us show up in our lives, at work and at home, out of focus, making it hard for family, friends, colleagues, bosses and clients to truly understand and value us. We are soft because we lack clarity. We haven't defined clearly for ourselves or the world who we are, what we value and what others should value about us.

When we strive to get along, be cooperative and be open to new ideas, we may not take on a strong and resolute posture. As a result, others perceive us, like Mel, as soft, a blank slate they can write all over. We need to write over our own slate with terms, rules of engagement, non-negotiables, values and expectations. Clarity helps us do that.

If your company or client is paying for your professional expertise and skills, and you appear uncertain, you will make

people nervous, and rightfully so. They start to project onto you their own fears and insecurities. Or, conversely, they might saddle you with unrealistic expectations, and everything spirals out of control. **Without clarity, we project a level of uncertainty, which in business can put you at a disadvantage, weakening your negotiating position and inviting others to steamroll you.**

Furthermore, clarity is your differentiating superpower. If you are ill-defined, you look and sound like everyone else. Without a strong stance, without putting your stake in the ground, you aren't giving people a reason to hire *you*, work with or for *you*, or invest in *you*. Everyone you interact with has limited resources and multiple options. Clarity gives you the definition you need to help them see that you are the best choice over anyone else, whether it's a date or a contract.

In the absence of defining characteristics, you may find yourself valued by others on price alone, your worth measured on how low you can go. Low prices work for big enterprises like Walmart and GEICO, but do you want to be the cheapest alternative? The cheap date? The commoditized talent?

Clarity also helps you make the best choices for yourself. If you're happy to land just any job, you may end up working with or for an enterprise that isn't satisfying to you. Or you find yourself in the company of people who don't treat you well. Clarity helps you define the ideal relationship. Consultants just starting out or working to refresh their practice are often coached to define their "ideal client." You can and should use

clarity to define your ideal workplace, company mission, culture or relationship. Then you'll know with great specificity what to look for and what to dismiss, instead of taking any job or relationship that comes along.

Clarity is the cornerstone of effective communication. Sharpening up involves work: introspection, reflection, focus and decision-making. Defining your clarity means making choices, closing some doors while opening others. You are going through an exercise in self-defining that companies all over the world do. Only in their world, it's called *branding*. Since they spend millions of dollars annually in this journey, clearly, it's valuable to them. So, why not take a page from their book?

Good branding isn't about creating a cool logo or tagline. It involves finding that singular hook that defines and differentiates a company (or you). Branding is about finding and expressing clarity. We can learn a lot from companies who have established strong brands. They're clear about what they *do*, and more importantly, what they *don't* do. You go to McDonalds to get a quick meal that fills you up without breaking the bank. You don't go there for fine dining. You go to Lenscrafters to buy glasses. You wouldn't go there to buy a suit and shoes for a job interview. By clearly defining what they do, these companies don't waste time and money courting people who don't want what they have to offer.

Clarity gives you power. When you have done the work to define yourself, you can own the conversation, the vocabulary and terms of discussion. Chances are, the people you are



dealing with haven't done the work to sharpen up, so *they* are out of focus. *They* are the blank slate. With this power, you can be the one to set the terms. Just be a force for good.

There is a lot of talk today about creating a personal brand. Go to Amazon or your local bookstore and you will find dozens of books written by experts showing you how to create your brand. These books place a heavy emphasis on creating a memorable personal tagline, having a good elevator pitch, or developing a signature look. But when you get right down to it, a personal brand is about having a clear and unshakeable sense about how you want to relate to the world and how the world should relate to you. It's about defining what makes you, well, you. What you will go to the mat for and what you won't. And how you will lead your life.

The *Prism of Value* offers a framework to help you find that clarity, not just by looking inward, but also by looking at how you project yourself. You want to send out the right messages to attract the ideal relationships and the kinds of work environments where you want to be. By doing so, you can thrive and contribute to people who will get what you have to offer and appreciate it.

