



# The Sixty Second Spark™

October 2008

## The Truth Will Set You Free... or Will It?

I would like to think that most of us learned growing up that telling the truth was the right thing to do. We learned not to tell lies and that "honesty is the best policy". That is, until we saw our mom say one thing to a friend and another thing behind the friend's back to our father. Or, we told Aunt Matilda that her perfume smelled bad and got punished for it (*and oh by the way, the perfume definitely smelled bad*). We didn't want to sleep over at someone's house, so we were given permission to creatively come up with a plausible excuse so we wouldn't hurt her feelings. As kids, it got a little dicey sometimes figuring out which truths were the right ones to tell. Sometimes the truth didn't set you free... it got you in trouble.



I think as "grown ups", we often struggle with the same dilemmas at work. What's an honest person to do in the workplace when it comes to telling the truth? How do we tell the truth at work and forge positive relationships at the same time? One of the tenants of how to have a healthy relationship according to [www.wikiHow.com](http://www.wikiHow.com) ("the how-to manual that you can edit") is to "tell the unarguable truth." Most of the web entry talks about personal relationships, but I would argue that business relationships aren't that different and that telling the truth at work is a good thing - when done the right way - and it sets you on the path to Professional Paradise.

I have found that there are two kinds of truth at work:

1. Blooming Truth - the truth that helps others grow
2. Blaming Truth - the truth that kills relationships

What kind of truth are you telling? And, how is it impacting your relationships at work?

Let's say you and a coworker were assigned a project to complete together. The truth of the matter is that you are doing all the work. Another truth is that you need more help from this coworker to meet the deadline your boss has set. There are two ways to "tell the truth" in this situation.

We're going to start with #2 - **Blaming Truth**.

A lot of us are familiar with this. We tell the "truth" about something in a way that points a finger or blames them (as the name implies). It often happens in the heat of the moment or when we are frustrated. "*We're running behind on this project because you haven't been doing your fair share. You never do your share...and everyone knows it!*" Time of death for this relationship...whenever you said those last two sentences. It will be hard to get back in good graces here. "But wait," you say, "I was just telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

You might be right that you were telling the truth, but remember Jack Nicholson's famous line from *A Few Good Men*? "You can't handle the truth..." He was right. At work, a lot of us can't handle the truth. We take the truth too personally and we often blame the messenger. Sometimes the best way to make the truth more "handle-able" is with a different approach.

In comes strategy #1 - **Blooming Truth**.

If you want to tell the truth in a way that people can hear, then you have to *SHIFT* your perspective. How can you deliver the message in a way that is informative and actually true and palatable...all at the same time? Usually it starts with ownership of the truth.

"I" \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with..think, feel, have noticed, want to, need to, etc...). For example, "*I need for you to get more involved on this project - we are going to have to work together on this all day tomorrow so we can get it finished on time.*" In this scenario, you have given the relationship an opportunity to bloom instead of die. Just

one small change from "you" to "I" makes all the difference. Of course, your tone of voice and lack of pointing finger probably make the message easier to hear as well.

I can hear some of you right now. You're thinking "*Why do I have to worry so much about how I tell the truth? It's not my problem that my coworker can't handle the truth! I'm here to get my job done and I'm going to tell it like it is.*" To that, I would quote the famous Dr. Phil and ask, "How's that working for you?" I'm betting that you might get short term results from your "tough love" approach, but long-term, you are a relationship wrecker.

Professional Paradise is created through relationships - relationships with coworkers, customers, your boss, etc. The better you are at telling the truth in a way that someone else can hear, the stronger your relationships will be. The stronger your relationships are the better results you will achieve...and on an on.

So, stop and think the next time you get ready to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. *SHIFT* to telling the Blooming Truth. Tell the truth in a way that helps someone grow instead of pointing the finger. Now that will set you free!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Vicki".

Vicki Hess  
Catalyst Consulting, LLC  
Tel: 443.927.3597 ext. 4