



The Next Conversation

**ARGUE LESS,
TALK MORE**

**Jefferson
Fisher**



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Jefferson Fisher

A TARCHERPERIGEE BOOK



tarcherperigee

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CONTENTS

Dedication

Epigraph

Prologue

Introduction

PART I

The Essentials

Chapter 1 Never Win an Argument

Chapter 2 Your Next Conversation

Chapter 3 The Truth About Connection

PART II

The Application

Rule 1: Say It with Control

Chapter 4 Control Yourself

Chapter 5 Control the Moment

Chapter 6 Control the Pace

Rule 2: Say It with Confidence

Chapter 7 Assertive Voice

[**Chapter 8** Difficult People](#)

[**Chapter 9** Boundaries](#)

[*Rule 3: Say It to Connect*](#)

[**Chapter 10** Frames](#)

[**Chapter 11** Defensiveness](#)

[**Chapter 12** Difficult Conversations](#)

[Afterword](#)

[The 47-Second Version](#)

[The Next Steps](#)

[Attorney-Client Privilege: Narcissists and Gaslighting](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Notes](#)

[Index](#)

[About the Author](#)

For

Sierra, who supports me
Jett and Ruby, who inspire me
My siblings, who inspired me first
My parents, who prayed over me
And all who tried that and followed me

There ain't no good guy.
There ain't no bad guy.
There's only you and me and we just disagree.

—Dave Mason, "We Just Disagree"

Prologue

The worn-out Berber carpet of the old ranch house felt scratchy on my legs. Wearing an oversize shirt and my Spider-Man underwear, I curled up into a ball in the corner of the main room. My hair and skin were still wet from my rushed, unheated shower. I was shivering. I was also grinning ear-to-ear.

Eight-year-old me wasn't going to miss a thing.

Everyone was in the main room. The patriarch of the family was my great-grandfather, who was a federal judge. My grandfather, father, first cousins, great uncles—you name it—were all trial lawyers. Every year, the Fisher men would get together for an opening-weekend hunt in the Hill Country of West Texas. There were thirteen joining in total, and for the first time, I made it fourteen. I felt like I had been called up to the big leagues. Me—finally old enough to go on an eight-hour drive with my dad listening to James Taylor, Jim Croce, and Jerry Jeff Walker. Me—finally old enough to be around the big boys. I hardly spoke a word, mind you, but it didn't matter. I drank IBC Root Beer and ate more beef jerky than my momma would ever have allowed.

The first night was an experience cemented into my memory.

As dinner finished, my grandfather put his plate down and scooted to the edge of his couch seat. He began to tell a story. Something about his job, a judge, and a courthouse. I immediately recognized it as the same story he had told my dad earlier that day while we were fixing an old deer blind. Earlier, though, the story was

more matter-of-fact. His voice came out plain as he told it while searching for green paint in his truck bed.

But this was special. It was the same words, but it was a very different story.

I was entranced, watching as he stood up to reenact a scene. He used his hands and face to give texture to his voice. His volume went up on the exciting parts, low and slow on the intense parts. Even his tone changed. Could this be the same story? He captivated the room for nearly ten minutes. After a long pause, he delivered the punch line, and the room filled with laughter. I felt as though I had seen a magic show.

The end of his story opened the floor to others as one by one my cousins, dad, and even my great-grandfather took turns with courtroom stories of their own. As trial lawyers, they were all wonderful storytellers. The laughter went on for hours into the night.

I sat there in that corner transfixed by every story, every word, with my knees tucked into my sleep shirt. I took it all in until I fell asleep. It was late. My dad carried me off to bed, beef jerky still in my hand.

The whole evening for me had been the discovery of something new yet strangely familiar, as if I had seen it all before. I remember it immediately felt right to me, like a shoe that fit the first time you tried it on.

That night, and for the next ten years of opening weekends, I received my family's inheritance: a passed-on identity dedicated to advocacy through storytelling. I realized with each year gone by that law was only the family profession—communication was the true family passion.



To no one's surprise, I wanted to go to law school and become a trial lawyer.

And after practicing for ten years, I still don't know of another profession like it. I get hired to handle problems with people I personally don't have problems with. What's more, the opposing party also has their own lawyer, who's getting paid to have problems with me. Every day, I go up against people whose primary job is to make sure that I lose. When it comes to a jury trial, the stakes can't be any higher. How I communicate, and how I teach my client to communicate, can mean the difference between recovering their livelihood and losing it forever. Each case is a new lesson, whether I'm deposing witnesses, cross-examining parties, or giving arguments before a judge or jury. My entire purpose is to run toward conflict.

If you're inclined to believe that I learned my communication skills in law school, don't. Law school teaches you how to apply the law: principles of contracts, torts, constitutional law, and state and federal rules of procedure—all important. But you won't sit in a class on how to speak to each other with empathy. You won't hear a lesson on how to defuse a heated argument. Law school teaches you how to read the law. It doesn't teach you how to read people.

I had to learn that part myself.



"Do you yike it?!" my sister, Sarah, squealed through her pacifier as she brought me the fifth round of invisible pancakes. As the oldest of four, I loved being the big brother.

By the time I was thirteen, my bond with my siblings was so strong that they obeyed me almost better than they did my parents.

I was like a mother hen wherever we went. And by the time I was sixteen, I was driving them to school while going over their spelling words.

To be clear, my parents are loving and wonderful. I was only as good as I was because they poured so much of themselves into me those first four years before my sister was born. I also just truly enjoyed the responsibility of being the big brother.

Being the oldest supposedly leads to more emotional stability, initiative, and the like. But for me, it taught me to hone communication fundamentals at an early age.

I quickly learned to acknowledge Sarah by pretending to gobble up the invisible food while smiling and saying, "Mm-hmm, delicious." I found that words of kindness worked better at getting her to open up than words of anger. My younger brother Jonathan would say my name repeatedly (they call me Bubba, a southern term of endearment for the eldest boy) and stammer until he got his sentences out. I learned that if I patiently waited and repeated his words back to him while nodding my head, he felt understood. He also couldn't say his consonants for a long time, only vowels. I naturally became his interpreter, identifying nonverbal mannerisms and foreseeing situations that would frustrate him before they happened. Jacob, my youngest brother, was the most emotionally intense of the three. He felt his emotions big, quickly losing his temper. I figured out that if I slowed my words and lowered my voice, so would he. I learned to let him feel his feelings without me taking them personally. That sometimes a hug said more than any words I could say. Each sibling had a unique personality that took a special approach, a special touch to connect with them on a deeper level.

One of the most critical skills that I developed as the oldest was my ability to mediate and resolve conflict. If two of my siblings began arguing over our sister's Polly Pocket, I'd quickly stop the yelling, have them each give their side of the story, and then make

the judgment call on whose turn it was and what the compromise would be. And it worked. I became proficient at teaching my siblings how to communicate their needs and understand the needs of one another. Serving as the role model for communication between my siblings was daily life.

Now married with two kids, it's still daily life. I've been the communicator in every phase, every relationship, every friend group. Maybe you think it's just a knack for talking. I know it to be something more. Every night as I was growing up, my dad sat on the edge of my bed, leaned over, and whispered, "Dear God, give Jefferson wisdom and always be his friend." I believe in the power of prayer. And I believe that without my parents' prayer, you wouldn't be reading this book.



In 2020, I made partner at a prestigious defense firm. But despite this achievement, I was professionally depressed. I always came back to the same metaphor: I felt like I was running with a parachute. I was billing and working cases, yes, but creatively, I was getting nowhere.

To make things harder, my dad worked at the same firm. When I first told him I had thoughts of going off on my own, let's just say it didn't go well. Honestly, it didn't go well for the next twenty conversations and even up to when I announced it to the firm. He fought for me to stay. Those were hard talks.

I did two things in January 2022 that would change everything.

First, I opened my own law firm, Fisher Firm, handling personal injury cases.

I didn't have an office or an assistant—heck, I didn't even have a printer. I surfed coffee shops with my laptop and borrowed friends' empty offices. I quickly signed up clients, and man, did it feel

amazing. I got to help real people with real problems. I'd cut the parachute, and I was finally making up ground.

Second, I made my first social media post giving communication advice.

Originally, I wanted to use it to generate leads. I saw so many lawyers posting on social media doing the only thing they knew: selling. They saw it as the new billboard frontier, telling people what to do and who to call after an accident. I even tried some of it myself. But afterward, it just didn't feel right. My mind flashed to those attorneys whose faces are splattered on billboards, seen holding hammers, flamethrowers, and boxing gloves, saying outrageous things like "Have you been injured? I'm the Texas Cheese Grater! Call me and get that cheddar now!" Blerf. I shuddered. I can't stand that stuff. Most of all, that wasn't me.

I chose a different path. Instead of selling myself, I would provide value for free. Not about what would benefit me, but about what would benefit other people. And this time, I would do it being authentically me, the person I've been all along. Jefferson.

How could I truly help people?

It needed to be something relatable, a message of light and good into people's homes and workplaces. My mind flashed back to my parents' question to me whenever I didn't know what to say to someone: "Well, what do you want them to know?" The answer hit me like a ton of bricks. I'd tell them what I know better than anyone else I knew. I'd help them learn how to communicate.

I didn't have a cool desk setup or a studio to record in with a fancy camera, but I had my truck and my phone. That'd have to do. I turned my phone selfie-style and pressed record. I decided on the fly that it would be "How to argue like a lawyer pt.1" and that I'd boil it down to three easy points. In the front seat of my empty truck, I talked to the screen of my phone about how to keep your questions shorter, how to be less emotionally reactive, and how too much cursing was like over-seasoning your food. I'd run across

something previously that said that a video needed to have a *call to action*. So, at the end of the video, I said, "Try that and follow me." For whatever reason, I couldn't tell you why, I put my hand up to my mouth at the last second when I said it. I decided to roll with it. I took a big gulp and posted the forty-seven-second clip to social media.

I didn't expect anything to happen. So far, all my videos had zero views. In fact, I'd even googled "Why do my videos have 0 views?" and "How do I make a reel?"

What happened next was nothing I was prepared for. After an hour passed, my "how to argue" video started ramping up in views, quickly reaching into the thousands. The next day, it was in the millions. I didn't realize, of course, that it would also mean that millions of people would see my daughter's pink car seat and my son's sippy cup in the back, along with my thoughtless fashion choice—an unstructured polo with a suit jacket. Who gets dressed thinking they're going to be seen by millions of people that day?

People didn't seem to care. It was where I was in my life. It made them feel like I was speaking directly to them, with no upsell, no gimmicks. It was real.

"What do I do now?" I asked a friend. She replied, "You make more."

So I did.

That year, I gained more than five million social media followers, including hundreds of celebrities and public figures, all while using my iPhone from my driver's seat to give communication advice. Always the same way—alone, in my car, wherever I could park between leaving the law firm and arriving home. Never scripted, always posted on the same day that I filmed. No video editor or fancy graphics or trendy captions. Just me, holding my phone and being myself.

And despite doing everything alone in my car, I soon found myself in front of thousands of real people giving keynotes at

conferences and speaking to organizations asking to learn from my communication techniques. I even spoke at NASA. Every time I spoke, all I could think was, "What are all y'all doing here?" I reached 250,000 email subscribers wanting my weekly communication tip, and I signed a book deal with Penguin Random House to start writing the book you're holding now. I launched *The Jefferson Fisher Podcast*, which shot straight to the top of the charts and is the number one communication podcast in the world. I've also grown an amazing online community filled with resources and classes that equip people with practical ways to improve their communication. My videos have received over half a billion views across all platforms. I'm blessed and humbled to have received some of the kindest, most thoughtful daily messages of thanks and gratitude. I can't believe I get to help others in this way, much less that I'm typing these words.

I still practice law every day, now helping people from all over the US with their personal injuries and connecting them to attorneys I trust. I still record a short video every day. I still say, "Try that and follow me." Millions have tried it and followed me. I say that from a deep place of gratitude.

I never dreamed this is where it would go.

But the dreams didn't stop there.

Five months after I opened Fisher Firm, my dad left his firm of thirty-five years to join me, his son, for no other reason than simply for us to practice law together. "You still got room for the old man?" he asked with a smile. I was speechless. There was nothing I could've ever wanted more. My eyes still well up with happy tears now as I write about it.

Introduction

Not long after uploading my first video, I started to receive messages—thousands of them. So many that there was no way I could read, let alone respond to, all of them. The messages were from followers of my content asking me for advice.

They weren't asking for my guidance on big philosophical questions about religion or politics, or even legal stuff. They wanted my advice on the day-to-day, micro moments about real things that real people struggle with, everything from mundane issues to stories that'll rip your heart out.

- What do I say to a superior who always puts down my ideas?
- What do I say to my adult daughter who I haven't seen in years?
- What do I say to my partner, who always has to be right?

After thousands of messages like these, the one thing I've learned is that no matter how they frame the question, their problem isn't *what* to say—it's *how* to say it.

Whenever I get one of these questions, the first thing I ask is what my parents always asked me: "Well, what do you want them to know?" So far, I've never received back, "I don't know." I always get a quick answer. People already know what they want to say, because

deep down, it's a reflection of what they're already feeling: *I want them to know it hurts me. I want them to know I need space. I want them to know why I'm upset.* The feelings reveal themselves naturally. But articulating those feelings to another person? Not so easy.

It's deflating, really, how something so simple can feel so out of reach.

If you picked up this book, chances are you're reaching for the same thing: real solutions for real problems. You don't need the *what*, you need the *how*. How do you express yourself in a way that respects both your perspective and the perspective of the other person? How do you stand up for yourself without losing the relationship? How do you voice your thoughts with authenticity and empathy but still show that you have a backbone?

The easy answer you're looking for is connection.

The more honest answer you deserve is in the pages that lie ahead.

Why I Wrote This Book

I wrote this book for three reasons:

1. Because my social media followers asked for it. To me, it's their book.
2. To teach you what I know that will improve your next conversation.
3. To preserve a piece of me for my kids and my family.

Before you crack into it, I need you to understand something important. The communication skills in this book aren't borrowed principles. Outside of a few studies and commentary from other scientific fields—psychology, neuroscience, behavioral science—you

won't be seeing many sources. What you're about to read is knowledge collected from my life experiences and how I communicate.

I am not a therapist. I am not a psychologist. If anything I say in this book somehow conflicts in some way with one of these specialists, believe them over me. I'm not going to ask you to identify your attachment style or encourage you to take a quiz to find out which conflict personality you have. If you're looking to take a deep dive into the latest statistics or a case study about how the social dynamic patterns of bees can help you communicate, I'm not the guy for you.

What I've written are lessons from my daily grind in the real-world trenches of arguments, disagreements, heated debates, and difficult conversations.

What I offer is down-to-earth, homegrown advice outside of the textbooks and lectures.

And maybe that's just what more of the world needs.

How This Book Will Help You

While I am a trial lawyer, you won't find a speck of law in what you're about to read. This book isn't about my profession, or even about lawyers.

It's about how to speak boldly, with your chin up, to embrace the vulnerability that comes with laying all your cards on the table.

How to say what you mean and mean what you say.

It's about choosing courage over comfort, even when your voice shakes.

Speaking directly doesn't mean you lack empathy or consideration for the other person's feelings. Being direct means that you have the self-assurance that you can respect the other person,

as well as yourself, enough to communicate your needs openly without fear.

You don't have to be an assertive person to speak assertively. The words do it for you. That's what this book will give you: the words.

In this book, you'll get answers to questions that so many people wrestle with:

- How do I talk to someone who's defensive?
- What do I say when someone belittles me?
- How do I assert my boundaries?

To get you there, I've broken it down into two parts. Part one tells you how to first connect with yourself. That sounds woo-woo, I know. But it's not. It's about where to go in your mind when conflict appears, and most important, how to *leverage* the mindset for better outcomes. Part two teaches you how to use that leverage to connect with other people. How you connect looks different based on context, whether it's working through a difficult conversation or needing to stand up for yourself. Whatever context you find yourself in, I've created three rules that will build the connection for you:

1. Say it with control.
2. Say it with confidence.
3. Say it to connect.

Behind each rule are proven tactics you can use immediately. Throughout this book, I'll show you what confident communication looks, sounds, and feels like. You'll learn from real-life stories from my personal and professional experiences. You'll also see yourself in hypothetical conversations that hit close to home. You'll learn what to say and what not to say, and of course, how to say it.

After reading the pages ahead, you're going to be able to remove the difficult from difficult conversations, making space for more *real* in your life. Real friendships, real connection, and real growth. And I don't just mean at home or in relationships. You'll find the real you starting to show up at work and in meetings. You'll respond to texts and emails differently. People will know where you stand. You'll watch your confidence turn into credibility—and that, I can't wait to see.

How to Apply This Book

While reading this book or watching any of my videos, you may ask: How will I remember all this when I need it?

My answer is simple: you won't. You can't read everything and expect to immediately apply everything. That's too much at once, like trying to drink from a firehose. You'll set yourself up for failure.

Instead, pick one.

Pick one tip that resonates with you and apply it as soon as you can. For example, let's say the lesson that hits home with you is the one about over-apologizing, in chapter seven. Focus on that one lesson. Find ways to keep it close to your thoughts, like writing it down somewhere you can see, saying it out loud to yourself, or telling a close friend who can keep you accountable. Then, start using it. Catch yourself every time you give a needless "sorry" and edit it out of every sentence you say, email you type, or message you text.

Commit yourself to that one rule. Then, and only then, when you can go a week without a single unnecessary apology, should you move on to another lesson that also resonates with you.

This book includes tips I've handpicked, from my most popular and viral videos to exclusive takeaways I've never shared before. If you're reading this because you follow me on social media, hi, it's

still me. I'm proud to finally give you something tangible to mark up, tear up, and make yours. I know you'll find it worth the wait. It's time to say more of what you mean and mean more of what you say. It's time to communicate your needs openly without fear.

So come hop in to the passenger seat, and I'll bring the IBC Root Beer and beef jerky. You're well on your way to making your next conversation the one that changes everything.