



MAKE YOURSELF CLEAR

HOW TO USE
A TEACHING MINDSET
TO LISTEN,
UNDERSTAND,
EXPLAIN EVERYTHING,
AND BE UNDERSTOOD

RESHAN RICHARDS
AND
STEPHEN J. VALENTINE

WILEY

“This is a book of practical magic. Reshan and Steve know that education is a transformative force. In *Make Yourself Clear*, they give us a case study in the power of great teaching, applied to an unexpected field: business. The result is revelatory. This is alchemy we can use.”

—*Jim Best, head of school, The Dalton School*

“With their clear and concise style, Richards and Valentine relate successful teaching and learning practices from the classroom to their less obvious counterparts in business, especially sales. Everyone sells something, so anyone can apply their mantra of ‘authenticity, immediacy, and delight’ to their everyday life.”

—*Merrick Andlinger, private equity investor, president, Andlinger & Company*

“Be a clarifier – not a confuser. This book helps sales and service leaders cultivate teams of ‘teachers’ who can help prospects and customers make meaning out of all the information and choices they face. The sales and service humans who don’t get replaced by AI functionality will be those who can give people a way of processing their experiences into strategies and decisions.”

—*Tim Reisterer, coauthor of The Three Value Conversations and chief strategy officer, Corporate Visions*

“My audience (startup founders, technical decision makers, and software engineers) by definition have chosen careers where continually learning is their biggest competitive advantage. In addition, as they move from startups to big companies and back, they work in roles that didn’t exist 10 years ago (for example, data scientist and ecosystems developer). Selling in the traditional sense is an immediate fail to these professionals. Reshan and Steve have accurately described a business methodology of teaching and learning that adds value to this audience and operates in their modern currency: knowledge.”

—*Tejpaal Bhatia, startup lead, Google Cloud, New York*

“Richards and Valentine’s *Make Yourself Clear* is the first book that I know that capitalizes on what we’ve gleaned about teaching and learning as applied to business in an age of technology. Whether leading in a school or corporation, or navigating the challenging leadership role of a parent, the wisdom in this book promises to inform your actions. Buy it, but most importantly – read it.”

—*Pearl Rock Kane, professor of education, Teachers College Columbia University*

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Reshan dedicates this book to Jennifer, Grayson, Finley, and Riley.

Steve dedicates this book to Amy, Chloe, and Hunter:

drummers on pots and pans.

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FOREWORD

In my work at Columbia University, I teach graduate students, coach senior executives, and speak globally about learning as a professional capacity. My conversations with business professionals, corporate executives, and academic leaders regularly address the need to augment learning capacity in order to expand employees' skills, increase the potential for individual career advancement, and improve overall corporate results.

Companies who adopt a culture of learning attract and retain top talent, make well-informed business decisions, and ultimately increase profitability. Too often, corporate learning initiatives are relegated to a defined unit within an organization, such as skills training programs overseen by the human resources division. Such narrow initiatives have limited impact on employee development and ultimately fall short of their potential to improve overall corporate performance.

To maximize the impact of learning initiatives, leaders should establish an environment dedicated to teaching and learning at all levels. When all leaders – from top-level CEOs to middle managers and situational leaders – engage in corporate learning initiatives, it sends a powerful message that learning is taken seriously throughout the organization.

As an educator and consultant, I witness, daily, the benefits that embracing a teaching mindset delivers in the corporate environment. The scholar-practitioner model at the Columbia University School of Professional Studies offers a compelling example of how teaching

by business leaders can accelerate learning, skill development, and business success. Our instructional model harnesses the teaching capacity of corporate leaders in the classroom. When scholarship informs teaching, teaching then enhances the practice of professions, which, in turn, reinforces scholarship – creating a virtuous circle that benefits students, faculty, scholars, and professions alike.

A teaching mindset also has application in interactions with external clients. The financial sector widely embraces education as a means of gaining clients and retaining them in the long term. For example, investment firms educate prospective customers by delivering information that is useful to them when making financial decisions. Consumer banks employ a teaching approach through the growing practice of providing analytics services to their customers. These personalized data points, based on an individual's banking transactions, provide customers with new insights into their financial health and likely contribute to brand loyalty.

In *Make Yourself Clear*, career experts Reshan Richards and Steve Valentine define teaching capacity and discuss its application in the business world. They harness their expertise to present techniques that skilled teachers use every day to build understanding in others. Their combined teaching experience – ranging from elementary through graduate school to corporate universities – provides them with unique insights into the ways educational strategies can be leveraged in a commercial environment.

Applying teaching methods in a corporate setting unleashes novel approaches to establishing and growing business relationships. When adopting a teaching mindset, sellers consider multiple approaches to listening; customer service agents consider an array of techniques to demonstrate understanding and empathy with their customers; trainers assess learning to promote knowledge and skill development, rather than simply conferring a certificate; and leaders communicate to be understood, changing their tactics to influence different learners.

Reshan and Steve describe the value of striving for authenticity, immediacy, and delight in the corporate landscape. Their approach highlights the importance of bidirectional communication with both internal and external constituents to create long-term business results. Reshan and Steve provide a new context for what these terms mean in the technological age, converting authenticity, immediacy, and delight into a powerful heuristic for sales professionals, customer service agents, corporate trainers, and leaders at all levels.

– Jason Wingard, PhD
dean and professor
School of Professional Studies
Columbia University

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The expression “no book arrives in the world without the support of many people” is certainly true for the book you are currently reading (thank you for reading, by the way). But, given that this is a book about teaching, we have to add a wrinkle: no book about teaching arrives on the shelves without the support of many teachers.

We have had more than our share – good people who found their way into our lives and cared enough to try to teach us something that, they felt, mattered in a way that, we felt, mattered.

The what and the how, with emphasis on the how. And now onto the who ...

Reshan would like to acknowledge: Ms. Muller, Ms. Ryder and Miss Hess, Ms. Bhagia, Mr. Love, Mr. O’Leary, Ms. Rota, Mrs. Milliren, Mr. Lacopo, Mr. Wood, Coach Barile, Mr. Jones, Dr. McCall, Carlton Voss, Professor Currier, Professor Dede, Professor Meier, Professor Vasudevan, Professor Yorks, Dr. Ahmad, Dr. Mentor, Professor Budin, Professor Genishi, Bill Walsh, Deborah Herschel, Darian Levin, Tom Golden, Michelle Dowling, Joyce Evans, Matthew Stuart, Chris Marblo, Don Buckley, Jason Wingard, David Stephens, and everyone on the Explain Everything team.

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Our hope is that the readers of this book will be better off because of the teachers that we met along the way, who helped us to learn, whether they knew it or not.

Reshan and Steve would also like to acknowledge the formidable crew that has helped us to learn together, with particular nuance, the art and science of teaching: Tom Nammack, Karen Newman, Pearl Rock Kane, Eric Hudson. Thank you for your deep wisdom and your commitment to your craft – our craft.

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To our editors: Jeanenne, thank you for seeing us. Vicki, thank you for shaping us with the kind of thoughtful feedback that few writers these days are fortunate enough to receive.

And to those brilliant people we interviewed for this book: you (the reader) will want to thank them yourself, and we hope that you will do just that by tuning in to their work and telling them what you’ve learned from it.

Otherwise, just start turning the pages ... or this might go on forever.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Reshan Richards is adjunct assistant professor at Teachers College, Columbia University and associate at the Columbia University School of Professional Studies. He is also the chief learning officer, CEO, and cofounder of Explain Everything, a software company. He has an EdD in Instructional Technology and Media from Teachers College, Columbia University, an EdM in Learning and Teaching from Harvard University, and a BA in Music from Columbia University.

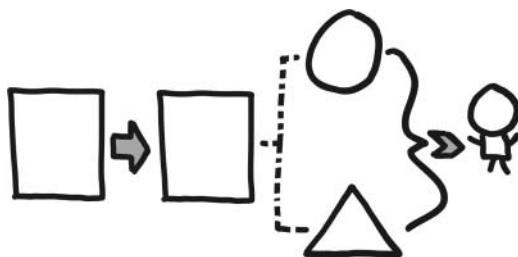
Stephen J. Valentine is an educator, school leader, writer, and serial collaborator. He works with great people at Montclair Kimberley Academy (Montclair, NJ), serves as the coordinating editor of *Klingbrief*, a publication of the Klingenstein Center at Columbia University, and wrote *Everything but Teaching* (Corwin). He holds degrees from the University of Virginia and Boston College.

Reshan and Steve have coauthored a number of publications, including *Blending Leadership: Six Simple Beliefs for Leading Online and Off* (Wiley/Jossey-Bass). Both separately and together, they speak, teach, consult, and launch learning experiments across a variety of domains and in locations worldwide.

They document their learning, mistakes, and enthusiasms at www.constructivisttoolkit.com and www.refreshingwednesday.com.

INTRODUCTION: WORKING AT THE INTERSECTION OF TEACHING AND BUSINESS

Throughout this book, we're going to connect two fields, teaching and business, in order to explore the benefits of embracing a teaching mindset in a corporate environment. Simultaneously, if all goes well, by becoming a better teacher, you will learn how to enrich the lives of your audiences, and even better, the scope of your industry.



More specifically, we're going to show you how teaching practices (the stuff the best teachers use daily) can:

- Enrich approaches to selling ideas, products, and services to new (or ready to expand) customers.
- Enrich approaches to providing services to existing customers.
- Enrich approaches to making colleagues understand, demonstrate understanding of, and apply that on which they are being trained.
- Enrich approaches to developing and managing teams and individuals.

We're also going to show you how to think of and serve your customers and colleagues as modern learners – because that's exactly what they, and we, all are.

Learning (for a New) Now

The “new now” of learning is transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary. The modern learner-practitioner, whether she is a teacher, learner, employee, seller, or buyer, has been unboxed and unbounded – invited to be combinatory and connective and to solve problems that matter. The modern learner-practitioner has full permission and agency to think across domains, between silos, and using all available perspectives. One should plan accordingly.

Learner-Practitioner

We have a preference for this compound noun (learner-practitioner) and will use it throughout this text because we believe that even our youngest learners are practitioners (they are trying to be writers and scientists and artists) and even our oldest practitioners are learners, or should be.

There's an old, and good, justification for breaking down the artificial boundaries we place around learning: life itself. Outside of the time we spend in school, we don't really live in isolated disciplines, switching from English to math to science, and only when the bell rings. Instead, we live both between disciplines (interdisciplinarily) and across disciplines (transdisciplinarily). We blend and mix aspects of several disciplines, working with teachers and laypeople alike, in order to make progress in a given area, in order to make sense, however temporarily, of the world.

According to researchers, the term *interdisciplinarity* quite simply means an approach to knowledge that takes more than one discipline into consideration. Its driving force, or perhaps outcome, is a social relevance that is not always present in more disciplinary, academic work or research. In short, an interdisciplinary approach can be more stimulating for the learner because it is often more relevant to his or her direct concerns rather than some abstract, possible use in the future. Transdisciplinarity, on the other hand, has the added layer of being produced with others, especially others who exist outside of what is traditionally referred to as “the academy.” When professors partner with industry folks to explore a problem, they do so transdisciplinarily (Frodeman & Mitcham, 2007; Frodeman, 2017).

If you track such combinatory thinking, you will see that it pops up again and again like some kind of low-key superhero, often when people are stuck and need to learn something in order to advance a project or possibility.

When working on their Shinkansen bullet train, trains that travel up to 300 kph, Japanese engineers could not figure out how to reduce the sound boom as trains entered and exited tunnels. They turned to biomimicry, or the combination of nature and engineering, to find a solution. Noting that the beaks of kingfishers allowed them to dive into water without making much of a sound, the Shinkansen engineers reshaped their trains accordingly. Once the fronts of the trains resembled the beaks of the kingfishers, the engineers reached their goal, reducing the sound (Moskvitch, 2011; JNCC, 2018).



Combinatory thinking has been used in sports as well. As an engineering student at Oregon State University, Dick Fosbury applied his knowledge of physics to his love for a track and field event: the high jump. Before Fosbury, high jumpers used a straddle jump, jumping over the bar face down. After Fosbury used applied physics to lower his center of gravity, the Fosbury Flop was born, showing athletes that a better approach involved lifting one's hips and lowering one's shoulders. He won a gold medal, breaking the Olympic record, in 1968 (Durso, 1968; *The Guardian*, 2018).

If you look into the careers of people as diverse as Martin Luther King, Jr., Mendel, and Eratosthenes, you will find religion mixed with philosophy and literature, botany mixed with genetics, and math mixed with geography and science. You will find, in other words, combinations leading to breakthroughs in human rights, human genetics, and geography.

Such knowledge production is not merely intuitive; it is documentable and therefore, then, repeatable. Some in the academic community have done this work with gusto, categorizing certain approaches and thinking patterns as Mode 1 and Mode 2.

Mode 1 thinking is what many of us grew up with: memorizing and performing in order to pass (through) school. Such problem-solving is isolated from applicability, that is, the real world, but has credence in academic circles. It can be reviewed, and tested, without undue outside influence (Gibbons et al., 1994).

Mode 2 thinking often takes place outside of academic institutions; its context is provided, and defined, by its application, and its intention is pegged to a specific use. What's more, its practitioners, who are often university-trained researchers and scholars, seek collaborative partners outside of university settings (Gibbons et al., 1994).