Saying less builds the reputation *you want.*

What colleagues conclude from how you communicate, and a repeatable method for getting to the point.

By **Joe McCormack** Originally published December 8, 2025 4-minute read

THE ISSUE IN ONE PARAGRAPH

Your colleagues form opinions about you based on how you communicate. When you express ideas clearly and concisely, they see you as thoughtful, prepared, and respectful of their time. When you ramble, they see the opposite. This brief explains how brevity shapes your reputation and introduces SPEAR, a five-step method for keeping any exchange short and clear.

SKILLS THIS BRIEF ADDRESSES

Four of the seven elite human skills

05 **Clear and Concise Communication**
Brevity is the core of this brief, from leading with a summary to editing out what people will skip. See sections 2 and 3.

02 **Active Listening & Close Reading**
Saying less leaves room for others to engage, and SPEAR asks you to adjust based on their reply. See section 4.

07 **Executive Presence & Emotional Intelligence**
How you communicate determines how people experience you and talk about you. See section 1.

06 **Influence**
Short, clear messages travel further because people can understand and repeat them. See section 2.

Explore all seven skills

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What do colleagues conclude when you talk too long?

Picture a meeting where one person talked too much, never stopped to listen, and turned the time into a monologue. Nobody else said much. Think about what everyone in the room now believes about that person.

Your peers and the people who report to you are always drawing conclusions about you from how you communicate with them. You can't opt out of that. You can decide what they conclude. Brevity is more than a communication technique. It is a reputation strategy, and in an age of information overload it gives you a professional advantage in how people experience you and talk about you.

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How does brevity change the way people see you?

Brevity affects your reputation in five ways. Each one shows up in what people say about you when you're not in the room.

It signals respect	Brief communicators give people time back instead of taking it away. *"You don't waste my time."*
It shows competence	Making things simple requires mastery. Brevity demonstrates clear thinking and shapes how others judge your intelligence and preparation. *"You know what you're talking about."*
It builds trust	When you're consistently concise, people know what to expect: no rambling and no surprises. *"I can count on you to get to the point."*
It makes you easier to work with	People gravitate toward someone who communicates clearly and doesn't overtalk. *"You're easy to work with."*
It makes you memorable	Short, sharp messages stick. Your ideas travel further because they're simple to understand and easy to repeat. *"I remember what you said."*

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What habits build a reputation for brevity?

A reputation for brevity comes from practicing the same few habits in every meeting, email, and conversation.

- Lead with a clear summary.
- Get to the point in the first 30 seconds.
- Prepare more so you can say less.
- Edit hard. Remove words that don't add value.
- Use short sentences and sharp transitions.
- Deliver what's essential and leave out the parts people will skip.
- Respect time limits and keep meetings moving.

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How can you keep any exchange short and clear?

SPEAR is a repeatable method for brevity. It covers the full exchange: preparing before you speak and adjusting after the other person responds.

S **Strategize**
Think about your audience, your message, and why it matters to them.

P **Prepare**
Develop the message you want to share, and make sure it has a main point.

E **Engage and express**
Say what's needed, and keep it short.

A **Adjust and acknowledge**
Consider the other person's reply and correct course where they need more clarity.

R **Restate and respond**
Based on their reaction, revise your message or your response.

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What this means for leaders

The novelist and screenwriter Elmore Leonard (1925–2013) wrote more than 40 novels known for lean, dialogue-driven prose. His advice to writers applies to every leader who speaks or writes for a living:

> "Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip."
>
> Elmore Leonard

When you say or write less, you give the other person room to engage. You show discipline, clarity, and concern for their time, and people trust, follow, and respect you for it. Every email and conversation shapes your reputation, for better or worse.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE YOUR NEXT MEETING

- Can I state my main point in the first 30 seconds?
- Which parts of what I plan to say will people skip?
- Have I left enough room for others to respond?

Adapted from Joe McCormack's LinkedIn article, "Brevity as a Reputation Builder," December 8, 2025. Read the original on LinkedIn

For more on concise communication, visit The BRIEF Lab.

Build a reputation for clarity *across your team.*

Talk with us about developing clear and concise communication in your organization.

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