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GET THE NERVE TO SUCCEED

FREE
ARTICLE!

**The #1 Tool
for Getting
Rid of Drama**



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The #1 Tool for Getting Rid of Drama

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- Facial expressions
- Head movements
- Hand movements
- Eye movements
- Posture
- Appearance
- Body contact

Moreover, communication is the backdrop on which everything happens. It touches every single aspect of our lives, so it's pretty important.

To add insult to injury, *whether we realize it or not*, we are always communicating. *Whether we are clear or not*, we are always communicating.

It's easy to have a lot of drama in our lives. It's a small miracle anything gets done at all.

Know your mind and the rest will follow

You're reading this because you want to get your mind around this communication thing and figure out how to get rid of drama in your life. The first place to start is to understand where you are right now. This quick, two-part communication inventory will help sort out some fundamental issues:

- Are you wasting a lot of time and energy on drama?
- Do you feel like you get pulled into family drama?
- Does drama cause a lot of unwanted stress and negativity in your life?
- Do you wish you could have better relationships?
- Do you wish those closest to you understood you better?
- Are you unable to control your reactions to people around you?

If you answered yes to these questions, you're like most of us. It's time to take steps to change your reality. And you can.

It's very useful to get the slate of the past as clean as possible so you don't keep reacting to old things and stay stuck in constant drama mode.

On its face, communication seems pretty straightforward. You talk, I listen. I talk, you listen. Wouldn't it be nice if life were really like that? No misunderstandings. No arguments. No drama.

Of course, it's not even close to being that easy. To send a message to you, I encode it using words and tone of voice. To receive it, you decode it using *your* understanding of those. And back and forth. Misunderstandings can compound quickly even in a brief conversation.

To add uncertainty to the situation, there's background noise interfering with our messages. It can literally be background noise – screaming kids, traffic, loud conversations nearby – so we miss important cues or meaning in our conversation.

Many times, it's noise from our own backgrounds: our experiences, education level, economic status, opinions, fears, biases, and a lot of other things.

And if that weren't enough, we have *some* shared information between us on the topic of our communication – like a project at work – but even when we know the same information, we're making our own assumptions and drawing our own conclusions.

Ok, enough already! This is complicated!

Yes, of course it is. That's why we have so much drama in our lives. But I'm not done yet.

Throw on top of that an endless array of non-verbal communication:

In order to do that, you have to get into the details of the specific issues as much as possible, face them, and move forward. The second part of the inventory addresses these issues:

- Are there important conversations you're avoiding? If so, with whom? About what?
- Are there important conversations you keep messing up? If so, with whom? About what?
- Do you have relationships that need repairing? With whom?
- Are you sure you accurately understand the nature of the problem you have with the other person? If no, what can you do to understand it more fully?
- Do you need to ask someone for clarification?
- Do you owe anyone an apology? If yes, what steps can you take right now to get closer to giving an apology?
- Do you feel that someone owes you an apology? Is that holding back your relationship? What if that person doesn't realize it? What steps can you take right now to get closer to resolving this situation?
- Are you holding a grudge against someone because of their behavior, a possible misunderstanding, or clash of opinions? Do you realize that holding a grudge is like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die?

Obviously, these questions are not exhaustive or comprehensive. Create your own inventory based on your personal situation. Listing out the steps you need to take to clean up your relationships is a great way to get clarity about where you are today.

Starting over

Understanding our drama is about improving the conditions of our lives and creating new conditions in which to go after our dreams and enjoy the happy, peaceful life we long for.

The importance of clearing the slate should be obvious. Being stubborn, having screaming matches, holding grudges, and avoiding people are a tremendous waste of time, energy, and spirit. In these cases, we spend our resources

plotting to get even or figuring out how to avoid the target of our discomfort. In the process, we are putting up roadblocks to our own success.

We can't make the kind of progress we need on the things that truly matter to us if we're distracted by bad relationships. Keep in mind that these untidy relationships take a toll on our diet, health, sleep, other relationships, job performance, and many other things.

Understanding our drama is about improving the conditions of our lives and creating new conditions in which to go after our dreams and enjoy the happy, peaceful life we long for. To do that, we have to get ourselves in order.

As we start a new and exciting chapter in our lives, there's an important point to keep in mind: We don't have to be friends with everyone. We don't have to bend over backwards to satisfy people who are not willing to engage with us. We don't have to appease other people or give up our values or rights for the sake of an uneasy peace. Let the people who are unwilling or unable to come to the table make their own decisions. Don't make it part of your drama.

Where does drama come from?

It's not too difficult to figure out where drama comes from. There are four basic sources:

- Our behavior
- Other people's responses to us
- Other people's behavior
- Our responses to them

This may seem obvious but it's not simple. If you think about it, these four sources essentially cover everything: our fears, the way we were raised, our experiences, our relationships, the words we choose to use, and a whole lot more.

These four sources also influence the way we brought all that information – all that baggage – from the past to the present and what we do with it now on a daily basis.

How the four sources relate and interact determines the kind of drama we have in our lives and whether we allow ourselves to be dragged into other people's drama.

I can hear you now: "This is too much! It's dizzying just thinking about all of those connections, interactions, and relationships. I can't control all of these influences in my life. I can't control anyone else. I can't force them to change. How am I ever going to make sense of it all?!"

The good news is you don't have to.

Your drama comes from not knowing what you want and how to get it.

We have to find a way to simplify all of this complexity. And we can, by reducing the problem to one sentence:

Your drama comes from not knowing what you want and how to get it.

How to change the conversation

Pete is a police detective in a high-stress job. And he frequently loses his temper. Well, he used to.

When things didn't go his way, when people didn't behave the way he expected them to, when his kids didn't pay attention, he would explode.

Do you think Pete *wanted* to lose his temper? It's just a response he learned growing up, watching his father. He didn't really know any other way.

Pete told me what he experienced on his way to losing control.

"I clench my fists. The muscles in my arms tighten. My face gets red. And my ears get hot."

"And what happens next?" I ask.

"I lose my temper," he says.

"How many times would you say you lose your temper after you go through that process?"

"Every single time."

"So, the thousand times that's happened in the past, you exploded a thousand times."

"Yep."

"It's predictable, then."

"Guaranteed. If that stuff happens, I'm going to lose my temper."

"Why don't you hit the pause button?"

"What's that?" Pete asks.

"The pause button is a device, a tool, something you can use to change your situation. Do you like losing your temper?"

"Of course not."

"So what you do is, when you feel yourself clench your fists, you hit the pause button. That means you find a way to short circuit your usual response process. It's a way to change our behavior and get what we want. If we want to get something we've never had, we have to do something we've never done, right? You already know exactly what happens when you lose your temper. It happens the same way every time. So you can pick a spot early on in that process and hit the pause button."

From the look on his face, Pete apparently had never considered such a thing. I continued.

"The pause button can be anything you want it to be as long as it interrupts what's happening at that moment. You could excuse yourself and say, 'I'd really like to continue this conversation, but I have to go to the men's room. I'll be back in a second.' Then you leave the room and go somewhere to calm down for a minute. Or you can count to 10. Or you can ask questions of the person to get more information; maybe you don't have the full story yet. There are a lot of things you can do; it almost doesn't matter what it is as long as you have a simple, conscious, and constructive way to change your usual response."

The choices we make

I'm happy to say that Pete really took to the idea of the pause button. He even printed out a big red pause button and put a copy on his desk and on John's desk, his partner at the police department.

If one of them is getting frustrated and starting to lose his patience, the other leans over the desk and taps on the pause button. Before long, they won't need the paper pause button anymore.

It's not only Pete's work life that changed. His temper was most powerful at home. After a short time with the pause button and other tools, he started responding differently. We can see from Pete's situation that changing the choices he makes is going to have a huge impact on his life. That's powerful stuff.

Let's say you were on the receiving end of one of Pete's tirades. What would you do? Would you call him names and swear at him? Would you yell back at him? Would you lose your temper too?

You don't have to accept every invitation to an argument.

When someone escalates to the point of yelling, we frequently escalate with him. We convince ourselves we're being disrespected; we convince ourselves we cannot tolerate someone treating us that way, and so we fire back. We rationalize it with statements like, "He made me so mad," "He ruined my day," "He made me lose my temper." Sometimes we say we had to defend ourselves or had to put the other person in his place.

In point of fact, you – and only you – made the choice to escalate. The other person didn't force you. He didn't command your mouth to open, your voice to shout, or your body to flail about in anger. As convenient and comforting as it may be to blame him, you are the only one responsible for your actions. You are 100% responsible for your life.

Here's a wonderful piece of wisdom I once heard: "You don't have to accept every invitation to an argument." Once you understand this, the choices you make will start to change.

How to turn around situations before they become a problem

It's great to know that when a situation is quickly deteriorating, you have simple and effective tools like the pause button. You can identify the physical signs of increasing stress and take measures to short circuit your usual, unproductive response to it.

It would be even better if you could prevent the stress from occurring at all. There is a great tool I call a filter that helps prevent drama from starting.

In one of my previous lives, I worked as an organizer and host of conferences and seminars. It was my fifth day at a new job and I was already hosting a conference. In other words, I had no idea what I was doing.

Between featured speakers, I was at the front of the room making announcements when a woman stood up and took me to task in front of the audience of 150 women. If I had found myself in this position years earlier, I would have been instantly embarrassed. My brain would have shut down because I would have been so panicked about how to respond. I would have been so worried about what the audience would think of me.

But as soon as she stood up, my filters automatically activated.

- She chose to stand up and say something. That's not about me. No need to be embarrassed or respond. Filter it out.
- She chose the words to say. That's not about me. No need to be embarrassed or respond. Filter it out.
- She chose the tone she used. That's not about me. No need to be embarrassed or respond. Filter it out.

She had given me nothing to respond to and no reason to be embarrassed. So far, none of what she said or did was about me. I was simply waiting to find out what actually had to be fixed.

Finally, she made her point about the conference, and then I had a choice to make. I could either get angry at her for calling me out in front of everyone or I could have thanked her for pointing out the inadequacies of the conference.

The only thing I could control in that moment was to own what was mine to own and do my best to let the rest go. Having that awareness meant I was halfway to avoiding drama.

When we choose our responses, we always have an option to give an extreme negative

response, an extreme positive response, or anything in between.

I could have responded in a hostile way, but what would I have gained? For a few seconds I might have felt good about putting the participant "in her place." After that it would have been all downhill. At least some, if not many, in the audience would have been upset. Someone likely would have called my boss. I would have paid for that remark for days and possibly weeks or months thereafter.

Worse, I wouldn't have gotten what I really want: job stability, monthly income, good relationships, success.

More importantly, had I given a response like that, I know it would have been driven by fear. I would have gone into self-protect mode, felt embarrassed, and tried to get my revenge. There is nothing productive about a response like that.

There was no negative fallout from that experience because I chose the extreme positive response. "Thank you so much for your input. I appreciate that. I'll look into it immediately."

Zero drama.

One more story

Stories about reducing drama help us see ourselves in our own situations and show us that alternative responses are available. When we see that, we can begin to change our lives.

This last story comes from a wonderful book called, *How to Talk So Teens Will Listen & Listen So Teens Will Talk*, by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. It's an account by a mother who was having an encounter with her daughter.

"I took my daughter shopping for jeans. Big mistake. Nothing she tried on was 'right.' It wasn't the right fit, or the right color, or the right designer label. Finally she found a pair she liked – a low-cut, skintight number that she could barely zip up and that outlined every part of her bottom.

"I didn't say a word. I just left her in the dressing room and went out to look for a larger size. When I came back, she was still admiring herself in the mirror. She took one look at the pants I held up for her and started yelling, 'I'm not trying those

on! You want me to look like a nerd! Just because you're fat, you think everyone should wear big clothes. Well, I'm not gonna hide my body the way you do!"

"I was so hurt, so angry, I came very close to calling her a little bitch. But I didn't. I said, 'I'll wait for you outside.'

"She said, 'What about my jeans?'"

"I repeated, 'I'll wait for you outside,' and left her in the dressing room.

"When she finally came out, the last thing I wanted to do was 'acknowledge her feelings,' but I did anyway. I said, 'I know you liked those jeans. And I know you're upset because I don't approve of them.' Then I let her know how I felt. 'When I'm spoken to that way, something in me shuts down. I don't feel like shopping anymore, or helping anymore, or even talking anymore.'

"Neither one of us said anything on the whole ride home. But just before we got to the house, she mumbled, 'Sorry.'"

"It wasn't much of an apology, but still, I was glad to hear it. I was also glad I hadn't said anything to her that I would've had to apologize for."

There's so much we could discuss about this story, but let's make just three quick points.

First, the mother stuck to her principles and didn't give in just because it would have been easier. She didn't cave.

Second, she chose her response and maintained her composure. Yes, she was pretty annoyed, but she hit the pause button and removed herself from the intensity of the moment, just like Pete learned to do.

Third, she was able to take the apology her daughter offered, even if "it wasn't much of an apology." So often, we create an expectation in our minds of what a response from someone else should be and when we don't get it, our reaction kicks in. The mother realized that the daughter was apologizing in the only way she knew or could muster in that particular moment, and the mother accepted it.

The number one way to get rid of drama

It's not about anyone else. It's about us, the choices we make, the things we accept, and the places we put ourselves.

But making the right choices is not the first step we take. There is an indispensable step prior to that, a step most people skip over. It's the #1 way to get rid of drama. I call this step Thinking in Advance.

If we want to get rid of drama, we need to understand how drama shows up in our lives.

We must define very clearly and very specifically what we want. Everything flows from Thinking in Advance.

If we want to get rid of drama, we need to understand how drama shows up in our lives.

Let's take a close look at one example. Let's say we want peace in our lives. That's a perfectly reasonable desire. We may be tempted to think we have now done our Thinking in Advance – we want peace. But that's not how it works.

In order to have peace in our lives, we have to decide what that looks like in our daily lives. Does it mean no yelling? Practicing meditation? Not watching violence on television? Exercising regularly? What does the thing you're trying to achieve look like?

If we have a sibling, relative, or friend who is always upset with us and the relationship is strained, that takes some of our peace away. We need to determine if the situation was caused by something we did and if we need to give an apology. If we need to give an apology, we want to Think in Advance how to do it most effectively and genuinely. The goal is to restore our peace. And then we make choices about how to interact with that person in the future.

In order to have peace in our lives we need to decide what's important to us, how we're going to respond if we don't have it, determine whether lack of peace is due to our own actions and choices, and what next steps are necessary.

The Thinking in Advance exercise will show us the kinds of responses we need to use. For example, if you and your significant other decide that peace in your lives means no yelling – and you're both committed to that – then yelling is no longer an option. You will need to decide how you will resolve issues in the future without yelling.

But, you can't decide these things effectively in the heat of battle. Do it beforehand.

If you know that going to your family reunion is a highly stressful experience, one in which people usually start yelling or pushing your buttons, you have to do some Thinking in Advance:

- Should I go to the family reunion?
- Am I going in order to satisfy other people's needs or do I really want to be there?
- How will I respond if I go and someone gets up in my face?
- How will I respond to people's questions or attacks if I don't go?

In order to effectively get rid of drama in our lives, we have to make our choices before we get into the heat of the moment. The following questions are a great place to start Thinking in Advance:

- Am I clear about what I want and how I'm going to get it?
- What am I willing to tolerate? What is unacceptable?
- How do I want people to treat me? Am I treating them the way they want to be treated?
- Is my current response getting me what I want?
- What specific effects or outcomes do I want?
- What kind of environment do I want at home? What kind of workplace do I want? What kind of relationship do I want with my spouse, partner, kids, or siblings?
- How will I respond when things don't go my way? How will I respond when someone is rude to me? If I respond in kind, I won't get the peace in life I want.
- What tools are available to short circuit my usual responses and create more positive, healthy responses?

- What do the people closest to me need? Am I sensitive to their needs and am I doing my best to give that?
- Am I going to get involved in things that don't concern me? How will I respond when people try to drag me into their drama?

In essence, Thinking in Advance helps you create a vision for the life you would like to lead. It's about personal leadership, time management, communication, and addressing your fears.

Once you put in a system of Thinking in Advance, your life will change and you will be on your way to living your dreams. You will Get the Nerve to Succeed.

In closing, here are some additional tips to reduce drama as you set out on your way to making different choices:

- You don't have to accept an invitation to an argument.
- You don't have to react to everything people say.
- You can decide that not everything is about you.
- You don't have to agree with or believe other people's opinions.
- You don't have to own other people's drama.
- You don't have to intervene whenever someone wants you to.
- You don't have to try to change other people.
- You will likely misunderstand the other person if you try to be a mind reader. Reduce drama by asking questions.
- You can't decide what you want and how you're going to get it when you're in the middle of an emotional situation. Think in Advance to get everything you want.

If you put these in place and remember to hit the pause button, you'll be well on your way to having the relationships and success you want, both at work and at home.

About Dr. Joe

Joe Serio is a keynote speaker, trainer, author, and former coward who is known for his work in investigating the Russian Mafia. His Get the Nerve™ series of books and workshops empower people to live their dreams.

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