

**STYBEL
PEABODY &
ASSOCIATES, INC.**



Laurence Stybel, Ed.D., and Maryanne Peabody, MBA, founded Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc.

People Will Gladly Follow You If.... You are a Calm, Assertive Leader.

Stybel Peabody Teaches You How to Fake It
Until You Become a Calm Assertive Leader.

Have you ever seen the cable television show
“Dog Whisperer” starring Cesar Milan?

The title of the show would have you believe it is about dog training. That is not what this show is about. Cesar Milan trains dog **owners** to be effective leaders.

What he has to say about canines in family homes also applies to humans in business situations.

Calm Assertive Leadership.

On the show, Cesar Milan observes that dogs are pack animals. Pack animals are attracted to Calm Assertive leaders.

A frequent theme of the television series is that a “calm but not assertive” owner confuses the dog. The dog thinks, “There seems to be no pack leader. Pack leaders are Calm and Assertive. I guess I must be the designated pack leader for this family.”

Cesar teaches dog owners how to become the Calm Assertive Leader the animal really wants.

Watch What Calm Assertive Leaders Do.

Calm Assertive Leaders have a certain body posture and facial expressions that differentiate them from Calm but Not Assertive Leaders and Assertive but Not Calm Leaders.

Cesar Milan demonstrates the body postures in his work with animals. We also demonstrate the body postures in our work with corporate leaders.

Without getting too political, imagine recent U.S. presidents you would describe as Calm and Assertive; Assertive but Not Calm; and Calm but Not Assertive. Go to [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and watch them respond at press briefings. Focus on voice tones, hand gestures, and eye movements.

How Calm Assertive Leaders Speak to You.

Evan Thomas' history of the Eisenhower Presidency shows how a Calm Assertive Leader

works under intense pressure in high stakes situations. (2012).

The Central Intelligence Agency recommended President Eisenhower authorize the use of covert force to overthrow the elected Guatemalan President. The CIA Director was asked by President Eisenhower, “What do you think Castillo’s (the U.S. backed leader) chances would be without American supplied aircraft?” The Director responded, “About zero.”

Eisenhower then asked, “Suppose we supply the aircraft. What would the chances be then?” The Director responded, “About twenty percent.”

President Eisenhower smiled and gave permission for the aid saying, “The figure of 20 percent was persuasive. If you had told me that the chances are 90 percent, I would have had a much more difficult decision.”

Consider the logic behind the numbers.

Translating this vignette into our model, a statement that there is a 100% chance of success would strike Eisenhower as too assertive and

perhaps unrealistic. But a 20% chance of success appealed to Eisenhower's leadership style as both calm and assertive.

Psychometricians use the technical term "predictive validity" to measure the degree to which a score on a scale or test predicts scores on some future measure. In the above example, the CIA Director said that there was a 20% chance Castillo would be victorious if the United States supplied aircraft. This is a measurable prediction. And the criterion was that Castillo would be the President of Guatemala.

Every day, meteorologists make predictive validity statements: the chances of rain are 40% today.

One of the authors of this article is a psychologist who is retained by companies to make predictions about leadership potential.

Saying the person has "high" or "low" potential is meaningless.

We like to make predictive statements like the following: “Within twenty-four months, there is an 80 percent chance this person would be promoted grade higher without assistance. Within twenty-four months, there is a 65% chance that this person will be promoted two grades higher with coaching assistance.”

Whether the predictive validity statements are made by the CIA Director, a meteorologist, or a psychologist, they are all delivered in a calm/assertive manner.

Now You Try It

Do you wish to be perceived as a calm/assertive leader? Think about ways you can articulate predictive validity phrases. Below are some examples:

1. Within three years of you approving this acquisition, our market share will move from 14 to 21%.
2. If we provide this course to our Chinese college students, within four years we will see the percentage of Chinese students seeking to

come to our institutions increase by 2% while other institutions will see a drop in Chinese students seeking admission.

3. If we join this global alliance, we will see a 10% improvement in referrals we get from outside the United States within three years.
4. If I am lucky enough to get hired by you, I believe that twelve months from today there is an 85% chance that you will rate me “above average” in “achievement of sales results.”

Think about predictive, measurable statements you can make to make a statement that you are a calm/assertive leader.

Pssst.

Here is a secret: it is ok to be wrong.

Money managers, psychologists, and weather forecasters make predictions every day. Sometimes these predictions turn out to be valid. Sometimes the predictions are wrong.

At the end of the day, you will be judged on the preponderance of valid or invalid predictions you made. You will not be judged by one prediction.

I remember a senior psychologist told one of the authors to not be afraid about being bold in making predictions.

“It’s nice if you are right but people understand that you may be wrong.

Whatever you do, do not be vague.”

Calm/assertive leaders are not vague and are not afraid of being wrong.

“It is Perfectly Safe.”

A friend reported getting a routine medical exam from a Physician Assistant for his annual physical exam. The exam itself was performed in a fully competent manner. At the conclusion of the exam, the Assistant stated that there was

something he would like more information about. He was recommending my friend return to the hospital for an ultra sound examination.

The Assistant said, “Don’t worry about ultra sound. It is perfectly safe.”

The phrase “perfectly safe” may have been intended to reassure. But it had the opposite effect on our friend.

Our friend knew people who had lost money investing in “absolutely safe” ventures. This person is savvy enough about risk management in health care service delivery to know that no medical intervention is “perfectly safe.”

He did a web search and found that ultra sound examinations were “generally” safe.

They do heat up bodily liquids like blood and water.

The friend decided against the procedure.

In the context of Calm Assertive Leadership, this Physician Assistant was being Assertive but not Calm.

The following statement would have been calm and assertive:

“We want to look at this part of your body using ultra scan. If there is indeed a tumor and we can identify it early, the probability is about nine on a ten-point scale that we can successfully intervene.

“Any medical intervention contains risks, including ultra sound examination. Those risks include heating up liquid parts of your body that are in the range of the scan. There is no published research on the impact of such scanning on that part of your body.

Based on research done with pregnant women and the babies they are carrying, my estimate of the risk, is one on a ten-point scale. It is my opinion that the potential

benefits of early identification and treatment of a tumor outweigh the risks inherent in the procedure.”

This is typical physician talk. It works well with nervous patients. It is the linguistic structure of calm and assertive leadership.

From a risk management perspective, no customer should ever be told that any intervention is “perfectly safe” or that any investment is “perfectly secure.” It unnecessarily opens the institution to a Pandora’s Box of litigation.

Watch Your Language.

Let’s examine the same issue in another field: weather forecasting.

A weather reporter can be calm but not assertive: “On one hand, it might rain but on the other hand it might be sunny.”

President Truman was so impatient with such unassertive advice he asked if he could hire a “one armed economist.”

Our weather reporter could be assertive without being calm:

“I guarantee it will rain today.”

Some viewers might be reassured. Many viewers might be agitated since weather patterns can be unpredictable. And the television station’s risk management staff ought to be concerned with such a statement.

Finally, the weather reporter could be both calm and assertive:

“There is a 70% chance of rain.”

Use a Likert Scale.

The late University of Michigan psychologist

Rensis Likert developed a useful way of asking questions we recommend our clients use as a method of communication. He would first make a statement and then ask for a confidence rating about that statement. For example, a classic Likert question in medicine is “I am in pain.” Please give me a number between 0 and 10 to express how much you agree with that statement with 0 being total disagreement and 10 being total agreement.

A typical business question using a Likert scale is called the Customer Loyalty Index: “I would recommend this company’s product/service to a friend or colleague.” Please give me a number that best expresses your level of agreement from 0 (never) to 10 (always).

Suggestion for Calm Assertive Leadership:

Consider phrasing your arguments in Likert ways: make a strong statement but then qualify it with a number from 0 to 10 to express your confidence. Keep in mind that a “10” is

equivalent to the physician assistant's comments that the medical intervention is "perfectly safe."

Stybel Peabody Conducts a Retained Search.

A company has retained us to conduct a search for a Board member. Our job is to present candidates that fit the job qualifications and would add value to the Board. We introduced a candidate the following way: "I believe this candidate is worth meeting. On a scale of 0 to 10, I would give my level of confidence as an 8."

The client reviewed my report and responded in the following manner: "I have reviewed the candidate report you presented and would give this person a "4" on your ten-point scale based on the following reasons: x, y, and z."

Through the mutual use of Likert phrasing, we were able to keep the discussion job focused

and away from emotional words like “good” “bad” “awful.”

We had given the candidate an “8” and the client had given the candidate a “4.” We had missed something important.

Using the Likert system, we were able to engage in a focused and calm discussion about where we had missed things.

Script It to Leverage It.

Creating a calm and assertive leader may require coaching. Creating a calm and assertive culture may require explicit use of Likert-like scripts and enforcement over the years.

Once you think about leveraging scripts, you are moving from leadership intervention into system-wide organization culture change.

References:

Evan Thomas. IKE'S BLUFF: President Eisenhower's Secret Battle to Save the World. NY: Little Brown, 2012.

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Stybel Peabody provides companies with “leadership and career success” for valued senior level talent. Core services include retained search (Board members, CEOs, COOs, CFOs), leadership development coaching, and executive-level outplacement.

For a free 15-minute consult, contact:

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