

EPISODE 138: HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES CAREFULLY**1. WHAT IS MY MOTIVATION FOR BATTLE?**

- Know yourself: Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*: “If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.”
- Know your motive: Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*: “The general who advances without coveting fame and retreats without fearing disgrace, whose only thought is to protect his country and do good service for his sovereign, is the jewel of the kingdom.”
- Are you naturally confrontational?
- Do you have a lot of stored anger and you just want to let it out?
- Do you feel hurt or offended and you’d like to get even?

2. WHO OR WHAT AM I BATTLING AGAINST?

- Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*: “Do not interfere with an army that is returning home because a man whose heart is set on returning home will fight to the death against any attempt to bar his way, and is therefore too dangerous an opponent to be tackled.”
- Know who you are going against:
 - Who will you be talking to?
 - What do you know about his/her personality?
 - What’s at stake for the person who disagrees with you?
 - What are they protecting?
 - Will they be willing to “fight to the death?”
 - What are you up against?
 - A simple issue or an entire corporate culture?

3. WHAT DO I STAND TO GAIN FROM THIS BATTLE?

- Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*: “Move not unless you see an advantage; use not your troops unless there is something to be gained; fight not unless the position is critical. No ruler should put troops into the field merely to gratify his own spleen; no general should fight a battle simply out of pique.”
- What is the advantage that you see?
- What is it that you (or the family or company) have to gain?
- Are you simply “gratifying your own spleen?”
- There is a cost to every battle. Is the benefit worth the cost?

4. WHAT WOULD THE COST OF FAILURE BE?

- Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*: “A kingdom that has once been destroyed can never come again into being; nor can the dead ever be brought back to life. Hence the enlightened ruler is heedful, and the good general full of caution.”

- There is always a price for failure:
 - Loss of respect for you or your position.
 - Creating a confrontational atmosphere.
 - Polarizing the organization or family around an issue.
 - Inviting a counter-attack.
 - Professionally: You could get fired or fail to get promoted.
- Count the cost. Can you afford to fail?
- Is this an issue you're willing to die for, personally or professionally?

5. IS THERE A MINIMAL BATTLE STRATEGY?

- Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*: a chapter called "The Sheathed Sword"
"The skillful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any fighting; he captures their cities without laying siege to them; he overthrows their kingdom without lengthy operations in the field."
- Is there a way to address this issue without it becoming a full-scale battle?
- Are there approaches other than direct confrontation that I haven't considered?
- How can I keep this battle from expanding into all-out war?

6. IS THERE AN EXIT STRATEGY?

- Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*: "In all history, there is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare. Only one who knows the disastrous effects of a long war can realize the supreme importance of rapidity in bringing it to a close."
- Every general knows that it's easier to get into a war than to get out of it.
- Ask yourself:
 - Is this issue resolvable?
 - Can this issue be resolved in a reasonable period of time?
 - Have I chosen an issue that's too large in scope? Can the topic be narrowed?
 - Will I open a Pandora's box that can never be closed again?

Are there other communication-related topics you'd like to hear the Communication Guys address? Let us know on our [Facebook page](#).