



PROJECT MANAGEMENT  
CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE

A.J. CLARK SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING  
Civil & Environmental Engineering Department



# SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

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*2020 Project Management Symposium*

# Course Objectives

**Upon completion of this presentation, you should be able to:**

- Describe the origin & meaning of “Speaking Truth to Power”
- Incorporate lessons learned, including Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, Anita Hill, Doug Elmendorf, and more
- Learn and apply five practical steps for speaking truth to power
- Understand the concept of Speaking Truth to Power as applied to Project Management

# “Nothing Strengthens Authority So Much As Silence”

- Leonardo da Vinci





The way to right wrongs,  
is to turn the light of  
truth upon them.

—

IDA B. WELLS





It's very, very hard to speak truth to power when the truth is unpleasant. I think it's one of the toughest things especially a young person has to do and the only way you can do it is if you're willing to walk out the door if he doesn't take your advice. Or if you're willing to walk out the door if he goes over the line.

— David Gergen —

AZ QUOTES

# Origin and Meaning

## Etymology

- **Παρησία**
- **Transliteration “Par-eh-see-ah”**
- **is a Greek noun which literally means “*outspokenness, frankness, freedom of speech*,”** claimed by the Athenians as their privilege, “<sup>1</sup>
- (πᾶν "all" and ῥῆσις "utterance, speech“)

# Origin and Meaning (cont.)

**“Speak Truth to Power”**

**- Phrase originated from the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) pamphlet “Speak Truth to Power: a Quaker Search for an Alternative to Violence, published in 1955.**

- **Popularized the phrase “Speaking Truth to Power”**
- **Colleague of Dr. Martin Luther King in the 1950s and 1960s**

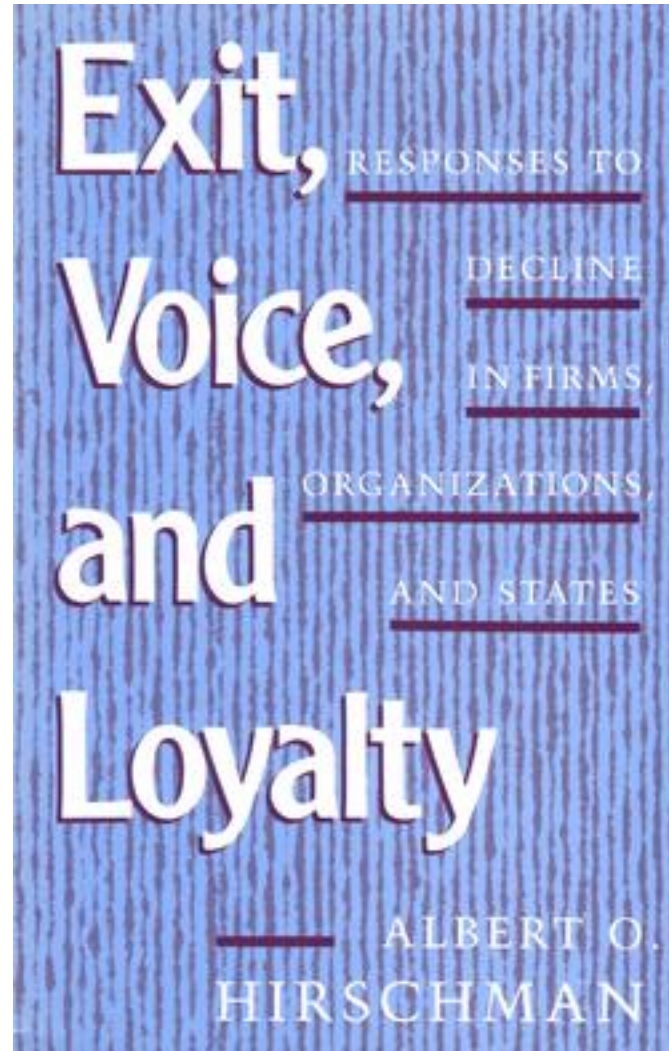
## Bayard Rustin





# Albert O. Hirschman

- **Seminal book published in 1970**
- **Employees have 2 response options**
- **The greater the availability of exit, the less likely voice will be used.**



# Anita Hill

- **Wrote best seller in 1998 “Speaking Truth to Power”**
- **Her experience forever changed how we talk about imbalance of power in the workplace.**



# Time Magazine's Persons of the Year - 2002

- **SHERRON WATKINS**  
**of Enron**
- **COLEEN ROWLEY** of  
**the FBI**
- **CYNTHIA COOPER** of  
**WorldCom**





# Dr. Anthony C. Fauci

- **His experience is a great example of speaking truth to power**
- **Spoke truth to power to multiple American presidents going back to Ronald Reagan**





# Doug Elmendorf

September 13, 2011

- **Another great example of a public figure who spoke truth to power**
- **Elmendorf was the Director of the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office**



<sup>2</sup>From NPR News 9/13/11 ( 4 minutes)



# A Five Step Plan for Speaking Truth to Power



- 1. Know Your Facts**
- 2. State Your Case**
- 3. Stand Your Ground**
- 4. Keep Your Cool**
- 5. Offer Options**

# Know Your Facts



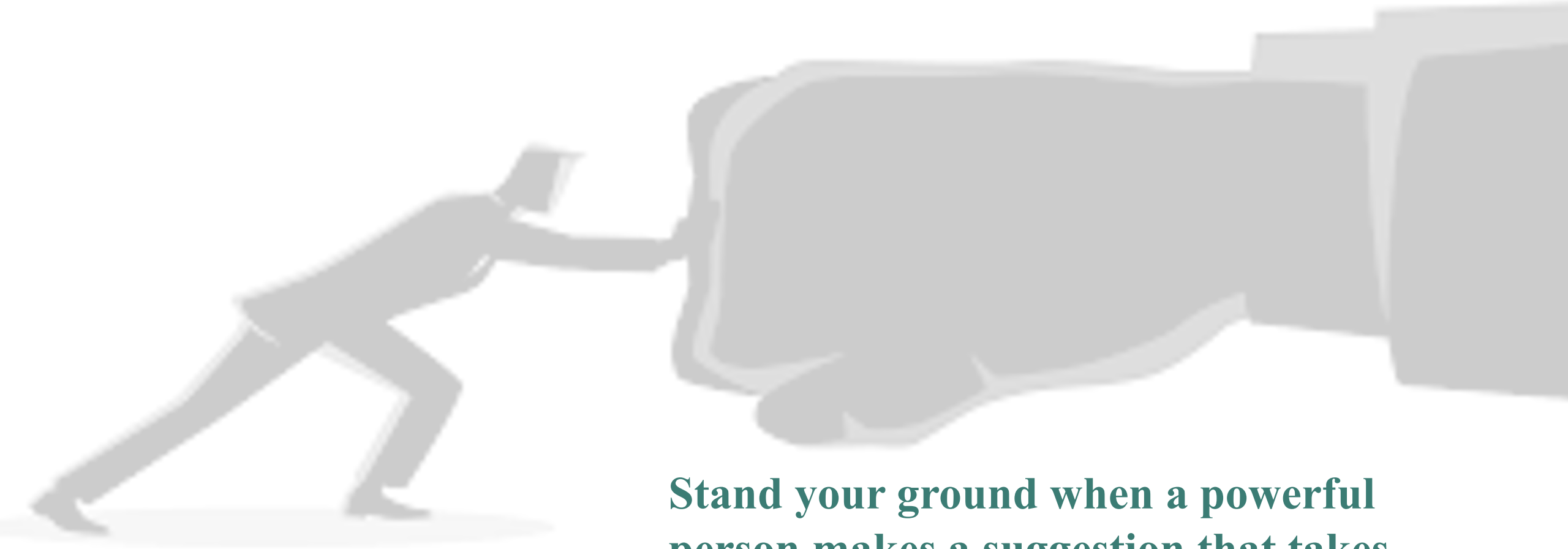
- **Become the expert**
- **Earn credibility to say what has to be said**
- **Build a solid reputation as a talented person who knows their stuff and gets the job**

# State Your Case

- **Clear, succinct communication enhances your ability to speak truth to power.**



# Stand Your Ground



**Stand your ground when a powerful person makes a suggestion that takes the collective eye off the ball.**

# Keep Your Cool

- **Keep cool under pressure.**
- **Be respectful**
- **Going soft on the people and hard on the issues.**





# Offer Options

- **Avoid backing the other party into a corner.**
- **Offer options that square up with the facts of the case.**



# Why Are Some Project Managers Afraid to Speak the Truth?

**Executives do not  
appreciate how risky it can  
feel for others to speak up  
- *Harvard Business Review*,  
2017**





# Impact to Project Managers of Effectively Speaking Truth to Power

- **Can boost the odds of having sufficient time for planning instead of rushing into implementation**
- **Being asked for the impact when additional requirements are being considered**
- **Getting executives to make and support timely decisions**

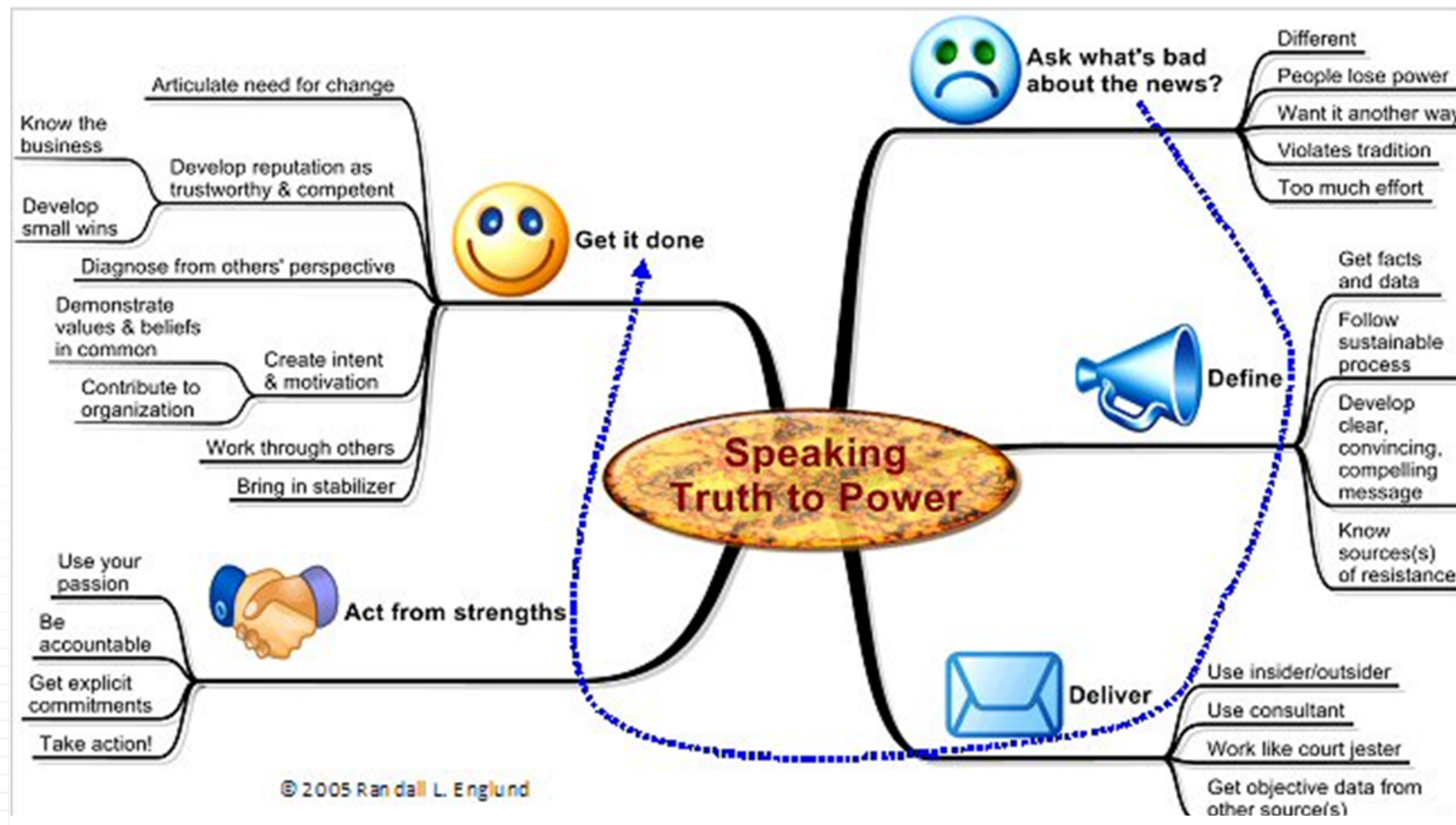


# Markkula Center for Applied Ethics Recommendations

- **Must be wholly truthful**
- **Devoid of self interest**
- **Without harming any innocents**
- **Without spite or anger**
- **Authenticity is key**



# Randall Englund's Model



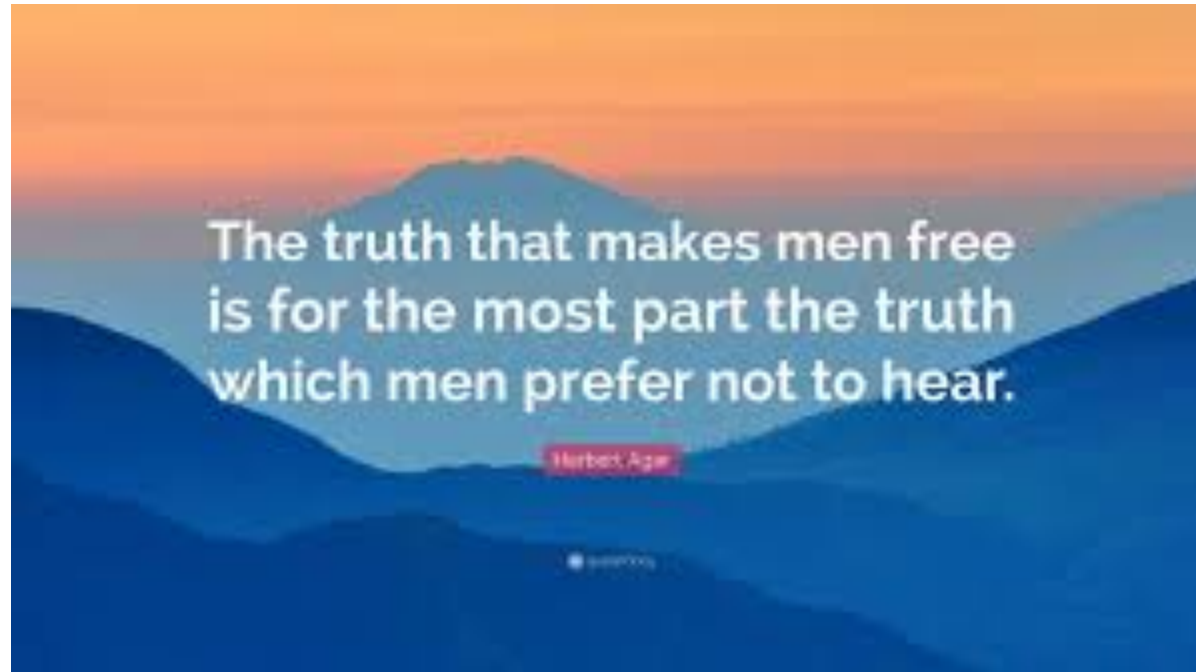
## Randall Englund's Model (cont.)

- **Act from your personal strengths**
- **Develop a clear, convincing, and compelling message and make it visible to others.**
- **Use the passion that comes from your deep values and beliefs about the work.**

## Randall Englund's Model (cont.)

- **Be accountable**
- **Get explicit commitments**
- **Take action**
- **Tap the energy**

# Herbert Agar Quote





## Seminar Discussion

- Describe a situation where you had to speak truth to power to an executive/project sponsor. How did you approach the situation? What worked? What didn't?
- As a project manager, how do you create an environment where team members are comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions?
- Can employees truly speak up without retribution?

# References

<sup>1</sup> Liddell & Scott (1940) *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press

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<sup>2</sup> NPR's *All Things Considered*: "A Potential Superhero For the Supercommittee". September 13, 2011

O'Brachta, Michael, PMP *How To Get Executives To Act For Project Success: Building A Strong Mutual Partnership*. 2018

O'Toole, James, *Speaking Truth to Power: A White Paper. Old Tales and New Leadership, Organizational Culture and Ethics*, Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, October 15, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Vanity Fair interview on March 31, 2020: <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2020/03/anthony-fauci-on-dealing-with-coronavirus-and-trump>