The Literal Truth

by Cathy C. Bonczek

Say what you mean. Mean what you say.

I was once talking to a friend about a mutual acquaintance. My friend liked this person more than I did, so I was being polite in my inquiry. My son was with me and he was fairly young at this time, maybe 5 or 6 years old. He blurted out, "But you said you didn't like that person, Mommy!" Gulp.

He was genuinely baffled by my saying nice things about someone I didn't care for. This is the same son who used to enjoy telling people my exact age, made a habit of correcting me in public if I ever said anything slightly exaggerated, and could be counted on to share embarrassing stories and family secrets if anyone ever praised us. " My mom yells when she gets angry, you know."

My son has autism and his communication is very literal and is often brutally honest. It's taught me a great deal about being authentic. I learned not to coach him to dissemble. He doesn't understand the need. I learned to own all my flaws because they would likely be on display. **And I learned the joys of having someone tell you that they love you and really, truly mean it.**

I should add that my son's way of communicating doesn't prevent him from lying he learned that as a teenager. "I did clean my room" is the one I hear most often. But he remains emotionally honest.

What if we all did this in our corporate communications? Reduced our messages to their most unvarnished form? We'd stop saying things that are vaguely pleasant: "We're cautiously optimistic." "We are right sizing." "There are headwinds."

Say what you mean. Mean what you say. Own your mistakes and imperfections as a leader. Many of you know my aversion to the words unique, differentiated and excited because they've lost their meaning and power from overuse. It's hard to stop and think about what you're saying and to find other ways to say what you mean. I find it's always worth the effort. **What would you say if you just said it?**

CCB Communications©