

Talk that transforms: 5 communication habits for high-growth leadership

Insights from Charles Duhigg,
Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and
author of *Supercommunicators*

As AI reshapes the way we work, human skills—like connection, empathy, and communication—are becoming leadership’s biggest differentiators. At Uplift 2025, Charles Duhigg broke down what makes certain people “supercommunicators”—and how their habits fuel stronger teams, faster trust, and more resilient cultures.

Here are 5 habits of supercommunicators every high-growth leader should master:

1. Match the conversation type	2. Ask deep questions, not surface ones	3. Prove you’re listening
<p>Not all conversations are created equal. Duhigg outlines three types:</p> <p>Practical Solving problems or planning</p> <p>Emotional Sharing feelings, seeking empathy</p> <p>Social Relating, building identity or belonging</p> <p>Supercommunicators recognize what type of conversation the other person is trying to have—and match it. That alignment builds instant trust and connection.</p>	<p>Surface questions skim the facts. Deep questions explore values, experiences, and beliefs—and create space for meaningful connection.</p> <p>Instead of “What hospital do you work at?”</p> <p>Try “What made you decide to go to medical school?”</p>	<p>It’s not enough to nod along. Supercommunicators demonstrate they’re listening by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Summarizing what they heardAsking, “Did I get that right?”Following up with curiosity <p>This builds what psychologists call conversational empathy—and it’s crucial in both conflict and collaboration.</p>
<p>“You think you’re having one discussion, but actually you’re having multiple kinds of conversations.”</p> <p>—Charles Duhigg</p>	<p>“When we ask someone how they feel about their life—not just what their life is—we invite real connection.”</p> <p>—Charles Duhigg</p>	<p>“Proving we’re listening shows we want to connect—and makes others more likely to listen in return.”</p> <p>—Charles Duhigg</p>

4. Foster safe vulnerability	5. Shift from solving to understanding
<p>Vulnerability doesn't mean oversharing. It means saying something someone else could judge. When leaders open up (just a little), others feel psychologically safe to do the same.</p> <p>It's in these moments—when both parties lower their guard—that trust grows fastest.</p>	<p>Especially in high-stakes moments, resist the urge to jump to solutions.</p> <p>Ask: “What does this mean to you?” It's the fastest way to discover unspoken fears, goals, or motivations.</p> <p>Case in point: A leading surgeon cut unnecessary operations by 70%—just by opening with that question.</p>
<p>“</p> <p>“When I feel vulnerable, and you respond by revealing something of yourself, we can't help but feel connected.”</p> <p>—Charles Duhigg</p>	

Top takeaway for leaders

Leading is about more than setting direction—it's about leaning in. The best leaders aren't the loudest in the room. They're the ones who can turn conversations into connection, fast.

Start here: Ask a teammate a question that shows your curiosity about who they are in the world—beyond work. And see what kind of conversation unfolds.

Build a culture of connection—one conversation at a time

BetterUp's AI-powered platform helps leaders become supercommunicators by developing the human skills that fuel trust, collaboration, and impact. Through personalized coaching and science-backed tools, your team can strengthen empathy, listening, and communication—at scale.

Ready to turn better conversations into better performance?

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