Effective Communication - Protocols for Improved Advocacy:

→ Make your thinking process visible

What to do:
- State your assumptions, and describe the data that led to them.
- Explain your assumptions.
- Make your reasoning explicit.
- Explain the content of your point of view: who will be affected by what you propose, how they will be affected, and why.
- Give examples of what you propose, even if they’re hypothetical or metaphorical.
- As you speak, try to picture the other people’s perspectives on what you are saying.

What to say:
- “Here’s what I think, and here’s how I got there.”
- “I assumed that . . .” “My thinking is based on the following assumptions . . .”
- “I came to this conclusion because . . .”
- “To get a clear picture of what I’m talking about, imagine that you’re the customer who will be affected . . .”

→ Publicly test your conclusions and assumptions

What to do:
- Encourage others to explore your model, your assumptions, and your data.
- Refrain from defensiveness when your ideas are questioned. If you’re advocating something worthwhile, then it will only get stronger by being tested.
- Reveal when you are least clear in your thinking. Rather than making you vulnerable, it defuses the force of advocates who are opposed to you, and invites improvement.
- Even when advocating: listen, stay open, and encourage others to provide different views.

What to say:
- “What do you think about what I just said?” or “Do you see any flaws in my reasoning?” or “What can you add?”
- “Here’s one aspect which you might help me think through . . .”
- “Do you see it differently?”
Effective Communication - Protocols for Improved Advocacy:

→ Ask others to make their thinking process visible

**What to do:**
- Gently walk others down the ladder of inference and find out what data they are operating from.
- Use unaggressive language, particularly with people who are not familiar with these skills. Ask in a way which does not provoke defensiveness or “lead the witness.”
- Draw out their reasoning. Find out as much as you can about why they are saying what they’re saying.
- Explain your reasons for inquiring, and how your inquiry relates to your own concerns, hopes, and needs.

**What to say:**
- “What leads you to conclude that?” “What data do you have for that?” “What causes you to say that?”
- Instead of “What do you mean?” or “What’s your proof?” say, “Can you help me understand your thinking here?”
- “What’s the significance of that?” “How does this relate to your other concerns?” “Where does your reasoning go next?”
- “I’m asking you about your assumptions here because . . .”

→ Protocols for Improved Advocacy: Compare your assumptions to theirs

**What to do:**
- Test what they say by asking for broader contexts, or for examples.
- Check your understanding for what they have said.
- Listen for the new understanding that may emerge. Don’t concentrate on preparing to destroy the other person’s argument or promote your own agenda.

**What to say:**
- “How would your proposal affect . . .?”
- “Is this similar to . . .?”
- “Can you describe a typical example?”
- “Am I correct that you’re saying . . .?”
Protocols for Facing A Point Of View With Which You Disagree:

What to do:

- Inquire about what has led the person to that view.
- Make sure you truly understand the view.
- Explore, listen, and offer your own views in an open way.
- Listen for the larger meaning that may come out of honest, open sharing of alternative mental models.
- Raise your concerns and state what is leading you to have them.

What to say:

- “How did you arrive at this view?” “Are you taking into account data that I have not considered?”
- “If I understood you correctly, you’re saying that . . .”
- “Have you considered . . .”
- “When you say such-and-such, I worry that it means . . .” “I have a hard time seeing that, because of this reasoning . . .”

Opening Lines:

When . . .

- Strong views are expressed without any reasoning or illustrations . . .
- The discussion goes off on an apparent tangent.
- You doubt the relevance of your own thoughts.
- Two members pursue a topic at length while others observe . . .
- Several views are advocated at once . . .
- You perceive a negative reaction in others . . .
- You perceive a negative reaction in yourself . . .
- Others appear unresponsive . . .

You might say:

- “You may be right, but I’d like to understand more. What leads you to believe . . .?”
- “I’m unclear how that connects to what we’ve been saying. Can you say how you see it as relevant?”
- “This may not be relevant now. If so, let me know and I will wait.”
- “I’d like to give my reaction to what you two have said so far, and then see what you and others think.”
- “We now have three ideas on the table [say what they are]. I suggest we address them one at a time . . .”
- “When you said [give illustration] . . . I had the impression you were feeling [fill in the emotion]. If so, I’d like to understand what upset you. Is there something I’ve said or done?”
- “This may be more my problem than yours, but when you said [give illustration] . . . I felt . . . Am I misunderstanding what you said or intended?”
- “Is there anything that I can say or do that would convince you otherwise?”
Protocols for When You’re At An Impasse:

What to do:

- Embrace the impasse, and tease apart the current thinking. (You may discover that focusing on “data” brings you all down the ladder of inference.)

- Look for information which will help people move forward.

- Ask if there is any way you might together design an experiment or inquiry which could provide new information.

- Listen to ideas as if for the first time.

- Consider each person’s mental model as a piece of a larger puzzle.

- Ask what data or logic might change their views.

- Ask for the group’s help in redesigning the situation.

- Don’t let conversation stop with an “agreement to disagree.”

- Avoid building your “case” when someone else is speaking from a different point of view.

What to say:

“What do we know for a fact?”

“What do we sense is true, but have no data for yet?”

“What don’t we know?”

“What is unknowable?”

“What do we agree upon, and what do we disagree on?”

“Are we starting from two very different sets of assumptions here? Where do they come from?”

“What, then, would have to happen before you would consider the alternative?”

“It feels like we’re getting into an impasse and I’m afraid we might walk away without any better understanding. Have you got any ideas that will help us clarify our thinking?”

“I don’t understand the assumptions underlying our disagreement.”