

EMPATHY IS NOT WEAKNESS

Empathy doesn't have a downside. When you let the other person know you understand where they're coming from, you build an invisible connection of trust that leads to the best chance of success. It's the game theory optimum.

Leading with empathy doesn't mean you're weak or a pushover. You don't compromise your position. Empathy is not sympathy. With sympathy, you're dragged into somebody else's quicksand. Emotions get involved. Leaders are horrified they'll appear as if they're weak, a pushover, or not the expert. But it is possible to be soft-spoken and even show kindness but still not give in.

These days I'm seeing more and more stories of female leaders finding success while still maintaining their femininity. Up until very recently a woman had to become one of the guys to be successful in business. In many ways that myth is still out there. But I've watched female leaders—such as Camille Vasquez, who was the trial attorney in the Johnny Depp/Amber Heard defamation trial—model a leadership style that is uncompromising, empathetic, and feminine. I see her as one of many emerging female leaders who are achieving a higher level of success than their male counterparts.

We impact and influence the people around us by staying students of human nature. It is energizing to see new leaders who are building an invisible connection of trust because they listened closely to the people they work for and with, and made sure the people felt heard. When we hire people with the right core values and mentor them as they develop, we grow the pool of people we want to collaborate with. We build leaders who spark creative solutions and who raise the collective intelligence in a room.

Ultimately, the master of the game ends up being the one who most quickly figures out the rules of the dynamic unfolding between you and your counterpart. Be agile as you gather information. Stay creative with your problem-solving. And whatever you do, don't forget that no strategy is consistently more effective in gaining a win than tactical empathy.

About Chris

Chris Voss is the best-selling author of *Never Split the Difference*, a former lead international FBI kidnapping negotiator, and the CEO and founder of The Black Swan Group.

During his twenty-four-year career with the FBI, Chris served as the FBI's hostage negotiation representative for the National Security Council's Hostage Working Group and has represented the US at two international conferences. He's been recognized for a number of awards, including the Attorney General's Award, and the FBI Agents Association Award for Distinguished and Exemplary Service. He has received negotiation training from the FBI, Scotland Yard, and Harvard Law School.

Since retiring from the FBI, Chris has earned his master's in public administration from Harvard University and taught at a number of esteemed institutions, including the University of Southern California Marshall School of Business, Georgetown University, Harvard University, Northwestern University, the IMD Business School in Lausanne, Switzerland, and the Goethe Business School in Frankfurt, Germany.

Following the success of his book *Never Split the Difference*, Chris coauthored a book with real estate guru Steve Shull, *The Full Fee Agent*, which provides practical and skillful negotiation techniques for real estate agents—both experienced and expert. Chris has been featured on podcasts and media outlets such as *Time* magazine, CNN, CNBC, the Lex Fridman podcast Inc., and others.

His company, The Black Swan Group, established in 2008, aims at providing negotiation coaching for professionals all over the world through corporate and individual coaching, as well as live events.

When he isn't coaching or giving keynote speeches, Chris is passionate about learning, working out, reading, and spending time with his family. He currently lives in Las Vegas.

To connect with Chris and his company, you can go to blackswanltd.com. You can also follow him on LinkedIn and Instagram.

CHAPTER 2

FROM EMIGRANT TO CEO

A Journey of Courage, Data, and Purpose

By Julia Bardmesser

“**D**o you understand,” he asked, “you may never see Baba Tanya again?”

I knew my father-in-law was just trying to make sure I fully understood the irrevocability of our decision, but his comment came across as cold and uncaring, and I held it against him for years.

Baba Tanya was my beloved grandmother, and as my then husband and I had decided to emigrate to America, I, even then a student of history, knew that the iron curtain could come down again at any time without warning and I would never see my family again.

What do I remember of our journey? Not much, just moments in time, like old photographs or fragments of stilted home movies.

I remember the farewell circle of my friends and relatives on a platform in the Kyiv railway station. My mom was in that circle too, and neither one of us cried, though both of us were very aware that there were no guarantees we'd ever see each other again. Oddly, the circle felt festive, a kind of bon voyage party with all of us naively choosing to believe that everything would turn out well and that the others would follow us to America as soon as they could.

I remember standing just inside the door of the Vienna-bound

train in Chop and looking at my father. The train wasn't moving yet, but its tracks crossed the border, and our car was sitting on the other side. I could see my dad standing behind the invisible line, closely watched by border police. We were still so close, yet already vastly apart. It was after midnight and bitterly, relentlessly cold, and he was wearing dress shoes. I saw him dance a bit to keep his feet from freezing. But he stayed, unwilling to abandon the platform for the warmth of the station until the train pulled away and we couldn't see each other anymore.

Today, thirty-three years later, I am the CEO of Data4Real, a strategic advisory company providing trusted, unbiased, reality-based advice to organizations on a mission to create maximum value from data, AI, and digital assets.

I've spent the last thirty years growing a data-centric career in the financial industry, and I have served in leadership positions in some of the most well-known financial institutions in the world.

But back then, I was a young woman—a bit scared but mostly hopeful—embarking on the greatest journey of my life with no resources other than my brain and my courage.

Both courage and helpfulness came from my family, mostly from Baba Tanya.

Baba Tanya, my grandma, was a scientist. She was born in 1918. She worked as a materials research scientist all her life, but at fifty years old, she finished her dissertation, got her PhD, and became a head of a large research team in one of the premier material science institutes in Kiev.

She had high-level security clearance and worked with the Soviet Union space and weapons program. My grandmother knew about Chernobyl before all the civilians did—she was asked about the best materials to put on top of the reactor to dampen the radiation.

We spent a lot of time together, especially in the summer, in monthlong vacations in resort towns near Riga, Latvia. We walked, we talked, we read, we entertained her science colleagues,

and I absorbed her confidence and her belief that everything is possible, always.

Year in and year out I remember sitting down for dinners she hosted for her colleagues across the entire Soviet Union. They were brilliant men (and yes, except for my grandma, they were all men), and I loved hanging out with them. That early entry into such a community of such intellect and depth of knowledge, not to mention power, served me well throughout my career.

I don't get intimidated easily.

That's a gift that would come in handy as I worked my way up to senior-leadership positions in what was largely a male-dominated financial-services industry.

Another thing from my upbringing that turned out to be massively useful, especially as I moved into the data-management space, is caring deeply about accuracy and truthfulness. The Soviet Union propaganda had neither, so as I moved into my new life, I wanted to do everything I could for this to be different.

IF YOU WANT TO HAVE INFLUENCE, DON'T BE A CLOISTERED NUN

I had just been promoted to manage a data team at a financial company. I was excited! I knew the challenges the company was facing and was confident I could make a difference.

I happily walked into the building and made my way over to introduce myself to a colleague.

She looked at me and said, "I feel so sorry for you."

Huh? Where were the congratulations?

She went on, "I feel sorry for you because data is like electricity—nobody notices it unless it's not working. It's only when you flip the switch and nothing happens that people realize its importance."

Even now, many years later, in the data-is-the-new-oil and AI era, this statement rings uncomfortably true.

Why do data teams go unrecognized? It's simple, really. Change

is disruptive, and humans, by nature, are resistant to it. Data teams challenge the status quo, question long-held beliefs, and push boundaries. Our recommendations are met with skepticism, and our findings are often massively inconvenient.

But the biggest reason is that we spend most of our time hidden behind our computers and working through other teams.

As I took over yet another data team a few years later, I saw the same dynamic and I looked for something that would help both my team and the broader business and IT community break this pattern.

Luckily, the pictures from my recent food tour to Seville helped. I loved Seville! It was gorgeous, boasting a cathedral that is huge and ethereal at the same time, oranges hanging on the trees, and the food was incredible! I told my team a story...

One day we went on a food tour of the city. Our group was buzzing about a particular cookie that was on our list of must-haves, but the excitement wasn't just for the cookies. The chatter was about the fact that the cookies were made by cloistered nuns who lived behind the monastery walls right in the middle of the city but were never seen. Cloistered nuns cannot see or be seen by the outsiders, but they needed additional income and so were selling cookies based on the centuries-old recipe.

How were we going to buy cookies from someone we weren't allowed to see or speak to?

We went into the courtyard surrounded by the stone walls and saw the most ingenious contraption to sell a cookie.

There was a window in the stone wall, and in that window there was a tall lazy Susan. We put some money in it and turned it, and a moment later—a box of cookies!

The cookies were great, and after we polished them off, we spent some time wondering whether there were other foods they made and about what life behind that stone wall might be like.

This kind of mystery was charming in a food tour, but for a data team—not so much!

I shared this story (and the picture) with my team and the rest

of the organization. It was painfully obvious that no other division in the organization had any idea why we did what we did, how to leverage us and how our work improved business operations. We were invisible, cloistered nuns!

You cannot have any influence if people don't know you exist, or if they know you exist but they don't know *why*.

Ditch the lazy Susan, come out from behind the stone wall and proudly share not just the cookies but why the organization needs them.

ANCIENT SUMERIAN BUSINESS SECRETS

The Sumerians were a **people of southern Mesopotamia** who lived between 4100 and 1750 BCE.

They are credited with being responsible for the first-ever recorded instances of writing.

They are called the Sumerian Tablets. These stone tablets are carved with ancient Sumerian text, and when they were discovered, scientists, archaeologists, and academics were beside themselves with anticipation.

Could these ancient stone scrolls hold the key to the meaning of life? Would they reveal religious epiphanies?

No.

What disappointed translators discovered was that the Sumerian Tablets were nothing more than a list of products. It was the first-ever inventory! Instead of life-changing, sacred guidance, they had before them a list of transactions, administrative concerns, and records of purchases. In essence, they revealed the first-ever recorded instance of *data*!

The value of data was perhaps more understood thousands of years ago than it is today.

What I have seen time and time again is that the business divisions of organizations have trouble describing their offerings, they have trouble discerning how their offerings fit into market, and they struggle to read the data that answers those questions.

And we all know what happens when something is complicated—we give up and walk away.

I have seen brilliant executives throw their hands up in exasperation and make decisions based on their gut feelings because they didn't have the data or, even worse, they had it but didn't trust it.

That's why I made it a practice to train my teams to speak the language of their business counterparts.

It's tempting when you're persuading someone to resort to impressing them with your knowledge, throwing in complex industry jargon and showing off your expertise.

But that's often counterproductive.

I taught my team to stop talking technology and instead explain in plain terms how the findings would increase or decrease profit, and to offer recommendations in a way that would make sense to anyone regardless of their level of understanding of data.

The most persuasive communication is simple to understand and directly tied to the outcome the other party wants.

No one is interested in diving into the inner workings of a clock. They just want to know what time it is!

Leave out the details and go *simple*.

DATA RICH, INSIGHT POOR

In any negotiation or business interaction that requires two sides to come together, it's not uncommon for the parties to have every bit of information they need to make a sound decision but no clue how to glean meaningful value from that information.

That's what we call being data rich but insight poor.

We have the facts, but our failure to understand the facts brings everything to a screeching halt.

How can anyone change or take corrective action if they can't make sense of the actionable conclusion the facts are presenting?

This is a call to *lead*.

If you find that the person or team that you're trying to persuade

just isn't understanding the facts, don't view it as a stalemate but rather an invitation. You are being invited to lead the conversation and bridge the gap for them!

I tell my teams all the time to remember that the role of a data officer or data analytics officer is not a technology role.

It's a change-management job.

The role isn't just to own the data strategy; it's to make the *other* side own it.

No matter what industry you're in, this shift in perspective is essential to master persuasive communication—the other party should not be seen as just a stakeholder in the negotiation but rather as its owner.

Ask questions such as:

What are your priorities for this year?

What are you working on?

What frustrates and challenges you the most?

When you understand what they are trying to achieve and the obstacles standing in their way, you are in a much better position to explain how your point of view supports their desires and solves their fears.

Don't just present your facts.

Instead, provide insight into how those facts ultimately, with time and collaboration, will culminate in something even greater than they are imagining right now.

YOUR MOST PERSUASIVE TOOL IS PURPOSE

Baba Tanya ultimately made her way to the United States a few years after me. I loved being able to just lift the phone and talk to her every day.

Over the years, she remained sharp, solving crossword puzzles and asking my daughter questions about her science courses in school. I never saw the typical cognitive issues that come with age. Yet I watched her shrink, both physically and metaphorically.

In Russia my grandma was not your typical cookie-baking,

sweater-knitting baba. She was writing books, leading research teams, planning adventures, and following her insatiable curiosity!

The woman who was so alive and revered in her home country was small and invisible in the United States. I would watch her interact with a store clerk and wonder if he had any idea this little old woman that he was bartering with used to be one of the most brilliant and respected scientific minds in the Soviet Union!

This change in rank seemed to cause a quick deterioration.

It made me wonder, "Was it really geography that robbed her of wielding influence? Or had she simply disconnected from her purpose, the move being so monumental and the change so great that she could no longer connect to her own brilliance?"

It happens to all of us at some point.

We find ourselves in a new place, or with a new team, or in a room we feel unqualified to be in, and we shrink.

What I have found time and time again is that if I just reconnect to my inherent purpose, courage follows.

Persuasion can be intimidating, but purpose will always shine brighter than credentials.

Remember that the next time you are in a room of people with big titles, or finding your way in a new country, or advocating for a cause that's close to your heart.

You belong there. Your goal is valid. And your gifts are needed.

Baba Tanya died in Brooklyn at the age of ninety-nine.

The influence and impact she had on my life are hard to put into words, but I'll try.

Because of her I was brave.

Because of her I was able to do work that inspired me and make the impact *I* wanted to make in this world.

Because of her I am sitting here with a lifetime of adventures and wisdom under my belt, telling you these stories.

If you want to have influence and make an impact, get out front; lead productive, respectful conversations; look for ways to provide

insights that are meaningful to the other party; and if they still can't hear you?

Return to your purpose.

It will always tell you exactly what to do next.