



Entertain. Inspire. Empower.

How to speak a teen's language,
even if you're not one.

by Josh Shipp

When I attended Yukon High School in Yukon, Oklahoma, we had quite a few motivational speakers come through. Every couple of months brought another assembly and we'd march out of class to the auditorium and slouch down into the stiff-backed seats.

The majority of these guys were awful. They had a good message to deliver, but they lost their school-age audience as soon as they bounded onto the stage in their shirt and tie and shouted, "Don't do drugs!"

Right. Been waiting all our lives for someone to tell us that. You're the first, pal. I thought this school was pro-drugs.

Not that we hated assemblies. On the contrary, assemblies were times to catch up on important business. In assemblies, teachers didn't care where you sat — so the two kids who got separated for setting each other on fire? Reunited! Catching up on sleep was also popular, along with giving yourself an arm tattoo with a ballpoint pen.

Not me, of course. Oh, no! I would never do that during an assembly. That was the other kids.

Of all the speakers I remember, one was a beacon of light in the auditorium of darkness. And he played Simon Says.

Simon Says is a game we're all familiar with. I think an understanding of Simon Says was a requirement for passing kindergarden. It's this old-school game and you haven't played it in so long, it almost sounds like it's going to be stupid. You're going to play Simon Says with us?

In case you need a refresher, **here are the rules of Simon Says:**

- You win by doing exactly what the leader “Simon” says, no more and no less.
- You get “out” by messing up and not doing what Simon says. The last person standing wins.
- There can be only one Simon in the room. If someone else tries to tell you to do something, don’t listen to him or her, or you will be out.
- There is no talking during Simon Says. So if your friend gets out and you’re like, “Hehe, you’re out!” Guess what. Haha, you’re out too, because you talked.

He was a Simon Says expert. A black belt master of Simon Says, if you will. I can still remember how he started the game:

“Simon says, Simon says begins right now. Okay, everybody stand up and let’s get started.”
And everybody stood up.

And everybody was out. Beautiful. I was witnessing the work of an artist, a true craftsman.

Out of my four years in high school, he was the **ONLY** speaker I can remember. My friends who were there for six, said the same.

WHY? He entertained us.

ENTERTAIN.

With teenagers we must **EARN** the right to be **HEARD**.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, by age 18 the average American teenager will have spent more time watching television (approximately 25,000 hours) than learning in the classroom.

Teenagers have been conditioned to expect a certain amount of entertainment, and will disengage if they don't connect. Plugged into music, the internet, television, movies and video games, the world of entertainment is the language they are accustomed to. Sometimes it is easier to trust a TV screen than a human being, after all, a TV screen won't let you down. Therefore, it can be tough to earn their attention and trust. We have to break through the barrier and show teenagers that we care.

What teenagers don't get from technology, is a living, breathing, human being. I honestly think that deep down teenagers want to connect. They, like all of us, are starving to interact with others. We just have to invest the time to meet them where they are. Sadly, most people who have something amazing to share with teenagers don't get their message across. They don't build trust.

How do you build trust?

ENTERTAIN

Be Authentic.

Be Unique.

Be Yourself.

ENTERTAIN doesn't mean we have to juggle flaming pumpkins or do a stand up routine. BUT we do, for the love of all things holy, have to do something interesting and unique to us as individuals. Can you sing, do you have a funny laugh, can you rap, can you do a magic trick, can you dance, can you not dance? We all have unique talents that can engage people. Think about what you have to offer. Don't try to be something you are not. Authenticity is key. Teenagers can spot a phony a mile away.

ENTERTAIN doesn't mean to tell one joke that you found on the internet and then bore us to death the rest of the time. We must sprinkle something interesting throughout. Remember just about everyone has A.D.D. and our attention span is about seven minutes (until the next commercial). So think like a television sitcom. Don't go any longer than a few minutes without some sort of entertaining or interesting commercial break. Gotta go, I just saw a bird.

INSPIRE

My foster parents one night when I hit a very low point in my life said to me “Josh, you are not a problem, you are an opportunity.”

Those few, brief, powerful words forever changed my world. They **inspired** me.

INSPIRE. Teenagers have found a voice after something I said encouraged them. Teenagers have handed over suicide notes and said “thanks, I don't need this anymore.” Teenagers in the millions, all over the world have heard my story of challenges becoming opportunities. All because my foster parents inspired me. My foster parents have spoken to millions worldwide with that one living room chat. They changed my world and the worlds of millions.

INSPIRE. You have a teenager's attention and trust, now where are you going to lead them? Remember, everything you do should have the intention of changing the world for the better. Why else should you open your mouth. If you are going to say something, let it be words of inspiration. If your intentions are for improving that teenager's life, INSPIRE them. Tell them why they are needed and important. Express your concerns honestly and if you approach them with respect, they will respect you in turn.

INSPIRE a teenager to see their potential, their opportunity to change and make a difference. You have to speak their language. You have to be vulnerable. You have to open up first. Teenagers learn more from your mistakes and failures than from your success. Don't be afraid to share.

Most people think their mistakes will ruin their credibility, but in reality, it allows teenagers to respect you more. Sometimes the very thing in life that has hurt us the most is the VERY THING we can use to help others.

TAKING ACTION

Find a word from the list on the next page (or your own list) that connects with you. Ask yourself does it connect with the teenager(s) you are trying to reach. Find common ground for you to meet on. Notice what is similar and what is different about the teenager(s).

TEENAGERS WANT

Acceptance | Approval | Attention

A Voice | To Be Understood | Direction

Fun | Respect | Role Models

Sincerity | Time | To Feel Needed

True Friends | Trust | Unconditional love

EMPOWER

Have you ever been stuck with a problem on the computer, and someone swooped in and quickly fixed it without allowing you to figure out the steps? When you were stuck again in the future you would not know what to do. Teenagers are the same way with life challenges. If you swoop right in and fix it, they won't be prepared in the future. Ask teenagers questions. Involve them in the process of discovering the right solutions. They can discover new skills to solve their problems. Give examples, but then be supportive as they trudge through the hard work. If you always tell them the answer to their challenges, they cannot discover it on their own, and the lesson won't stick. Empower them with the steps to solve a problem and when you are no longer physically present, your words or the lesson you helped them see, will be there. It is about the process.

EMPOWER. Listen. Really listen. Don't just wait to talk. Make a list in your head of what they are telling you. Repeat it back to them for clarity. Ask them if you are on the right track.

Teenagers, or anyone for that matter, are empowered by knowing that they are valued, that they contribute.

EMPOWER. Pay Attention. This pertains even to large audiences. Sometimes responses are nonverbal. Are they on the same page with you? Are they getting it? Check in with their non-verbal and verbal cues. Half your audience is blind and half is deaf. You may have to use more than your words. Visual aids, body language, and eye contact can all support what you are saying. If the volume was turned off, could they still get your point? Are you understanding one another? Listen to their responses with your eyes and ears. We are always a teacher and a student at the same time. Empower them to talk with friends and continue the dialogue. Empower them to look at things from more than one direction.

EMPOWER. Set up accountability, check in with them on what you have discussed. It shows you care, and in this day and age that stands out. Teenagers are surprised when you invest time and you don't have to.

TAKING ACTION: EXPECTATIONS AND AGREEMENTS

If it is a team or individual you should go through and establish what you expect during your time together. Is it to have fun? To learn something? How do you expect to achieve it? If you can break into groups, have them brainstorm. They will take ownership of the guidelines when they are included in the process of creating them.

Why Expectations and Agreements?

- They know what is expected of them... there are no surprises.
- They have to give what they want to receive... for example, respect.

- They signed their name or took ownership by participating in the process.
- You can always come back to your foundation when things get rocky and remind them of the guidelines they helped create.

ENTERTAIN. INSPIRE. EMPOWER.

After I had been speaking professionally for a couple of years, when I was about 20, I decided to bring Simon Says into my show. I play it for about five minutes in the beginning of my talks. I always get everyone out. It really is a great way to bond with the audience, to create a sense of camaraderie, *joi de vivre*, or something French like that. It gets everyone involved and a little nostalgic for kindergarden.

People have asked me the secret to running a good game of Simon Says. Lord only knows why they want to know — maybe they have big families with nothing to do or maybe they have a score to settle with their kindergarden teachers.

The answer is, the secret is in the pace.

There really is an art to it. You don't want it to take too long. The first few times I incorporated Simon Says, when I first took it live, of course it wasn't as smooth. At this point I've got it down. I know. Once we actually get into the game I'll pull out the hands up, hands down; the touch your knees, touch your nose; I do the raise your hands if you're still in the game, and I do the dance thing. Bam. Ball game.

And at that point, usually everybody's out. It's over. So four moves, and everyone's gone.

Oftentimes I'll get a comment like, "I loved it when you played Simon Says with us and everyone was out within the first instruction." Yep. Now I'm the black belt master.

LAST MINUTE THOUGHTS:

- Have a plan, a vision, a goal, teenagers can tell if you are not prepared.
- Craft your message into point form, think of it as mile markers.
- Use games, personal stories, and real life examples. It is like a really good movie. It doesn't always spell it out, but it allows you to dig deeper.
- Stay current with youth culture. Understand where they are coming from and what is influencing them. Mall, Magazines, Music, Movies, Surveys.
- You cannot enforce the rules if they are not clearly stated. Expectations and agreements can help.
- Only talk as long as you can hold their attention. If you can hold them for twenty minutes talk for eighteen.
- What modality should you use? Every student learns differently, either incorporate all or find out the best way for individuals to take in information.

You are not always going to get it right. It is going to take practice. You will have to watch your pace. Check in and see that the teenagers you are trying to reach are still engaged and if not, shift your approach like changing the directions on Simon Says. When you get it right it is like gold. The moment you see the positive changes and the way it can ripple out. You will be hooked. Then **you will be the black belt master.**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

It's been said there's a thin line between comedy and tragedy...well, Josh Shipp crosses that line with the speed and accuracy of a race car driver in the Indy 500. His intelligent nature coupled with comedic timing might lead some to believe he has lived a long life...he has indeed, but he just so happens to be in his early twenties.

Abandoned, neglected, and abused as a child, Josh's personal story of triumph over tragedy inspires youth to overcome life's struggles and live life to the fullest. Josh could have moved on and forgotten painful memories but he uses them to benefit others.

He now travels the world as a youth motivational speaker, writes books on teen development, and has recently started an inspirational film company called Empower Films™ whose mission is to create relevant short films that entertain, inspire, and EMPOWER teenagers.

<http://www.joshshipp.com>

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	PC	MAC
Zoom in (Larger view)	[CTL] [+]	[⌘] [+]
Zoom out	[CTL] [-]	[⌘] [-]
Full screen/Normal screen view	[CTL] [L]	[⌘] [L]

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