

## Communication that produces results

In addition to setting and planning goals and determining tasks or sets of tasks that will achieve the goal, it is essential that individuals assume accountability for specific assignments. This is where the Group Leader’s skill in communication can help make the group successful.

Fernando Flores researched language dynamics and whether the language had its intended effect. He broke down those dynamics into an essential set of speech acts that if used intentionally could accelerate clarity, alignment, commitment, and follow through.

Flores’ work became influential to ontological learning across a number of leadership programs and coaching and consulting approaches. Effective use of these speech acts makes a difference in business environments, families, and in influencing others such as legislators, volunteers, and RESULTS advocates.

### Speech Acts:

- **Assertions**
- **Assessments**
- **Declarations**
- **Requests**
- **Offers**
- **Promises**

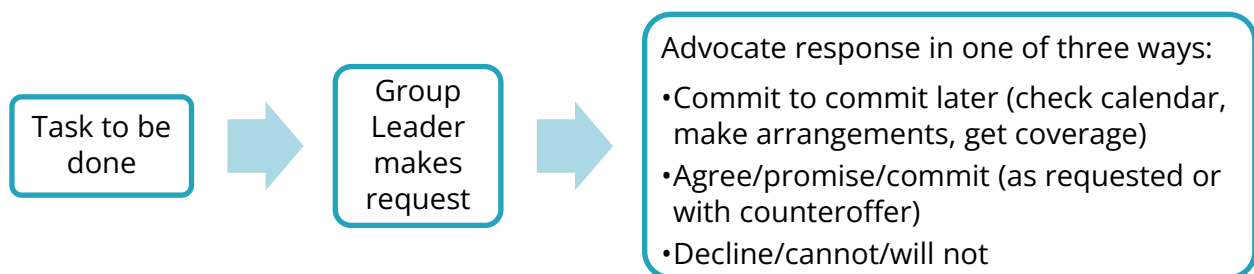
As a result of both how important Flores’ contribution has been and how widespread the usage has become, there has been much written about these speech acts. You may have participated in learning or coaching programs that leveraged this material.

The theoretical and empirical foundation for this work is both interesting and extraordinarily useful in ensuring results that require many people and teams to collaborate. Alan Sieler writes: “It is important also to regard an organization as a **network of commitments**. Within their specialized roles, individuals need and rely on each other’s specialist knowledge

and skills. Through continually providing service to each other, they enhance their own and others’ individual and team performances.”

In the RESULTS Group Leader Training program, certain speech acts — **requests and promises** — are highlighted as intentional tools to forward results. These speech acts are particularly important for Group Leaders who are asking others to take on tasks and managing the process of delivering on plans.

These steps of delegation show how these speech acts apply:



When leaders and activists work together in a clear and principled way and assume positive intent, their intentional use of language to clarify and deliver on commitments supports breakthroughs in results.

Great group leaders build an understanding in the team that the ability to make clear requests and promises fuels the group's ability to deliver results by making clear and reliable commitments. Sometimes new Group Leaders are hesitant to direct and delegate work to other volunteers, yet learning to use requests and promises (commitments) clarifies expectations and facilitates planning and collaboration.

### **Keys for Group Leaders**

- Learn to make clear requests and allow others to respond and choose to take on accountability
- Listen for and confirm those responses and the related expectations
- Recognize when a commitment has not been made — and, with precision, clarify whether it is a decline or a commitment to commit later
- Reinforce personal responsibility and the team sense of identity and capability within the group
- Summarize and align on commitments at the end of the meeting. This is particularly important when group members have interdependent roles.

### **Requests**

- Make a clear request: "I request that you do 'x' by 'y' (time)."
- Adapt your own language while being mindful to actually make a request with clear parameters.
- Specify to whom you are making the request — especially when the action will require more than one individual to follow through.
- Focus your request on a future action that the recipient is able to perform.
- Effective requests identify any conditions of satisfaction (how will I know when the action is complete).

### **Promises and other responses**

- A promise is a commitment for future action.
- As a Group Leader, you want to listen carefully to the responses to your requests. It is a good idea to confirm your understanding of what was committed.
  - The receiver might promise but want to renegotiate the conditions of satisfaction – this is called a counteroffer. (Yes, I will do that, but I can't meet that timeline. I can commit to the following week).
  - The receiver might promise but not fully understand the request as you made it.

- The receiver might seem open to the request but unable to commit in the moment. This offers the possibility of the individual committing to commit at a later time. Group Leader can confirm when and how the advocate will commit.
- At times, you will receive a direct decline. More often, you might get no response. Be sure to clarify when there is no response rather than assuming the individual agrees.
- A good practice is to establish a regular routine of confirming next steps and commitments made at the end of your group meeting — this can help surface any differences of understanding. This can then be used at the next meeting to check on progress.

## Sources

Ontological Coaching Institute. (n.d.). Articles & Case Studies.

<https://www.ontologicalcoaching.com.au/articles>