“Got a minute?” Has anyone ever asked you this? Does it immediately send up a yellow flag in your mind: Why is he asking me this? Does he want me to have a cup of coffee with him? Does he want advice, or a favor? It’s an invisible question—you don't know what he wants, you do know it probably won't take just a minute, and you don't know how to respond. Your honest answer is probably, "For what?" But you don't feel comfortable being so blunt—and you do feel cornered.

I get this a lot in my office. I handle it by reminding the person to be visible with “Why are you asking?” or “Tell me more.” This way, rather than uncomfortably saying "Yes" without having any idea of what's coming, I'm being direct in my communication and the final result will be better for both of us.

Another example of invisible communication is "What are you doing Friday night?" You wonder, Is she just curious? Does she want to invite me somewhere? Or maybe she wants me to babysit? What if she simply said, "I have an extra ticket for the concert on Friday night—would you like to come with me?" How easy is that to answer?

We all speak invisibly at times. When I catch myself doing it, I remind myself to finish the sentence: “Do you have a minute to discuss . . . ?” "What are you doing Friday night? I have concert tickets and I'm hoping you can join me." When your intention is clear, people don’t feel as if they’re being manipulated or trapped—and they feel comfortable responding to you.

Visible communication makes your purpose clear. Communication is flowing and easy, and helps build stronger relationships. Make your intent visible, make your purpose clear, and strengthen your relationships.