

Mistakes and Improvements with Communication

Making Insulting Comments: Even if you believe the other person acted like a "jerk" or "moron," insulting her/him by calling her names is not likely to be an effective strategy to get her/his cooperation to make agreements with you. If you say things to or about her/him that s/he finds insulting, s/he will probably continue to fight with you.

Choice of words: Some people don't recognize that their choice of words may be offensive to the other person. (Example: "You have been harassing me for weeks!") While the speaker may very well feel "harassed," a term like "harass" is likely to evoke a defensive reaction, especially if followed by the word "you." A more productive discussion would probably evolve from questions like, "Given my concerns, how would you have preferred for me to respond?" or "If I have those concerns in the future, how would you prefer for me to respond?"

Impulsive Comments: Some of the things you may be most tempted to say or do will not be helpful. If you feel mad or hurt as a result of something the other person says, you may be tempted to say things or act in ways that will harden the conflict. Resist this temptation to the best of your ability. This does not mean "keep it to yourself." It means "discuss whatever concerns you in ways the other person will be able to hear." If nothing else, if/when such a critical moment occurs, ask for a "time out" or don't say anything until you are able to avoid the impulse to lash out. The silence may be uncomfortable, but it is far less damaging to the goal of getting the other person's cooperation to work with you to resolve the dispute than giving in to the urge to "respond in kind."

"Always/Never" comments: For example, if you say, "You always miss those meetings," the other person may feel compelled to point out all the times s/he attended the meetings. Similarly, if you say, "You NEVER get to our meetings on time," you may find yourself in a conversation about the time(s) when the person DID get to the meeting on time. If you make any of the above mistakes, try to stop, take a breath, and, if necessary, apologize. After you've done something that insults the other person, that's really all you can do. Pretending as if nothing happened when you know that you have acted in a disrespectful or hurtful way toward the other person will not promote respect, trust, or cooperation.

WHAT WORKS BETTER?

"I Statements and Ask Open-Ended Questions vs. "you" statements:" For example: "It made me feel incompetent when you asked me four times about my progress in completing the report." I don't understand why you did that" Describing how it made you feel creates less of a defensive situation. It allows the other party to "save face" and explain themselves because the speaker does not force the issue as them being "right" or "wrong" but instead, makes an honest "I" statement. Also, sometimes people have different information and are not intentionally trying to frustrate you. If this is the case, questions or "I statements" will allow you to avoid inflaming the conflict and deal with the facts.

Explain Intent/Perception: "I'm sorry that I upset you yesterday, I should have explained myself better. When I said X my intent was...but I'm afraid it came across as criticizing to you." OR "When you said X yesterday, I perceived it as meaning..., which really bothered me, can you explain if that was your intent?"