

‘How’ and ‘why’ what we say affects our effectiveness as a Leader.

Current Phrasing	Possible Alternative Phrasing
Yes but.....	Yes and.....
No No, what you mean is.....	Can you help me by clarifying what you mean.....
No, you’ve got that wrong.....	What I hear you saying is..... Is that correct? or Can you help me understand this a little better please.....
You just don’t understand do you.....	I’m not sure I have explained myself very well. Let me try and clarify what I mean a little better.....
Your talking absolute rubbish.....	I sense there are some complexities here that are not clear to me, can you tell me more about how this works?

Many times what we say and the way we say it derails effectiveness and causes unnecessary complications in a relationship. It can be seen by others as attacking, manipulating, controlling, challenging, and sometimes threatening. (fight, flight, freeze or appease) This often stimulates the other person to defend their sense of personal self-worth in order to maintain their self-image or to save face. Both sides subsequently enter into a process of verbal self-defence attacks and counter attacks, defending and attacking to reposition themselves within the relationship. This vortex of decline saps energy and creativity and can lead to feelings of tension, exhaustion, stress, adrenaline overdosing, and increased cortisol levels within the body. (*core stress hormones*)

In the current pressurised business environment, we face innumerable daily exchanges that facilitate the above process to be considered by some as quite normal. Unfortunately, one person’s sense of short term victory over another can lead to feelings of betrayal, disappointment, anger, and even depression. None of which are good feelings on which to build positive relationships.

Our choices of behaviours are used by us to adapt to life’s rich pattern of experiences, but defensiveness can become destructive in relationships. Defensive behaviour is best described when:

- The behaviour is inflexible, and dogmatic. You believe you are justified in your rigidity.
- The motivation comes from past needs such as competence, significance, and lovability.
- You take things personally. You feel its ‘happening to you.’
- You think about it long after the incident.

Individuals, teams, as well as organisations, often see the need to protect their self-image to cope with events, and consequently resort to using defensive behaviours. Many seek to place the blame for their own insecurities or failures on an outside source since that protects the ‘self-image’. A ‘healthy’ individual, team or organisation will evaluate the facts and utilize a more mature approach to cope with the situation they find themselves in.

If the perception of an attack or threat is a true belief, then we seek ways to support that belief. Being defensive becomes a pre-emptive strike supporting that belief and a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Defensive behaviour, and 'the level of force'. It is generally accepted in most human societies that a perceived threat may not be answered with a level of force *greater* than the level of force of the threat itself. For example, if someone threatens you with deadly force (e.g., with a gun), you may justifiably use deadly force and shoot the attacker with your own gun. If you see someone breaking into your car, you cannot justifiably shoot the thief with a gun because he is not directly threatening you with deadly force. There is a twist to this last scenario, though. If there were a woman in the car and you believed that she was in grave physical danger from a man who could overpower her, then, even if he were unarmed, you could threaten him with a gun to protect the woman from a perceived deadly threat.

If you push or pressurize someone in the workplace, they will want to resist, to push back against the threat. Your pressure is a veiled threat, however, and not an open attack. Therefore, those who feel threatened cannot justifiably express direct aggressive hostility to you in self-defense. No one would be justified in getting up and hitting you; nor would they even be justified in verbally accosting you. But, when a man sees a woman threatened by your pressure, he may defend her with a level of force that he could not justifiably use against you in his own defense. Moreover, in defending the woman, the man receives the satisfaction of hurting you as he wants to hurt you for having hurt him. (That the men defend the women is an artifact of male physical strength in comparison to female weakness. It may not be politically correct, but it is biologically truthful.)

Reality is what we take to be true.
What we take to be true is what we believe.
What we believe is based upon our perception.
What we perceive depends upon what we look for.
What we look for depends upon what we think.
What we think depends upon what we perceive.
What we perceive depends upon what we believe.
What we believe determines what we take to be true.
What we take to be true is our reality.

Gary Zukov

That's How the Fight Started!

My partner sat down on the couch next to me as I was flipping channels. They asked, "What's on TV?" I said, "Dust." **and that's how the fight started....**

My wife was hinting about what she wanted for our upcoming anniversary. She said, "I want something shiny that goes from 0 to 150 in about 3seconds." I bought her a scale. **and that's how the fight started....**

When I got home last night, my partner demanded that I take them someplace expensive...so, I took them to a Petrol Station..... **and that's how the fight started....**

My wife and I were sitting at a table at my high school reunion, and I kept staring at a drunken lady swigging her drink as she sat alone at a nearby table. My wife asked, 'Do you know her?'

'Yes,' I sighed, 'She's my old girlfriend. I understand she took to drinking right after we split up those many years ago, and I hear she hasn't been sober since.'

'My God!' says my wife, 'Who would think a person could go on celebrating that long?'

..... **and that's how the fight started....**