



### Speaking

The ability to deliver instructions and other information through spoken word is particularly crucial in supervisory work. The following guidelines suggest ways of carrying on effective spoken communication:

- Speak as directly and concisely as possible. Clear, brief packages of information are easier to digest than convoluted or wishy-washy long ones. When extensive instructions are needed, they may be broken into understandable segments and supplemented by a written note for later reference.
- Avoid insider terms and jargon that may not be understood by receivers of the message. For example, “Take the blue goose over to the Gerken place and pick up the green cattle.” What a new employee may not know is that the Gerken place is where the Browns now live, the blue goose is the trailer that was painted red last year, and the “green” of the cattle is not their color.
- Ask open-ended questions to check on how others understand the intended message. Open-ended questions are those that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” For example, “What parts would you like me to further explain?” should reveal more than “Do you understand?” “When do you think this job will be done?” taps more than “Will you do that now?”
- Beware of multiple messages that conflict. Confusion and frustration can result from inconsistencies either within parts of a verbal statement or between words and gestures. “No, I’m not angry” does not couple well with finger-shaking and a red-face.

Wording and tone often influence whether employees “hear and accept” or “ignore and reject” a spoken instruction or other message. Alternative statements in three types of situations follow. Which statement would more likely get what you need from an employee?

- Asking for help: (A) “Let’s do...” vs. (B) “You help me do...”
- Assigning work: (A) “Would you please...” vs. (B) “Go do...”
- Expressing feelings: (A) “I’m upset about...” vs. (B) “You make me mad...”

### ***Using “I” Messages***

Framing statements as “I” messages is a technique for expressing a need or point of view that might otherwise provoke defensiveness. “I” messages also help keep communication open by implying the speaker’s ownership of a reaction rather than projecting responsibility onto a “you.” People tend to hear “I am upset that you didn’t ask me” much differently from “You made me angry when you didn’t ask me.”

Delivered in a firm but calm tone of voice, “I” messages are especially useful as a first step in dealing with conflict situations. The following are elements of an “I” message in a certain situation:

- The behavior or situation you want changed: “When the tools aren’t put away...”
- How you feel about the situation: “I feel annoyed...”
- Why you want the situation changed: “Because I end up wasting time trying to find what I want.”
- What you want done: “I would like you to put all the tools you use back where they belong when you’re finished with them.”
- Request for agreement and a commitment to follow through: “Will you please get in the habit of putting things away after you use them?”

The complete “I” message with these elements:

*“When the tools aren’t put away, I feel annoyed because I end up wasting time trying to find what I want. I would like you to put all the tools you use back where they belong when you’re finished with them. Will you please get in the habit of putting things away after you use them?”*

Not all “I” messages need to be as long as the example above. Using shorter or even partial “I” messages can have positive impact on communication.

Comments that make people feel devalued or threatened reduce the chances of getting to the bottom of a problem and eliciting a constructive response. “Red flag” or “trigger” words tend to arouse sensitivities, particularly when used in expressing frustration, setting limits, and criticizing.

Figure 6.3. Some common “red flag” words or phrases.



**You should....**

You have to....  
 You must....  
 You are supposed to....  
 You goofed....  
 Slowpoke....  
 Stupid, dumb....  
 I demand....  
 Every time you....

**Your weaknesses are....**

You never....  
 You always....  
 You don't understand....  
 You are confused....  
 Wimpy....  
 Lazy....  
 Your attitude....  
 You do this all the time....

**Example trigger statements and substitute “I” messages**

You are a loudmouth.

*I noticed you talked loudly at our meeting.*

You fail to see what I mean.

*I don't think I explained it well.*

You never show up for your weekend shift. You're such a jerk.

*When you aren't here on weekends, I'm left with all the responsibility.*

You misinterpreted me.

*I think you see it differently than I meant.*

You didn't complete this right.

*This wasn't finished the way I had in mind.*

You were supposed to buy feed today. What's wrong with you?

*I'm disappointed you didn't buy the feed today. Now I'll have to make a special trip for it.*

You are wrong to do it this way.

*Let me explain why I would like it done this way.*

What's wrong with you? You have a bad attitude toward your brother.

*I notice that when your brother asks for help, you won't give it to him. What's going on?*