



General Principles for Communicating Effectively in Difficult Situations

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Most people have times when they know they are going to have to speak to someone and it's probably going to be a challenging task. People can be aggressive, stubborn, rude, ignore you, stonewall, and engage in other actions which make it difficult to talk about what you need to discuss. There are even some situations where someone is very angry and aggressive, and it can be scary to have to communicate with that person. There are specific ways to handle communicating in each of the different situations, however, below are some general principles to bear in mind when communicating with someone you and others might see as difficult.

1. Know yourself. Know your beliefs, your attitudes, and your triggers. What actions and words of others trigger certain emotions in you? We all carry our own pain points. We all hear certain words and sentences and they get our backs up. The better you know yourself, the more you know what triggers you, and the more you can keep from getting emotional in the situation. Knowledge around how you react to certain people is important so you can manage yourself.
2. When communicating with someone, first seek to understand. Mostly we start by judging and the other person can pick this up and hostility arises. Try and approach the situation by being a good listener. Don't make assumptions about what the person will say. Don't try and dominate the conversation in the beginning proving you are in the right. Just listen and get a good understanding of what the person is saying. Ask clarifying questions if needed so you are both on the same page in terms of understanding what is being said. Sometimes people do just need to vent. Once they have been listened to, they will listen to you. However, don't allow someone to abuse you.

3. Understand that hurting people hurt others. No matter how great your communication some people will say things that hurt. Almost everyone who is hurtful with their communication is someone who is in pain. Aggression is often a cover up for fear and even sometimes anxiety. Try and not let yourself get hurt by what someone says.
4. Don't take what is said to you personally. Communication reflects our beliefs, values, attitudes, socialisation, experiences etc. What people say to you is a reflection of how they view the world, not how you are. When someone is bad-mouthing another person, they are not telling you about the other person, they are in fact, telling you about who they are. Who needs to go around saying mean things about others? People who like to be mean.
5. You teach others how to treat you. Listen and be understanding but don't be a doormat. Respect and value yourself and insist others do too. You can assert yourself without being emotional. You can make it clear to others what behaviour is not acceptable to you without having to resort to disrespecting the other person.
6. You cannot communicate effectively when you are extremely emotional. Rather go away and calm down and then communicate.
7. Act, don't react. What this means is be intentional about how you communicate. If you react to what someone else says, they are controlling you. Rather own your power. Instead of reacting to what is said, think about it and decide how you want to respond. In other words, be strategic about how you respond. Think about what response would work best for you and then act.
8. Generally speaking, in all instances, you want to communicate assertively. Stand up for yourself and ask for what you want, but in such a way that it respects the self-esteem of others.

In almost everything we do in life we communicate. Miscommunication is probably responsible for a lot of the unhappiness and frustration in our lives. Learning to be proactive in communicating constructively will pay off for you. This is not about winning some contest, it is about understanding what someone else is saying and putting your point across clearly and effectively. If you can learn to be a great communicator then your relationships in every sphere of your life will work better. Your personal life will improve and so will your business and career prospects.