

Taking the War Out of Our Words

Introductory Workshop

The Art of Powerful Non-Defensive Communication

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Sharon Strand Ellison, M.S., Founder and Executive Director of the Institute for *Powerful Non-Defensive Communication*, is an international communication consultant, an award-winning speaker, and the author of *Taking the War Out of Our Words*. Sharon was a nominee for the *Leadership for a Changing World Award*, sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the Advocacy Institute. She and her daughter, Ami Atkinson, produced the audio-book, *Taking Power Struggle Out of Parenting* winner of a Benjamin Franklin Award. Sharon has developed a communication process that gives people the ability to eliminate defensiveness in both professional and personal interactions. She offers inspirational keynotes with cutting-edge content, as well as workshops and other training programs. Her public speaking skills her ability to role-play enhance her clarity and enliven her presentations.



In the field of Mediation, and other forms of ADR, Sharon has been a speaker for local, state, regional, national and international mediation organizations, such as, The Association of Conflict Resolution, International Conference and the American Bar Association, International ADR Conference. She has also been a keynote speaker for conferences including the ADR Association of Northern California; the Georgia Office of Dispute Resolution; Heartland Regional Conference of Mediators; Arkansas Alternative Dispute Resolution Commission; Virginia Mediation Network; the University of California, San Francisco, Medical School Work-Life Mediators; Kaiser Permanente, California Annual Statewide Ombuds/Mediators Conference; The US Navy, International Mediation Conference; California Family and Conciliation Courts; Federation of Law Societies of Canada, National Family Law Program; and the IACP International Conferences for Collaborative Family Law Professionals. Sharon has trained court mediators, including those at the Sacramento Superior Court, CA and those in the Toronto, Canada, region; as well as in London, England, at The Centre for Dispute Resolution, 10th anniversary conference.

Sharon has been an invited guest speaker for the ADR Working Group for the federal government in Washington DC. Her presentation was also live-streamed to government offices and available on 100 phone lines for those outside Washington DC. An invited guest speaker for the 11th Annual Kaplan Lecture, in honor of Judge Kaplan, an early proponent of mediation for divorcing couples, Sharon received an honorary award for being a pioneer in the field of communication.

Sharon also provides training for organizations in more than a dozen professional fields, including: Hewlett Packard, Wells Fargo, General Dynamics, United Way and the Smithsonian.

In the area of community, cultural competence and leadership programs, Sharon has provided training programs for organizations such as the the Women's Global Health Imperative Conference; the Manitoba Ministers Government Leadership Program; Oregon State Mayors Association; I Have a Dream Foundation; Center for Volunteer and Non-Profit Leadership; and the Women's Funding Network, including the Women of Color in International Development program; the UC Berkeley Staff Diversity Facilitator Network. Sharon is dedicated to teaching cutting-edge, non-defensive communication, creating leadership with integrity, and building community in every environment.

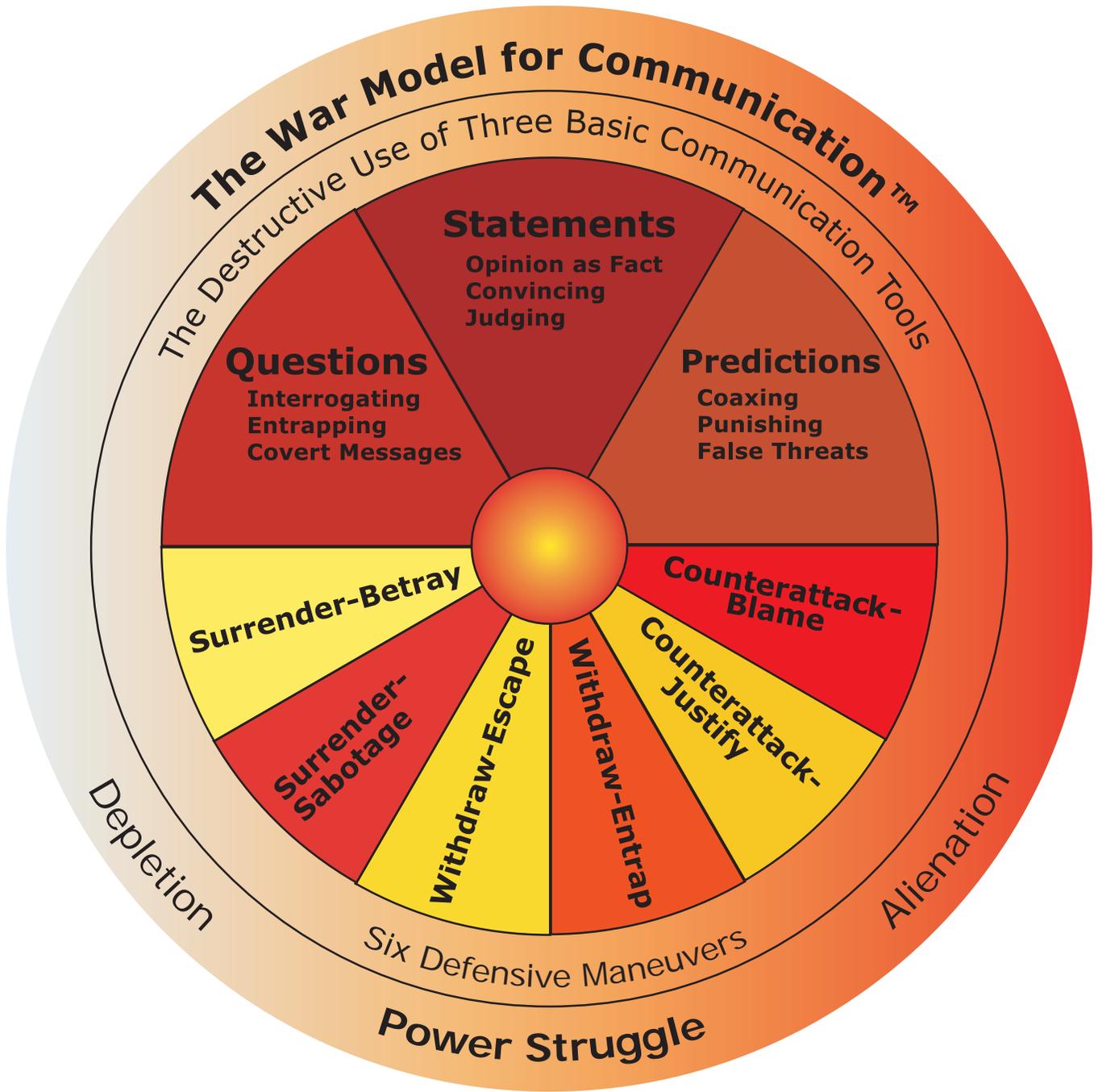




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Introduction

I believe that we have essentially used the "rules of war" as the foundation for all our human communication. Thus, when we communicate, whether with loved ones or in professional situations, we often close down and use war-like defensive maneuvers when we want to protect ourselves—from insult, judgment, or any kind of personal or professional injury. Defensive responses can include anything from argument to subtle forms of manipulation, gossip, withholding information, withdrawing, or even giving in to others.

Defensiveness is common among people from many cultures and backgrounds. In our personal lives, defensiveness causes much needless conflict with family and friends, as well as in community organizations. Using the traditional "war model" for communication, people become polarized. We can become alienated, even from those we love most.

In our professional roles, we also have a range of defensive reactions—sometimes subtle and hidden and sometimes very obvious—that can damage professional performance. It can impact relationships with customers, clients, boards, families, and students. This is true for people in corporations who serve both internal and external clients, for government officials who balance serving the public with adhering to complex regulations and laws, for teachers who are educating children and interacting with parents, and for healthcare workers who are caring for patients and relaying information to loved ones. Likewise it is true for people in community service, mediation, mental health fields, finance, law enforcement, the legal profession — anyone in a profession that serves a client base.

In addition to impacting our professional performance with the people we serve, our defensiveness creates countless power struggles with co-workers in our own organizations. Further, defensiveness can undermine the ability of managers to provide effective supervision and empower employees to achieve their potential. HR professionals are impacted, as well, in their efforts to deal with complaints and to meet employee's needs. Ultimately, the cost of defensiveness is huge in terms of our effectiveness, productivity, creativity, and our ability to find meaning in our work.

In community organizations and in spiritual communities, defensiveness can create divisions that undermine unity. When this happens, people lose hope and do not live by their highest values. It follows that the organization will not fulfill its highest potential for achieving its mission.

As individuals, defensiveness can cause us to stunt our own personal growth and undermine our competence and creativity. Our defensive patterns are also a part of our personality structure in a way that is so integral that some loosely defined "personality types" actually reflect the particular defensive modes that we have

adopted. What we might regard as “just our own personality” may simply be a reflection of our most commonly used defensive mode(s).

In long-term relationships, it can be a struggle to maintain the kind of intimacy that often draws people together in the beginning. Independence is often lost as well, for one or both parties. When a couple has children, the stress on the relationship becomes intensified. In order for a relationship to mature without losing its joy and passion, both intimacy and independence must become, if anything, stronger, rather than weaker.

As parents, the love and responsibility we feel can make us afraid about how to make the best decisions for our children—and how much to expect of them. We can end up being defensive and in power struggle despite our best intentions. We can be in power struggle even at times when we ultimately give in to our children.

I believe that defensiveness is the greatest glass ceiling blocking our human potential, and always leads to power struggle, whether passively withdrawing to escape conflict or aggressively arguing to defend a position. I think that across the spectrum of all of our personal, professional, and community relationships, we are using language in a way that systemically creates and accelerates conflict. As a result, we see differences between us as a matter of “right and wrong,” instead of seeing our differences as a resource for the kind of creative problem solving that takes us to new levels, and enhances each person’s competence.

The *Powerful Non-Defensive Communication (PNDC)* process provides a new system for verbal exchange that is geared to creating understanding and clear expectations instead of focusing on defensive self-protection. Families, friends, and co-workers can use these skills to interact with genuine cooperation. Managers and HR professionals can enhance their ability to use authority effectively, creating understanding across lines of personal and cultural difference, as well as to set clear boundaries when dealing with inappropriate behavior. Using these skills, we can create environments at work and at home built on respect, reciprocity, and competence. We can effectively and much more efficiently develop strong relationships between individuals and within groups of people, such as parents and children, or team members at work.

When we communicate non-defensively, we can blend a willingness to show vulnerability with a directness and honesty that has a unique power. Being more open is of great value, and not only in our personal relationships. Increasingly, corporations are recognizing the value in what is often referred to as “transparency” in business relationships.

Moreover, the non-defensive tools actually provide better individual protection than old defensive reactions, thus creating a level of safety that facilitates high

functioning. At the same time, using non-defensive skills holds each person more accountable for her/his own behavior, at work and at home and in community. In the course of this workshop, we will first examine what I call the “war model”—looking systemically at the dynamics of defensiveness, six typical defensive reactions we use, and how we misuse our basic communication tools (forms) in ways that are inherently manipulative and controlling. Then we will examine and practice a non-defensive model for communication (*PNDC*). The process facilitates:

- Asking questions that are disarming instead of entrapping or interrogating,
- Giving feedback to others that is clear and precise without being judgmental
- Expressing our own thoughts, feelings and beliefs without trying to convince others to agree with us, and
- Setting boundaries that hold others accountable, prevent burnout, and create more respect and reciprocity.

My goal in teaching "*Powerful, Non-Defensive Communication*" is that we can learn the skills necessary to help create respect, competence, compassion, and creative problem solving—in diverse environments at every level—from the family to the workplace to global communities. In the process, I hope we can become more able to use language in ways that takes us to a new level of human consciousness and functioning.

How Essential is Defensiveness to Our Ability to Protect Ourselves?

Protect: To defend or guard from injury or danger; to shield from attack or assault

Defensive: Having the quality of defending against attack or injury

The primary, if not only, “definition” we have for protection is to “defend” ourselves. We don’t blame anyone for being defensive; we’d rather see someone be defensive than defenseless!

On the other hand, what if we could protect ourselves without ever having to be defensive?

Is our defensiveness like a dinosaur tail we’ve hung onto for centuries?
Heavy, cumbersome, hard to control, leaving a trail of destruction behind us?

How Much Does Defensiveness Cost Us?

What is the cost to you?

What is the cost to your team?

What is the cost to your organization?

What is the cost to the community you live in? Our global community?

The Impact of Defensive Attitudes and Behaviors

1. The Victim Mind-Set:

Scientists are now demonstrating that when we become defensive, the chemistry of the brain changes, and we lose our ability to problem-solve, to think “outside the box.” In essence, we see the other person as having some kind of control over us and we start feeling like a victim. Then we stop taking accountability and start blaming.

Have you ever been unable to think of a good way to respond to a situation and then later thought of exactly what you could have said?

2. Seeing the Other Person as an Adversary:

Once we get into the brain chemistry of the victim mind-set, we begin to see the other person as an adversary. Once we do so, we see that person’s behavior as more calculated or intentionally hurtful than our own.

Directions: On the lines below, list the words you would use to describe another person’s behavior when you think you are doing your best to communicate and that person isn’t cooperating.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

The Messy Conference Room

Situation: You walk into a conference room at work to pick up a PowerPoint CD you forgot to get out of the computer after an earlier meeting. A co-worker, Joe, is in the room, getting it ready for another meeting. He is picking up used coffee cups and other odds and ends. He glares at you and says, sarcastically, "It's too bad nobody around here ever picks after a meeting." You think he's implying your team left the mess. The people on your team did leave the room clean, but apparently others in a subsequent meeting didn't pick up after themselves.



Pick your three most likely responses and number them 1-3:

A. ____ You explain to Joe that your team left the room clean and it was another group that left the mess. *Defense:* _____

B. ____ You are upset about how Joe spoke to you, but you don't want to get into a conflict with him, so you ignore his comment, get your PowerPoint CD and leave. *Defense:* _____

C. ____ You don't say anything at all, but make eye contact and stare back at Joe for a few seconds or until he looks away, letting him know you don't like his attitude. *Defense:* _____

D. ____ You have empathy for Joe and tell him you're sorry he got left with a mess. You feel some responsibility to help and offer to do so if you have time. *Defense:* _____

E. ____ You are upset with Joe for implying that your group left the mess, but you just tell him that you are sorry he got stuck with it. Later, you vent your frustration to someone else (at work or at home) about how rude he was. *Defense:* _____

F. ____ You are angry and confront Joe directly, saying, "You have no call to imply it was my team. You should get your facts straight before you start blaming people." *Defense:* _____

The Messy Conference Room — Part 2

Defensive Response	Benefits	Costs
A.		
B.		
C.		
D.		
E.		
F.		

Surrender

_____ Surrender-Betray (*Personality Type: Co-Dependent*)

Definition: Giving up our own position (viewpoint, feelings, beliefs) and agreeing with or justifying the behavior of someone who is mistreating us.

_____ Surrender-Sabotage (*Personality Type: Passive-Aggressive*)

Definition: Outwardly giving in or cooperating with someone and then undermining the person in some way.

Withdrawal

_____ Withdraw-Escape (*Personality Type: Passive*)

Definition: Emotionally or physically removing ourselves from someone to avoid a certain topic or conflict.

_____ Withdraw-Entrap (*Personality Type: Vindictive*)

Definition: Withholding information or emotional response as a strategy to trap someone so he/she will look foolish, make a mistake, let us off the hook, etc.

Counterattack

_____ Counterattack-Justify (*Personality Type: Defensive*)

Definition: Explaining or defending our own behavior to prove the other wrong.

_____ Counterattack-Blame (*Personality Type: Aggressive*)

Definition: Aggressively attacking or judging another person to defend ourselves or get what we want.

Communication Forms

“The War Model”

Questions: Two Typical Defensive Uses

Entrapment: Using a question to *trap* someone by structuring it so that there are only two obvious answers and either one makes the person answering the question look bad, such as: “Do you have that report done yet?” — when you know it’s *not* done.

Passing Information: Using a question to make a statement. Doing so, we can convey a need or criticism without having to take responsibility for it. For example, “Are you going to be on time for the meeting this time?” Translated: I’m irritated you were late last time.

Statements: Two Typical Defensive Uses

Objectifying: Using a statement of our own personal feelings, thoughts, beliefs, or experience as a *fact* that we suggest is true for everyone. “That idea won’t work.” — rather than specifying the problems you see with the idea.

Convincing: Using statements about our own viewpoint to persuade others to agree with us or to argue to prove a point. “Don’t give up yet, you can do this!”

Predictions: Two Typical Defensive Uses

Punitive: Trying to control which choice a person makes in a given situation by predicting consequences that are extreme and punishing. “If you don’t give me those materials, I’ll be on your case till you do!”

Coaxing: Trying to control which choice a person makes in a given situation by predicting consequences that hold a “carrot” out for the person. “If you get join this committee, it will look good on your resume.”

Powerful Non-Defensive Communication™



Is it time to get a new model?

Too often people try to make changes in our system of communication, but don't realize they are still tinkering around with an old "War Model," hoping to make it work better. But its basic software will always be designed to shut people down and to create conflict.

We think it's way *past* time to stop messing around with the old model and get a completely new one that opens up communication instead of shutting it down. One that can successfully resolve conflict, often with great ease. One that can lift the glass ceiling on our potential.

Common Misuses of a Question

- *Entrapping*
- *Statement/Judgment disguised as a question*

The question becomes *interrogating*.

We often have harsh facial expressions; such as frowning, raising the forehead or eyebrows, or shrugging.



The Non-Defensive Question:

- Open
- Curious
- Innocent
- Neutral
- Inviting

How to Use Questions in a Powerful, Non-Defensive Way

- Be curious; ask a question because you want to gather more information, so you can check out assumptions *before* you react.
- Use a gentle but neutral tone of voice – come *down* in tone when asking a question, just as you would when making a statement.
- Pay attention to your body language, so it is open and receptive
- If you are too angry to ask a curious question—then don't! Make a statement first.
- Remember that being curious about what the other person thinks, feels, or believes does not mean you have to agree with her or him — there is time to state your own position later.

Questions — Summary Chart

Content Questions

1. **Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why:** Getting the details regarding a situation or a person's reactions.
2. **Inverting:** Turning the other person's statement into a question.
3. **“What do you mean by . . . ?”:** Asking for clarification about the meaning of a particular word or phrase.
4. **Assumptions:** Asking the other person directly about your own assumptions regarding what he/she means.
5. **Quantity:** Asking for clarification about words that describe amounts, percentages, or degrees.
6. **Compare and Contrast:** Asking questions about opposites, variations, and exceptions.
7. **Contradictions:** Asking about any contradictions in what a person has said and/or done.
8. **Past, Present, and Future:** Asking questions related to time factors.
9. **First, Second, and Third Person:** Asking basically the same question with a focus on different “subjects” (*I/me, you, they/them*) in order to gain perspective from different angles.
10. **Value, Emotion, Reason, and Behavior:** Asking about what a person believes, feels, thinks, and does.

Process Questions

11. **Questions About Involuntary Reactions:** Asking about tone of voice and body language.
12. **Questions About Attitude:** Asking about outlooks such as superiority or pessimism.
13. **Questions About Motivation/Intention:** Asking about what caused a person to react in a certain way or what he/she is seeking to accomplish in the interaction.
14. **Questions About Impact:** Asking about what a person believes is the impact of, for example, a comment he/she made and/or an attitude he/she is demonstrating.

Exercise — Practicing the Question

Person's Statement:

Question(s): About what the person *means* by a particular word or phrase:

Question(s): About our own *assumptions* regarding what the person means:

Question(s): About the person's *intentions*:

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Common Misuses of a Statement:

- *Stating your opinion as fact*
- *Trying to convince others to agree with you*

Rather than just expressing our opinions, we are often trying to control other people, even if we are just trying to get them to “listen.”

The Non-Defensive Statement:

- Open
 - Direct
 - Vulnerable
 - Subjective
 - Descriptive
-

How to make statements in a powerful, non-defensive way:

- Make sure any feedback you give is stated neutrally so it won't convey judgment.
- When giving feedback, let the other person know how you got to your conclusions before you state them.
- When expressing your own thoughts, feelings and beliefs, speak with honest feeling while phrasing it subjectively: I think, I believe, I feel.

Formats for Position Statements

Sample Sentence: Someone says to you in an urgent tone, while frowning intensely, "I can figure it *out*."

The following types of position statements can often be used in the order that follows to provide a thorough description of how we understand the experience and viewpoint of the other(s) as well as express our own. The first three are *observational and neutral in tone*, and the fourth is where *our own thoughts, beliefs, and emotions can be fully expressed*.

1. **Hear: Interpretation of Overt Message:** Describe in our own words what we hear the other person (child, teen or adult) is saying.

Example: "I hear you saying that you can figure this problem out without any additional support."

2. **See: Interpretation of Covert Message:** Share with the other person how we see or perceive her or his position, which may be contradictory to what the person is saying to us.

Example: And at the same time, "I see you frowning and your voice sounds frustrated to me."

3. **Conclude: Interpretation of Motive or Intent:** Describe for the person any tentative conclusion you have drawn about what is motivating her statement and/or any contradictions in it.

Example: "It seems to me that for some reason you think that you need to figure it out on your own instead of asking for support."

4. **Express: Stating Our Own Reactions:** Tell the person our thoughts, beliefs, and feelings with regard to the topic under discussion, subjectively, from our unique perspective.

Example: "I'd like to give you support in your part of the project, and I also want to feel comfortable asking you for help when I need it."

When we try to convince others, they become increasingly resistant. Using these four formats for a statement, we can make it clear that we want to be supportive, without patronizing or coercing the other person.

Why Use a Four-Part Statement?

Often when people are communicating they state their conclusions with no explanation.

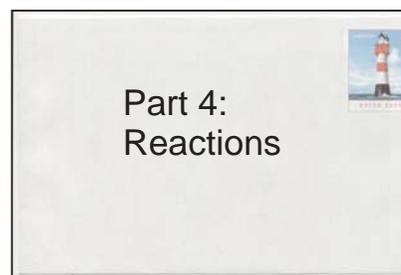
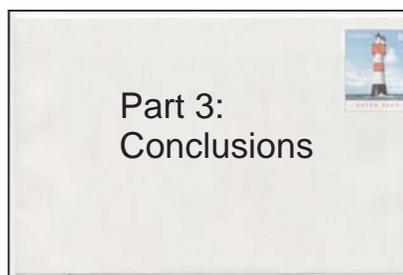
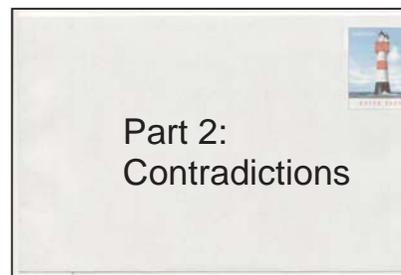
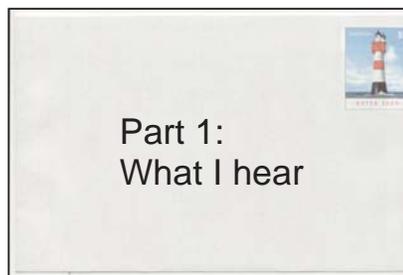
Example: Someone looks irritated and you ask them what's wrong and get the response, "I'm *fine!*" with a roll of the eyes and a frown. I may say back to the person, "You don't look *fine* to *me!*"

How did I know the person didn't look fine? Well, the roll of the eyes and the frown contradicted the words. However, I have only told the person my conclusion—he/she didn't look fine. I *didn't* tell the person what I saw that *led* me to my conclusion.

Also, I may have given my feedback in a frustrated, sarcastic tone. This conveys judgment. So the other person, first, has no clue that he/she was even rolling her/his eyes and, second, will be likely to block hearing me because of feeling my judgment.

Sending our Message in 4 separate Envelopes:

When we get a double message, or hear something that doesn't make sense to us, if we give the other person information in four separate parts, he/she will be best able to hear it and have an open discussion. We don't *have* to use all four parts, but the clarity is far greater, and the response often, much more open.



Common Problems with the Four-Part Statement

Using Active Listening

Step 1: "I Hear"

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What I want to do Instead:

Forms of Contradiction Between What a Person Says, and:

Step 2: "I See"

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Conclusions About a Person's Motive and/or Intentions

Step 3: "My conclusions"

Resistance to using it:

VERB Elements™:

Value: I believe

Emotion: I feel

Reasoning: I think

Behavior: I do

Expressing Our Own Reactions

*Step 4: My reactions: "I think, I feel, I believe, I do" **

The impact on how we express our own reactions when we don't first state our conclusions:

Tips on Using the Non-Defensive Statement

Putting the Four Parts into One Sentence

When I hear you . . . Saying you are fine and not feeling frustrated

And at the same time . . . I see you frowning and rolling your eyes

Then I think . . . that you are upset about something, but don't want to talk about it

And so I feel . . . worried, but I don't want to push you to talk.

Depending on the circumstances, (a) your observations about the contradiction, (b) your conclusions, and (c) your own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs can be different.

An Even Shorter Way to Put All Four Parts into One Sentence

When . . . you say everything is going fine

And . . . I see you frowning intensely and sounding abrupt

Then . . . I believe you are upset about something and don't want to talk about it

And so . . . I'm concerned that it might impact our work together on the project and I want to resolve any conflict so we can work smoothly on the project.

Jogging Your Memory About the Four Steps

Most of us actually have the all the information we put into these four steps. We often tell other people exactly why we are upset with someone, we just don't usually tell that person — in an open, non-defensive way. If you ask yourself the following four questions, you can often identify the information.

1. What did the person say with her/his words?
2. What's wrong with this picture?
3. What do I think is really going on?
4. What is my reaction?

Exercise — Practicing the Statement

Directions: Break into pairs. Each of you take a turn, using the situation you selected to work on and then write down the key sentence the other person said and your non-defensive response. You may use the same example you did in the question asking, or a different one. If you use the same example, still write the sentence down again, so you can reference it easily as you work on the example. Use this page to write your own example. If you want to write down the other person's example, use the back of the page or another piece of paper.

Person's Statement:

When you say: Your interpretation of the person's words—what they would mean if you said them and meant it.

And at the same time, I see: Name any contradictions you see between the person's words and (a) her body language and tone of voice, (b) your past experience with the person, (c) outside data.

Then my conclusion is (or, "It seems to me"): State your conclusions about what the contradiction(s) mean and/or what you think the persons intentions were with regard to the contradiction.

And so my reaction is: State your own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs with regard to the issue/situation.

Common Misuses of a Prediction

- *Coaxing someone into doing what we want by holding out some kind of carrot*
- *Threatening someone with a punitive consequence if they don't do what we want (We may or may not intend to follow through on the threat.)*

The prediction becomes a means to manipulate and control other people's choices, which causes them to resist even in the face of unpleasant consequences.



A Non-Defensive Prediction is:

- Protective
- Foretelling
- Neutral
- Definitive
- Firm

How to Make Predictions in a Powerful, Non-Defensive Way

- Give the other people the *security of predictability* by letting them know ahead of time how you will respond to certain choices they might make.
- Let the person know how you will respond if he/she *does* make a specific choice and how you will respond if he/she *doesn't* make that choice.
- Honor the person's right to make either choice, without trying to influence which choice the person makes.
- Make your prediction precise and exact, like a fence—a clear boundary.

Formats for Two Types of Predictions

Sample Sentences:

Person A: "It upsets me when you interrupt me."

Person B: "Don't be so sensitive. Everyone gets interrupted sometimes."

When making predictions, it is most helpful to use the words, "if" and "then," in order to make clear how we will respond in consequence to each of two opposing choices a person might make.

- 1. Limit-Setting:** Tell another person how we will respond as a consequence of each of two or more choices he might make.

Example:

Side A of Prediction: "If you interrupt again during one of these meetings, then I will just ask you to wait to make your point until I'm done."

Side B of Prediction: "If you wait to speak until I finish my point, then I will feel more open to hearing what you have to say."

- 2. Challenge-Choice:** Describe the consequences we believe a person will experience on her own, without any influence on our part, if she makes a particular decision or follows a certain course

Example:

Side A of Prediction: "I believe that if you don't ask for support when you run into a problem you don't know how to solve, you will bog yourself and your team down."

Side B of Prediction: "I believe if you get support when you run into a problem you don't know how to solve, you will get through it a lot faster and help keep the team project on schedule."

If we let others know accurately ahead of time how we are going to react depending on what choices they make, we create a clear understanding of the consequences of various choices. When we predict the effect we believe a person's choices will have, apart from any personal reaction on our part, we provide information that the other person can use in making choices. Neither with "limit setting" predictions, nor with "challenge-choice" predictions, do we attempt to control *which* choices a person makes. These predictions are not coercive or punitive.

Practice Plan — Step 1

Commitment to Practice: In making a commitment to practice non-defensive methods, we have found that it is valuable to identify both the things that might block you from putting these methods into daily practice, and what might motivate you to do so.

What is most likely to prevent you from putting these skills into practice?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Discussion Notes:

What do you most want to gain by practicing these skills?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Discussion Notes:

Practice Sheet — Practicing the Question

Person's Statement:

Question(s): About what the person *means* by a particular word or phrase:

Question(s): About our own *assumptions* regarding what the person means:

Question(s): About the person's *intentions*:

Person's Statement:

Question(s): About what the person *means* by a particular word or phrase:

Question(s): About our own *assumptions* regarding what the person means:

Question(s): About the person's *intentions*:

Practice Sheet — Practicing the Statement

Person's Statement:

When you say: Your interpretation of the person's words—what they would mean if you said them and meant it.

And at the same time, I see: Name any contradictions you see between the person's words and (a) her body language and tone of voice, (b) your past experience with the person, (c) outside data.

Then my conclusion is (or, "It seems to me"): State your conclusions about what the contradiction(s) mean and/or what you think the persons intentions were with regard to the contradiction.

And so my reaction is: State your own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs with regard to the issue/situation.

Defensive and Non-Defensive Reactions

Non-Defensive Attitudes and Behaviors	Defensive Attitudes and Behaviors
Open	Close
Responsive	Withholding
Assertive	Passive
Receptive	Resistant
Consistent	Inconsistent
Flexible	Rigid
Direct	Evasive
Gentle	Lax
Thorough	Demanding
Firm	Harsh
Compassionate	Judgmental
Knowledgeable	Arrogant
Accountable	Blaming
Respectful	Demeaning
Accepting	Rejecting
Humorous	Sarcastic
Curious	Suspicious
Sincere	Manipulative

People have a wide range of thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that can be expressed either defensively or non-defensively. Either kind of expression has a great deal of power. However, it is a very different kind of power, and creates different characteristics within us.

When we react defensively, we develop attitudes and behaviors that are rigid and judgmental. We become manipulative and justify our efforts to control others. The result is low self-esteem and relationships in which people are less productive and become increasingly more alienated from each other.

When we use a non-defensive communication process, we can balance consistency with flexibility, directness with gentleness, compassion with firmness, and so on. Here, we can develop a character that gives us self-esteem as individuals and the ability to create strong, creative professional and personal relationships.

Powerful Non-Defensive Communication™

Summary of Formats

When we use questions, position statements, and predictions in a non-defensive way, we can understand others better, communicate more effectively, and often resolve conflicts without getting into power struggles, even when others are not open or cooperative. We can have far greater impact without ever attempting to control others.

These eight communication formats are listed below in an order that is often most effective, but the order can be varied. Each format can be used with regard to the content (*what* is being discussed) and/or the process (*how* it is being discussed). All of the questions, interpretive statements, and predictions are neutral in tone (Steps 1-4 & 6-7). Only in step 5, when we express *our own reactions* do we put our own feelings in. It is sometimes helpful to first identify our own assumptions. Think about what *we believe* the other person means and what her/his verbal and non-verbal messages are. Then we can:

Ask: Use sincere questions to draw out the other person in order to understand her experience (thoughts, feelings, beliefs and behaviors) regarding the issue being discussed.

Hear: Describe for the other person in our own words what we hear (i.e., believe) he is saying to us. (*Overt Message*)

See: name any contradictions we see between the person's words and (a) tone/body language, (b) past experience, and/or (c) outside data. (*Covert Message*)

Conclude: Describe our own interpretations of the contradiction and/or the person's intentions.

Self Expression: Express our own position or reactions (thoughts, feelings, and beliefs) with regard to the issue being discussed. (*This is not neutral, but expressed with feeling.*)

Set Limits: Using "if-then," tell the person how we will respond depending on the choices he makes

Challenge-Choice: Tell the other person what consequences we believe she will experience depending on what choices she makes

Learning non-defensive communication can be overwhelming because it is a core change in how we communicate. It may be helpful to start slowly, practicing in situations that feel comfortable. We can use non-defensive communication immediately and have a dynamic professional and personal influence. It is also a process we can practice for a lifetime.

Powerful Non-Defensive Communication™

Formats Chart: Tone

When we begin to use our communication tools non-defensively, we can talk to others in a way that gives us constructive power, makes it more likely that others will respect us, and keeps us from getting caught in power struggles no matter what the other person does. We can build our self-esteem, confidence, and competence, even when the other person does not respond positively.

Eight Formats for Non-Defensive Communication

Questions:

Neutral and Receptive

Content Questions: The Topic

Neutral and Receptive

Process Questions: Attitudes, emotions, motives, etc.

Statements:

Neutral and Interpretive

Hear: The overt message

Neutral and Interpretive

See: The covert (hidden) messages

Neutral and Interpretive

Conclusion: The meaning of any contradictions

Full Feeling

Self-Expression: Reactions: Our feelings, beliefs, thoughts

Predictions:

Neutral and Forecasting

Set Limits: Our own consequences

Neutral and Forecasting

Challenge-Choice: Life's consequences