

Taking the War Out of Our Words

Introductory Workshop

The Art of Powerful Non-Defensive Communication

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Powerful Non-Defensive Communication™

Cutting Edge Tools for ADR Professionals

With Sharon Strand Ellison

Our premise is that we have essentially used the "rules of war" as the foundation for all our human communication. A founding principle of battle is that "to be open is to be vulnerable, and to be vulnerable is to be weak." Even simple misunderstandings can prompt physiological reactions that instantly impact our capacity for effective problem solving. These physiological reactions prompt instant defensive responses, even for highly trained professionals.

Currently evolving communication techniques for mediators, attorney mediators and other ADR professionals still can have "roots" in the traditional *adversarial* communication model, thus subtly undermining the mediation process. *Powerful Non-Defensive Communication* is a process that is, like a new computer program, designed to disarm defensiveness and diffuse power struggle. As such, it is a vital tool for taking mediation to the level of transformational resolution.

In this session, we'll look at the physiological and psychological dynamics of defensiveness. We'll examine how various currently accepted mediation techniques can backfire, including active listening, and "I messages." Then we'll discuss and practice methods for shifting how we: (1) ask questions so that clients and other professionals are more likely to instantly drop any defensiveness, (2) offer information and feedback so others feel respected and genuinely listen, (3) state honest opinions that build understanding instead of alienating parties, and (4) create clear boundaries when needed that prompt increased accountability and reciprocity.

The skills can be applied in mediations where the parties are in deeply entrenched conflict and also provide techniques for getting at the kind of information that clients often hide—anything from financial resources to spousal abuse.

Skills learned are immediately applicable in both professional and personal relationships.

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.

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

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 rag on you 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.

Summary of Formats for Questions

- 1. Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why:** Getting the details regarding the story about a particular situation
- 2. The Meaning of a Specific Word or Short Phrase**
“What do you mean by X Word. . . ?”: Asking for clarification about the meaning of a particular word or phrase
- 3. Assumptions:** Asking the other person directly about your own assumptions regarding what he/she means
- 4. Value, Emotion, Reason, and Behavior:** Asking about what a person believes, feels, thinks, and does
- 5. Compare and Contrast:** Asking questions about opposites, variations, and exceptions
- 6. Contradictions:** Asking about any contradictions in what a person has said and/or done
- 7. Involuntary Reactions:** Asking about tone of voice and body language
- 8. Attitude:** Asking about outlooks such as superiority or pessimism
- 9. Inverting:** Turning the other person’s statement into a question
- 10. 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
- 11. Past, Present, and Future:** Asking questions related to time factors
- 12. Quantity:** Asking for clarification about words that describe amounts, percentages, or degrees
- 13. 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. Impact:** Asking about the impact a person believes her or his reactions had on another person

Practicing the Question — Examples

Example + 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*:

Example + 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*:

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.”

A Non-Defensive Statement is:

- 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 Non-Defensive 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.

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...am 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 can even tell others, we just don't usually tell them 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?

Practicing the Statement — Example

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.
- Use the phrase "If . . . Then, and outline (a) choice one and (b) the consequence for that choice.
- Repeat the "if . . . Then phrase and outline (b) the opposite choice and (b) the consequence for that choice.
- **Example, side 1 of prediction:** "If you speak to me rudely, then I won't answer you."
- **Example, side 2 of Prediction:** "If you speak to me respectfully, then I'll be happy to answer you."

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 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.

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 & Tone Chart

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

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.