



Positive Principles Newsletter

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Welcome new **Positive Principles** subscribers.

In the last month, I have been working almost non-stop to continue growing the content that I offer to my friends, colleagues, subscribers, and clients. I have continued to improve and modify my website, and I have re-launched my [blog](#) on a more robust platform.

I have also done lots of training and coaching work around the idea of improved communication during conflict. This month's **Positive Principles** is a summary of the key concepts that keep coming to the forefront in my recent work with clients. You may have seen these concepts in my past writing or in other places. I do not claim that everything in this month's edition is totally original. In fact, I would not be surprised to learn that you have seen these concepts before. However, as Saint Augustine said, adults do not need to be taught so much as they need to be reminded.

If you would like more insights or perspective on any of the seven communication tips in this newsletter, I will be writing [blog](#) posts on each tip over the next few weeks.

Thanks for subscribing to **Positive Principles**. I hope that this series of articles will help you and the people that work with you grow in the ability to address and resolve conflict.

Have a great day,
Guy Harris
The Recovering Engineer

Key Quotes:

"Be sincere; be brief; be seated."
- Franklin Roosevelt

"Argument is the worst sort of conversation."
- Jonathan Swift

This month's tip – **Seven Ways to Improve Your Communication During a Conflict.**

Recently, I read a report on what happens in our bodies when we perceive a threat. Our adrenal glands flood our bodies with adrenaline as we prepare to either fight or flee. In that moment, our intelligence diminishes, and we revert to automatic rather than thoughtful behaviors.

Many conflicts begin with a perception of threat. As a result, we experience a rush of adrenaline that lowers our intelligence so that we do not communicate well during the conflict. With that wonderful thought in mind, I offer these seven ways to improve your communication when you find yourself in a conflict situation. Focus on these seven tips, and you will more effectively communicate your way to a resolved conflict.

1. Focus on behaviors and not on your interpretations

The perception of threat that often creates the conflict escalation cycle usually stems from how we view what other people do and say. This view often comes from our interpretation of a behavior more than it does from the behavior itself. For example, when someone speaks loudly and directly, we may interpret their behaviors to indicate that they are angry. Maybe they are. Maybe they are not. All we really know is that they spoke loudly and directly. As you communicate with other people, focus on and speak to their behaviors more than you speak to your interpretation of their behaviors.

2. Avoid the use of “always” and “never”

When you comment on another person’s behavior, avoid these two communication killers. Rarely does someone “always” or “never” do or say anything. If you throw these two words into the conversation, you just added fuel to the fire and helped to escalate rather than to resolve the conflict.

3. Use “I” statements

At some point in the conflict conversation, you will eventually need to address your interpretations of their behaviors. When this time comes, phrase your interpretation in the form of an “I” statement. Using the behavior mentioned above as an example, you could say something like:

- “When you speak loudly, I feel like you are angry with me,” instead of “Why are you so angry!”
- “When you speak that directly, I feel threatened,” instead of “Why are you threatening me?”
- “When you raise your voice, I feel like I am backed into a corner,” instead of “Quit backing me into a corner!”

4. Say what you want rather than what you don’t want

If you would like for someone to change their behaviors towards you, tell them what you would like to see rather than what you don’t want to see. One principle of behavior is that we cannot *not* be doing something. In other words, we are always doing *something*. When we tell someone what not to do in a relationship, we fail to clarify what we want to see instead. For example, you could say “When you speak to me, please lower the volume,” rather than “Quit yelling at me!”

5. Beware of your non-verbal messages

Remember that the other person will respond negatively to anything you do that they perceive negatively (aggressive, threatening, dismissive, disrespectful, etc.). Calmly maintain steady eye-contact, relaxed posture, and a calm voice tone and you will improve your communication during conflict.

6. Apologize for your contribution

Conflicts rarely happen entirely because of one person’s actions. If only unintentionally, you probably did something to frustrate or irritate the other person in the moments just prior to or just after the conflict began. Go ahead and apologize. It won’t harm you or diminish you. On the contrary, it will probably strengthen your status with the other person.

7. Give them a chance to speak

Remember this key point phrased the way I read Patrick Lencioni write it – “people don’t need to get their way so much as they need to be heard and understood.” If you will slow down long enough to really listen to them, they will probably calm down enough to listen to you. When people get a chance to say what is on their mind, they experience what psychologists call catharsis (or cleansing). This cleansing helps to lower emotional energy and pave the way for a more productive dialogue.

So for now, I encourage you to remember these . . .

Seven Ways to Improve Your Communication During a Conflict.

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Send questions, comments, or suggestions for future topics to Guy.Harris@PrincipleDriven.com

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