



Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Relationship problems often are rooted in poor communications.

Some people hide in silence because they don't want to upset others by speaking the truth. Others speak the truth but do so in a harsh or non-productive manner. There are individuals who ramble on and on without ever getting to the point or achieving clarity and still others who make statements that are full of assumptions that aren't accurate.

One of the most confusing forms of communication involves mixed messages where someone makes statements that contradict each other or says things that don't match their behaviours.

Let's pretend that you need to have a difficult conversation with someone and are worried about the outcome. Perhaps you need to confront a co-worker, family member, friend or neighbour. People can't read your mind and you can't read theirs, so it is important that you say exactly what you mean and mean what you say.

The good news is that you can improve your communications with others if you just practice a few simple steps:

- 1 Write down the issue that you want to discuss in one sentence using as few words as possible.
2. Slowly read what you have written aloud.
3. Edit the sentence until you have such clarity that a stranger could read it and totally understand what is bothering you.
4. Think about what you have written and decide whether you really do need to have a conversation about it (sometimes writing things down helps you to realize that you just need to let it go).
5. Using point-form list all the reasons that this is important to you (make sure that each is valid in itself and you are not just repeating the same thing over and over again).
6. Identify the feelings that you have been experiencing because of this issue. Are you sad, angry, afraid, disheartened or feeling another emotion?
7. Determine what you would like to see as a positive outcome.
8. Schedule a time when you and the other person can talk in private without interruption.
9. Be on time for the meeting and thank the other person for sharing their time with you.
10. Keep the conversation on topic, respectful and brief. Focus on the message that you have prepared and offer it in a mature manner.

There is a very simple but effective template that you can use to express yourself clearly in any uncomfortable situation. Just fill in the blanks:

I feel (name the emotion you identified during your preparation) when you do (name the specific behaviour that upsets you). Next time, please do (state a more desired behaviour) instead.

Once you have expressed yourself clearly, you will likely feel some relief. I am not suggesting that every issue will be resolved immediately but being clear and honest in your communications will help you to increase your self-respect and gain the respect of others.

You need to remember, though, that the other person deserves an opportunity to state his or her perspective also.

If you keep learning and practicing strategies, you will soon feel much more comfortable in your communications with others.