

Powerful Phrases

for Dealing with

DIFFICULT PEOPLE

**OVER 325 READY-TO-USE WORDS AND PHRASES
FOR WORKING WITH CHALLENGING PERSONALITIES**

RENÉE EVENSON

Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Difficult People

Over 325 Ready-to-Use Words and
Phrases for Working with Challenging
Personalities

Renée Evenson

AMACOM

New York • Atlanta • Brussels • Chicago • Mexico City • San Francisco Shanghai • Tokyo • Toronto •
Washington, D.C.

Bulk discounts available. For details visit:

www.amacombooks.org/go/specialsales

Or contact special sales:

Phone: 800-250-5308

Email: specialsls@amanet.org

View all the AMACOM titles at: www.amacombooks.org

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional service. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Evenson, Renée, 1951–

Powerful phrases for dealing with difficult people : over 325 ready-to-use words and phrases for working with challenging personalities / Renée Evenson.

pages cm

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-8144-3298-3 (pbk.) — ISBN 0-8144-3298-0 (pbk.)

1. Problem employees. 2. Personnel management. 3. English language—Terms and phrases. I. Title.

HF5549.5.E42E936 2013

650.1'3014—dc23

2013014941

© 2014 Renée Evenson

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

This publication may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of AMACOM, a division of American Management Association, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

The scanning, uploading, or distribution of this book via the Internet or any other means without the express permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions of this work and do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials, electronically or otherwise. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

About AMA

American Management Association (www.amanet.org) is a world leader in talent development, advancing the skills of individuals to drive business success. Our mission is to support the goals of individuals and organizations through a complete range of products and services, including classroom and virtual seminars, webcasts, webinars, podcasts, conferences, corporate and government solutions, business books, and research. AMA's approach to improving performance combines experiential learning—learning through doing—with opportunities for ongoing professional growth at every step of one's career journey.

Printing number

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

Introduction

PART 1

Powerful Phrases + Actions = Successful Work Relationships

1 Communicating Powerful Phrases

Resolving Conflict: The Wrong Way

Why This Doesn't Work

Begin with "I" Phrases

Phrases of Understanding

Phrases of Apology

Phrases of Compromise

Phrases of Resolution

Phrases of Reconciliation

Resolving Conflict: The Right Way

Why This Works

2 Actions That Enhance Powerful Phrases

Resolving Conflict: The Wrong Way

Why This Doesn't Work

Body Language

Facial Expressions

Tone of Voice

Assertiveness

Resolving Conflict: The Right Way

Why This Works

PART 2

Effective Conflict Resolution = Strengthened Work Relationships

3 Five Steps to Effective Conflict Resolution

Resolving Conflict: The Wrong Way

Why This Doesn't Work

Step 1: Think First

Step 2: Gain a Better Understanding

[Step 3: Define the Problem](#)

[Step 4: Offer Your Best Solution](#)

[Step 5: Agree on the Resolution](#)

[Resolving Conflict: The Right Way](#)

[Why This Works](#)

4 Powerful Phrases for Challenging Coworker Situations

[Basic Rules When Confronting a Coworker](#)

[How to Deal with a Backstabber](#)

[How to Deal with a Brownnoser](#)

[How to Deal with a Bully](#)

[How to Deal with a Credit Taker](#)

[How to Deal with a Criticizer](#)

[How to Deal with an Ethics Violator](#)

[How to Deal with an Excessive Emailer](#)

[How to Deal with a Gossipmonger](#)

[How to Deal with a Know-It-All](#)

[How to Deal with a Late-Nick](#)

[How to Deal with a Loudmouth](#)

[How to Deal with a Meeting Monopolizer](#)

[How to Deal with a Mistake Maker](#)

[How to Deal with a Negative Nelly](#)

[How to Deal with a Personal Hygiene Offender](#)

[How to Deal with a Personal Space Invader](#)

[How to Deal with a Slacker](#)

[How to Deal with a TMI'er](#)

[How to Deal with a Whiner](#)

[How to Deal with a Wimp](#)

5 Powerful Phrases for Challenging Situations with Your Boss

[Basic Rules When Confronting Your Boss](#)

[How to Deal with an Abusive Boss](#)

[How to Deal with a Controlling Boss](#)

[How to Deal with an Egotistical Boss](#)

[How to Deal with an Incompetent Boss](#)

[How to Deal with an Inconsistent Boss](#)

[How to Deal with a Micromanaging Boss](#)

[How to Deal with a Noncommunicative Boss](#)

[How to Deal with a Passive Boss](#)

[How to Deal with a Reactive Boss](#)

[How to Deal with an Unethical Boss](#)

6 Powerful Phrases for Situations You Cause

[Resolving Conflict: The Wrong Way](#)

[Why This Doesn't Work](#)

[Step 1: Think First](#)

[Step 2: Gain a Better Understanding](#)

[Step 3: Define the Problem](#)

[Step 4: Offer Your Best Solution](#)

[Step 5: Agree on the Resolution](#)

[Resolving Conflict: The Right Way](#)

[Why This Works](#)

About the Author

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to thank all the employees at AMACOM Books who took part in producing this book. You're a great team—*not* at all difficult to deal with—and I've enjoyed working with each of you on this project.

In particular, I'd like to offer a heartfelt thanks to my editor at AMACOM Books, Bob Nirkind, who has been supportive and encouraging as we worked together to create this book. I couldn't have asked for a better editor on this project, as I always enjoy working with you.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you to my production editor, Barbara Chernow. I appreciate the care and attention you give to each of my books. I know they're in the best of hands with you.

My gratitude goes to my husband Joe and to my family and friends. Thanks to each of you for your input on this project.

And my appreciation is sent to the readers of my books. My aim always is to help others improve their talents and abilities. If I help you deal better with difficult people, then I've achieved my goal.

Introduction

The ability to conduct yourself harmoniously and productively with your employees, colleagues, and bosses is a critical skill to master. However, when you enter the working world, no one equips you with this skillset, particularly as it applies to dealing with people who are difficult. When different personality types are expected to work side by side every day and get along with each other, it can be challenging. You can choose your friends, but you can't choose those with whom you work and, when you spend most of your waking hours with people who aren't of your choosing, getting along may prove to be demanding.

Yet, your ability to maintain strong work relationships is so important; it may, in fact, be vital to your success. Often, an employee who is capable of interacting well with others will be promoted over an employee who possesses greater job or technical knowledge. The ability to relate successfully to others doesn't necessarily mean being agreeable all the time, because we know that problems are going to arise. Rather, it's having the skills to effectively deal with those problems that will set you apart as an employee who values the importance of resolving conflict to maintain strong relationships.

Conflict is one of the most difficult situations we face because it thrusts us out of our comfort zone. The truth is that most of us are uncomfortable handling conflict of any kind, so we overlook problems and hope they'll go away. But that never happens. Unless you work to resolve conflict in an effective manner, one of two things is going to occur: Your working relationship with that person will be permanently damaged, or you'll bottle up your emotions and continue trying to ignore the problem. A damaged working relationship will never rectify itself; instead, the relationship will continue to fracture and may eventually sever completely. Further, when you bottle up your emotions, they slowly simmer until one day they begin to boil, which may cause you to lose control in an eruption of words you'll later regret.

A more effective way exists to handle conflict at work. Entering into a constructive conversation to resolve any problem as it occurs is the only way to demonstrate your ability to interact well with others all the time...and increase your odds for success.

In *Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Difficult People*, you'll find the tools that will enable you to develop the skills to handle any type of conflict with any person. You'll learn how to gain the cooperation of coworkers who are know-it-alls, meeting monopolizers, and people who send excessive emails. You'll learn how to communicate effectively with a boss who may be abusive, egotistical, micromanaging, or noncommunicative. And, when you cause a problem, you'll learn how to quickly recover, regroup, and work to successfully resolve the issue and reconcile the relationship.

In this book, you'll learn how to use over 325 powerful phrases to communicate effectively, as well as powerful actions to take in support of those phrases. You'll become familiar with the five-step process to resolve conflict of any kind. In addition, you'll develop the ability to work through problems with 30 types of difficult behaviors and personalities. And, throughout the book, you'll find "Something to Think About" tips, which detail how to handle unusual or difficult situations. The powerful words and phrases will be noted in *italics* and the type of phrase or word in **bold**.

[Part 1](#), "Powerful Phrases + Actions = Successful Work Relationships," explains the phrases and nonverbal techniques that form the basis of communicating effectively to resolve conflict. You'll learn when to incorporate "I" phrases to communicate how the problem affected you, along with words and phrases of understanding, apology, compromise, resolution, and reconciliation. You'll ascertain the body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, and assertiveness actions that will enhance your conversation.

Both chapters in [Part 1](#) include *Resolving Conflict: The Wrong Way/Why This Doesn't Work* and *Resolving Conflict: The Right Way/Why This Works* sample dialogues to reinforce how the phrases and actions you're learning will be advantageous when handling any type of disagreement you encounter. Both chapters also include a summary of sample phrases and nonverbal techniques, which will be beneficial for quick reference.

[Part 2](#), "Effective Conflict Resolution = Strengthened Work Relationships," builds on the powerful words and phrases and nonverbal techniques in [Part 1](#) to show you when and how to incorporate them into your conflict resolution conversations. In [Chapter 3](#), you'll learn the five-step technique to resolve any conflict. Included in this chapter are *Resolving Conflict: The Wrong Way/ Why This Doesn't Work* and *Resolving Conflict: The Right Way/Why This Works* sample dialogues, as well as a summary of the key points for each of the

steps.

Chapters 4 and 5 describe 20 challenging coworker behaviors and 10 challenging personality types of bosses. You'll discover how to use the five-step process to confront conflict and effectively resolve problems. Sample *Resolving Conflict: The Right Way/Why This Works* dialogues take you through each step of the process. These chapters also include "Applying the Approach," a quick reference of helpful tips for dealing with each of the behaviors and personality types.

In [Chapter 6](#), you'll learn how to handle situations in which you caused a problem. When you realize you've said or done something inappropriate, offensive, or unkind, you'll be prepared to take the initiative and incorporate powerful phrases and words in conversations to repair and reconcile the relationship. And, when someone approaches you about a problem you didn't realize you caused, you'll learn how to quickly recover and work through the five-steps to resolve the conflict, no matter whether the person approaches you in a constructive manner or confronts you in a spiteful or hurtful manner.

Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Difficult People will be your guide when you encounter problems with your employees, colleagues, or bosses. You'll be able to specifically identify the behaviors and personality types that are problematic for you. You'll build your confidence to handle any type of conflict with any person, whether you have a problem with someone or another person has a problem with you. It's the book that will provide you with the skills to enter into a productive dialogue and resolve any problem quickly.

Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Difficult People will enhance your communication skills, improve your leadership skills, and increase your assertiveness skills. When you develop these skills, you'll be seen as a person who connects successfully with others. And that is going to strengthen all of your work relationships.

PART1

Powerful Phrases + Actions = Successful Work Relationships

Communicating Powerful Phrases

Trying to get along with coworkers and bosses can be difficult at best. However, since you probably spend more of your waking hours at work than you do at home, it makes good business sense to get along with everyone. But when you're forced to interact all day with people who, let's face it, may not be people you'd choose to be with, they can test your mettle, tick you off, and sour your attitude.

The bottom line is that no matter how well you get along with people, you aren't going to get along with everyone all the time. Whenever people spend a lot of time together, conflicts are going to arise. But, in work situations, the conflicts can be particularly tough to handle. It's hard to maintain your composure and self-control when a coworker's done something that's irritated you, but that's just what you need to do.

Employees who are able to stay calm and approach conflict in a self-controlled, thoughtful manner are viewed more positively by coworkers and bosses. When you take the time to think before speaking, plan the best approach to handle the problem, and communicate in a constructive manner, your coworkers and bosses are more likely to listen and respond considerately to you.

If you're uncomfortable facing conflict, you're not alone. Most people feel uncomfortable when dealing with these situations and hope the problem will just go away. The bad news is that ignoring conflict will only aggravate the problem, often to the point where even a minor problem becomes unmanageable. It's like the straw that breaks the camel's back! If left unresolved, conflict can make you disgruntled and bitter; it can cause work relationships to breakdown completely; and it can spill over into and negatively affect your interactions with customers, vendors, and other business contacts. And, in the worst-case scenario, unresolved conflicts at work may even affect your personal relationships.

So what happens when the people you work with—and for—aren't easy to

get along with? What do you do when your coworkers won't assume responsibility for their actions, like to gossip, take credit for your work, talk too loudly, or bully others? What do you do when your boss piles on the work, berates you in front of coworkers, plays favorites, or possesses zero percent job knowledge? And what happens when it isn't your coworkers or boss who cause the problem? What do you do when you're the cause of the situation? You may inadvertently say or do something and realize later that it may have been upsetting to the other person. Or, you may not even realize your blunder until the other person confronts you about it. Knowing how to quickly recover and resolve conflict when you're the cause enables you to keep your work relationships constructive and productive.

When you arm yourself with the skills to begin a positive dialogue when faced with conflict; to communicate assertively, confidently, and constructively to uncover the cause of the problem; and to work toward a solution that's agreeable to everyone, you'll gain the cooperation and respect of your coworkers and upper management. Further, you'll be seen as an employee who's committed to being part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

This chapter focuses on the basics of communicating when facing conflict: the powerful phrases you'll use when confronting and discussing a problem with a coworker or boss. These phrases even work when you have a disagreement with a friend or family member!

Knowing the right phrases to use to communicate may make all the difference between effectively resolving conflict and furthering an already difficult situation. Learning how to incorporate powerful phrases into your vocabulary is the first step to help you resolve disharmony at work.

Resolving Conflict: The Wrong Way

During a staff meeting, Kate was in the middle of her presentation when Emma, one of her coworkers, interrupted and disagreed with what she was saying. As a result, Kate lost her concentration and confidence and found it difficult to regroup and get back on track. Kate became upset and angry, especially since Emma had interrupted her in a previous meeting.

Kate's been stewing about it since the meeting. Therefore, when she saw Emma in the hallway, she blurted out: "You know, you always interrupt me during my presentations. Yesterday you did it again! You jumped in before I finished and started disagreeing with me. It really bugs me every time you do that."

“I don’t *always* interrupt you,” Emma snapped. “And, maybe if you said something that made sense, I wouldn’t need to disagree with you.”

“Well, next time keep your thoughts to yourself until I’m done talking, okay?” Kate responded.

“Who do you think you are?” Emma countered. “I have a right to my opinion and if you’re talking nonsense, I’m going to speak up.” Emma turned and huffed off, leaving Kate fuming.

Why This Doesn’t Work

This conversation wasn’t going to end well from the moment Kate accused Emma of always interrupting her. Emma immediately went on the defensive, the conversation heated up, and the interaction went quickly downhill. Both women spoke angrily, and there was no way to transform their banter into a constructive dialogue. When Emma stomped away and left Kate incensed, the problem wasn’t resolved and, more importantly, their relationship suffered. Kate did get her point across about how the interruptions bugged her, and Emma may be mindful not to interrupt her in the future, but it’s likely that these coworkers will have a difficult time getting along and working together.

Something to Think About

When confronting someone, refrain from using the words *always* or *never*. When you say to someone: “You always...” or “You never...,” the other person is going to focus more on that one word than on the point you’re trying to make and is likely to become instantly defensive, as Emma did. Rarely is anything *always* or *never*.

Begin with “I” Phrases

The number one rule when resolving conflict is never to open a conversation with the word *you*. Doing so may result in anger, yelling, hurling accusations back and forth, or someone stomping off. The *you* word is going to immediately put the other person on the defensive. Think about it. Has anyone said something like this to you: “You talk too much! No one else can get a word in” or “You never take responsibility for your mistakes.” Your likely response is to defend yourself and fight back. “No, I don’t! Bob talks just as much, if not more, than I do.” or “Yes I do. And what about you? I’m always fixing your errors.” This is definitely not the way to begin a conversation when you’re trying to resolve a problem.

When you're having an issue with another person and decide to discuss it with him or her, it's difficult to have a productive conversation when you lead off with an accusatory statement or one that sounds as though you're blaming the person for the problem. When you confront someone who's done something that bugs you, keep the focus on "I" rather than on "you." Think about how the person's behavior made you feel. Open the conversation with an "I" statement describing how the event affected you, and you'll come across in a more constructive manner. After all: "I'm" the one with the problem. "You" may not even know that what you're doing that bugs me.

Sample "I" Phrases

You don't want your opening statement to sound like an attack the other person's character, so always begin with an "I" phrase:

- *"I was hurt when you said I make too many mistakes."*
- *"I became upset when you took credit for my work."*
- *"I felt betrayed when I heard that you talked behind my back."*
- *"I became confused and lost focus when you interrupted me during my sales presentation."*
- *"I was surprised when you jumped in before I had time to finish."*
- *"I get frustrated every time you talk so loudly that I can't hear my customers."*

Something to Think About

If you don't know how to launch into your conversation, try prefacing your "I" phrase by saying something like: *"I have something I need to talk to you about"* or *"I have something I need to get off my chest"* or *"Something happened that's been bothering me."*

Incorporating "I" Phrases

Here's a sample of how Kate could have opened the conversation using an "I" phrase:

"I have something I want to talk to you about. Yesterday during our meeting, I became upset when I was in the middle of my presentation and you disagreed with what I was saying. That really threw me off track for the rest of my presentation."

Had Kate begun her conversation with Emma in this manner, the dialogue would have headed in a different direction. Kate stated what happened and painted the picture of how it affected her presentation. Emma is likely to

focus on Kate's feelings and doing so will lessen the need to defend herself. After listening to Kate, Emma would have either understood where her coworker was coming from...or not. Either way, Kate would have taken a positive first step to discussing and effectively resolving the conflict.

Emma may have responded: "Gee, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that."

Or, she may have said: "I didn't agree with what you were saying and felt it was important to voice my opinion before you went further."

The first scenario will likely resolve itself when adding phrases of understanding and resolution (as you'll learn in the following sections). Emma appreciated how Kate felt, took responsibility, apologized, and will be more conscious not to interrupt her in the future.

In the second scenario, Emma heard how Kate felt but failed to take responsibility for her actions. In this case, Kate will need to continue her discussion to effectively resolve the conflict; otherwise, Emma is likely to do it again and Kate is likely to become upset again.

Phrases of Understanding

Opening your conversation with "I" phrases keeps the focus on how the other person's actions made you feel. After listening to that person's response, it's important to let the person know you understand that he or she may view the situation differently. By doing this, you demonstrate that you're willing to listen to the other perspective before drawing your conclusion or assigning blame.

When you show others you understand they may have a different viewpoint, you open the door to having a productive conversation. Conveying understanding is also a great way to build a rapport. You and the other person may be able to find common ground, and it may also encourage the other person to look at the problem from your vantage point. After listening to you, he or she may respond, "You know, now that I'm thinking about it, I wouldn't like that done to me either."

In addition, offering a phrase of understanding allows you to step into the other person's shoes for a moment. Let's say that a coworker has been short tempered with you. It's been bugging you because you can't think of anything you did to cause the person to treat you this way, so you offered an "I" phrase and your coworker said he was sorry. Then you offered a phrase of understanding such as: "I realize you didn't do that on purpose, but it made me wonder if I said or did something that bothered you." Saying this encourages your coworker to give you more information: "No, it's not you.

My mother had a pretty serious operation and since she was released from the hospital I've been staying with her. I'm beyond exhausted and running on empty." You have an *aha* moment. In this scenario, offering a phrase of understanding and walking in your coworker's shoes put everything in perspective.

Sample Phrases of Understanding

You can follow up an "I" phrase with a phrase of understanding in situations in which the other person didn't take responsibility for his or her actions or doesn't seem to understand your feelings.

- *"I realize that you didn't do it on purpose."*
- *"I understand that you didn't mean it to sound that way."*
- *"I'm sure you were just excited when you started talking."*
- *"I'm certain you didn't mean to take credit for my idea."*
- *"I know you well enough to know that you wouldn't knowingly do that to me."*

You can also use a phrase of understanding when you have an *aha* moment. Incorporating a phrase of understanding at that point will productively move the conversation along.

- *"Now I see where you're coming from."*
- *"I understand the situation from your viewpoint now."*
- *"I can see why you didn't think that would bother me."*
- *"I'm glad you gave me the additional information. I realize why you did that."*

Incorporating Phrases of Understanding

After Emma apologized in the first scenario, Kate offered a phrase of understanding: *"I figured you didn't know that would be upsetting to me."* Both women have a better appreciation of the situation, and it's not likely to happen again.

But in the second scenario, when Emma didn't take responsibility, Kate said: *"Look, I realize that you wouldn't do that on purpose to upset me."* The ball is in Emma's court now. She responded: *"Of course I didn't do it to upset you. I didn't know if I'd have the opportunity to voice my opinion if I didn't speak up right away."* They now have a constructive dialogue going.

Phrases of Apology

Saying I'm sorry doesn't necessarily mean saying you're wrong. Saying I'm sorry means you're the one who's taking responsibility for resolving the conflict and mending the relationship. You might offer an apology to explain your state of mind, how you feel about what happened, or why you felt the need to bring up the issue.

Offering a phrase of apology can go a long way in opening the lines of communication and productively moving the dialogue along. A sincere apology holds a great deal of power. It can diffuse anger, lessen pride, and soothe hurt feelings. You won't always need to incorporate a phrase of apology into your conflict resolution conversation, but if you feel it'll help move the dialogue along, why not? Whenever you're at a stalemate in your discussion and the other person isn't willing to budge or look at the situation from your perspective, offering an apology can often change a person's disposition.

Sample Phrases of Apology

Offer a phrase of apology whenever you feel it will encourage empathy between the other person and you.

- *“I'm sorry if I seem overly sensitive.”*
- *“I'm sorry if I misunderstood your intent.”*
- *“I'm sorry that we need to have this conversation.”*
- *“I apologize if I misunderstood what happened.”*
- *“I regret that I have to bring this up.”*
- *“Please forgive me for feeling this way.”*

Incorporating Phrases of Apology

In the first scenario, Emma apologized and took responsibility. As a result, the conflict was resolved, so there was no need for Kate to return the apology. In the second scenario, Emma didn't take responsibility. So, after offering a phrase of understanding, Kate added: *“I'm sorry if this seems trivial.”* In saying this, Kate let Emma know that she not only understood that they viewed the situation differently, but that she wanted Emma to respond so that she'd have a better idea of where Emma stood on the issue.

Phrases of Compromise

Compromise is the optimum way to resolve conflict. People are usually able to reach a compromise when they remain flexible, ask questions to gain a better understanding of the situation, listen with an open mind, look at the

circumstance from the other person's perspective, and try to find middle ground. When people who are in a conflict discussion are able to compromise, the chances of agreeing on a solution greatly increase.

Communicating phrases of compromise means that you want to negotiate fairly and find the best solution and that you're willing to remain open as you work toward an agreement. Phrases of compromise demonstrate that you want to cooperate, listen, and find middle ground. When you're willing to cooperate, others will be more apt to cooperate with you. When you're open to listening, others will be more apt to listen to you. And when you're trying to find middle ground, others will be more apt to meet you halfway. When those things occur, you're on your way to negotiating a suitable conclusion.

Sample Phrases of Compromise

When you open your conversation with an "I" phrase and offer a phrase of understanding and your colleague doesn't take responsibility, you'll want to add a phrase of compromise to continue the dialogue.

- *"Let's talk about this. I need to know why it happened and how we can keep it from happening again."*
- *"Can we talk about what happened?"*
- *"I feel that we need to talk this out so it doesn't happen again."*
- *"Let's go somewhere in private and try to resolve this."*
- *"Let's talk this over and find a suitable compromise."*
- *"I'd like to hear how you saw the situation so that I better understand."*

During your discussion to resolve the problem, it's important to remain flexible so you'll want to incorporate additional phrases of compromise.

- *"Here's how you see the issue: _____. And here's how I see it: _____. Let's see where we can come together on this."*
- *"Since we don't agree why this happened, let's lay out the facts and come up with a solution we both can live with."*
- *"Why don't we each state our viewpoints? Then we'll see if we can find common ground."*
- *"We need to resolve this somehow. The only way to do that is for each of us to be flexible and try to come together."*

Incorporating Phrases of Compromise

In the first scenario, Emma took responsibility, the problem resolved itself, and further discussion wasn't necessary. In the second scenario, however, Kate needed to further the conversation. So she chose phrases of apology, stating that she knew Emma might find the matter trivial. And, Emma replied:

“Yeah, I do think it’s trivial.”

Kate had prepared herself for this type of response and said: “To me it wasn’t trivial. Do you have a few minutes now? *I’d like to talk this over and find an agreeable solution.* **(compromise)** Let’s go into the conference room where we can talk in private.”

After closing the door, Kate said: “*Why don’t we try to look at the situation from each other’s viewpoint? That may help us find an agreeable solution.*” **(compromise)**

“Okay, sure. You don’t like me disagreeing with you, and I felt it was important to voice my opinion.”

“That’s not what bothered me. *I understand that we’re not always going to agree.* **(understanding)** What bothered me was that you interrupted me during the middle of my presentation, and it really threw me off track. I would have appreciated if you waited until I was done speaking to voice your disagreement.”

“I’m sorry if I threw you off track. That would have bothered me too. It’s just that I didn’t know if I’d have the chance if I waited. In another meeting I did wait and when you finished speaking, the discussion changed direction and I wasn’t able to make my point.”

“*Oh, I can understand how frustrating that must have been.* **(understanding)** *How does this sound? From now on, if you’ll allow me to finish my presentation without interrupting, I’ll see to it that we don’t move on to another topic before asking if anyone would like to add something. That way, you’ll be able to voice your opinion.*” **(compromise)**

“That works for me.”

Something to Think About

Timing is important when you’re trying to resolve conflict of any kind, so before beginning your discussion, make sure it’s a good time. When Kate asked Emma if she had a few minutes to talk, she made sure that Emma was open to having the conversation at that time. If now isn’t a good time for the other person, ask when it will be and then schedule a time that’s agreeable to both of you.

Phrases of Resolution

As you saw in the previous scenario, the coworkers were able to calmly discuss the situation, talk through the problem, and reach a compromise.

That's how many conflict resolution discussions go. When each of the involved parties is able to voice their opinion, listen to each other's perspective, compromise, and agree on a solution, everyone feels good about the outcome.

Offering a phrase of resolution is an important next step. You want to make sure that everyone truly is in agreement about the outcome and, in the event that you aren't able to garner agreement from all the involved parties, you want to make sure that everyone understands why this is the best solution.

For example, during a discussion on the best way to resolve billing mistakes, you agree to manage it at the point of contact, but one member of your team feels that the employee who was responsible for the error should handle the problem. As the meeting winds down, you need to gain the hold-out's agreement to the resolution by explaining why that solution was chosen: *"Look, Josh, we understand that you feel differently. (understanding) But, if we turn the contact over to another employee, there's going to be a delay in getting the problem resolved. It'll take extra time to explain the situation. And, what if the employee's on vacation? Since the rest of us feel this is the best way to handle these errors, can you live with our decision?" (resolution)* Josh responds: "I see your point. In the past we've been inconsistent in handling these types of problems but as long as we're all handling them the same way, then I'll agree."

Sample Phrases of Resolution

After finding a solution that's agreeable to all parties, add a phrase of resolution to show your appreciation that you were able to reach an agreement.

- *"I'm happy...we could resolve this."*
- *"I'm glad...we talked this out. We have a better understanding of what happened."*
- *"I'm pleased...we were able to clear up the misunderstanding."*
- *"I'm thrilled...we were able to come to an agreement."*

If you're not sure the solution is agreeable to everyone, voice your phrase of resolution as a question.

- *"Are you satisfied with the solution?"*
- *"Is there anything else we need to talk about?"*
- *"Do you feel we have a better understanding of what caused the problem?"*
- *"How do you feel about the solution?"*
- *"I'm happy with our compromise. How do you feel about it?"*

Incorporating Phrases of Resolution

In the first scenario in which Emma took responsibility, Kate added a phrase of resolution: *“I’m glad we talked this out.”*

And in second scenario, when Emma responded: “That works for me,” she was stating that an agreement had been reached. Kate felt good that they reached a compromise, and she said: *“I’m glad we talked this out.”* Then she restated the resolution: *“Now I have a better understanding of your viewpoint. After finishing any future presentations, I’ll make sure you get a chance to speak up, even if it is to disagree with me!”* (**resolution**) They laughed, and both felt good that they were able to resolve the problem.

Something to Think About

It’s a good idea to restate the resolution just in case you misinterpreted what you and your coworker agreed to.

Phrases of Reconciliation

Whenever you talk through a problem, show understanding, compromise, and reach a resolution, you should feel proud that you effectively and successfully resolved the problem. You began your conversation with an “I” phrase and a phrase of understanding. You may or may not have felt the need to apologize. You then incorporated phrases of compromise during your discussion and, after reaching agreement, followed up with a phrase of resolution.

Before ending the discussion, take one more step and say something about the value of your working relationship. Letting the other person know that he or she is important to you ends your conversation on a positive note and will strengthen your working relationship.

Sample Phrases of Reconciliation

Always end your conflict resolution discussions with a positive comment about your relationship.

- *“I value our working relationship... Going forward I feel we’ll be able to work through any problem.”*
- *“I’m glad we talked this out... Now I’m confident we can work through any problem.”*
- *“I respect you...and know that we’ll work even more closely now.”*
- *“I’m glad we talked this out... In the future, we’re not going to let any disagreement get in the way of our friendship.”*
- *“I have a better understanding of you..., and I hope you do of me as well.”*

- “We’ve always worked closely and going forward... I know that we won’t let a little problem stand between us.”

Incorporating Phrases of Reconciliation

After offering a phrase of resolution, Kate said: “I’m so glad we talked this out. I value our working relationship and wouldn’t want anything to detract from that.” **(reconciliation)** They both left the meeting pleased with the outcome and feeling comfortable that they’ll be able to work through any problem.

Resolving Conflict: The Right Way

After Emma interrupted Kate once again and disagreed with what she was saying, Kate became upset. She found it difficult to regroup but managed to complete her presentation without outwardly appearing shaken or upset. Since this had happened before, Kate saw a pattern emerging. On the surface, it appeared to her that Emma didn’t respect her. Kate felt it was time to confront the situation, but before speaking she first considered how to best approach Emma. She also thought through possible conversations that might ensue.

The next day, Kate and Emma were talking. Kate waited for a lull in the conversation, and then said: “I have something I want to talk to you about. Yesterday during our meeting, I became upset when I was in the middle of my presentation and you disagreed with what I was saying. That really threw me off track for the rest of my presentation.” **(“I” phrase)**

Kate hoped that Emma would understand where she was coming from, take responsibility, and apologize for interrupting her. Instead, Emma said: “I didn’t agree with what you were saying and felt it was important to voice my opinion before you went further.”

Kate didn’t hear what she wanted to, but because she had prepared for this possible scenario she said: “Look, I realize that you wouldn’t do that on purpose to upset me.” **(understanding)**

Emma responded: “Of course I wouldn’t do that to upset you. I didn’t know if I’d have the opportunity to voice my opinion if I didn’t speak up right away.”

Kate felt it was important to add a phrase of apology to keep Emma from becoming defensive, so she immediately added: “I apologize if this seems trivial.” **(apology)**

Emma did not back down: “Yeah, I do think it’s trivial.”

Kate knew that if she wanted Emma's behavior to stop, she'd need to continue the conversation. She also knew, by Emma's demeanor, that she needed to be assertive, yet remain calm. "To me it wasn't trivial. Do you have a few minutes now? *I'd like to talk this over and find an agreeable solution.* **(compromise)** Let's go into the conference room where we can talk in private."

Kate sensed that Emma felt uncomfortable and that she'd need to tread lightly. After closing the door, she began: "*Why don't we try to look at the situation from each other's viewpoint? That may help us find a solution.*" **(compromise)**

"Okay, sure," Emma said. "You don't like me disagreeing with you, and I felt it was important to voice my opinion."

"That's not what bothered me. *I understand that we're not always going to agree.* **(understanding)** What bothered me was that you interrupted me during the middle of my presentation and it really threw me off track. *I would have appreciated if you waited until I was done speaking to voice your disagreement.*" **(compromise)**

"I'm sorry if I threw you off track. That would have bothered me too. It's just that I didn't know if I'd have the chance if I waited. In another meeting I did wait and, when you finished speaking, the discussion changed direction and I wasn't able to make my point."

"Oh, *I can understand how frustrating that must have been.* **(understanding)** How does this sound? *From now on, if you'll allow me to finish my presentation without interrupting, I'll see to it that we don't move on to another topic before asking if anyone would like to add something. That way, you'll be able to voice your opinion.*" **(compromise)**

"That works for me."

Kate felt that Emma now understood her position and agreed with her proposed solution. Then she restated the resolution: "*Now I have a better understanding of your viewpoint. After finishing any future presentations, I'll make sure you get a chance to speak up, even if it is to disagree with me!*" **(resolution)** They laughed and both felt good that they were able to resolve the problem.

Then Kate added: "*I'm so glad we talked this out. I value our working relationship and wouldn't want anything to detract from that.*" **(reconciliation)**

Why This Works

When you compare the two conversations, you probably knew from the way in which Kate began the first conversation that it was going to head downhill quickly. In the second scenario, even though Kate was upset about what happened, she took time to think about the best way to approach Emma. She also played through different conversation scenarios in her mind so that she wouldn't be caught off guard.

She opened with an "I" phrase, which sounded much better than opening with a "you" phrase blaming Emma for interrupting her. By offering phrases of understanding, Kate demonstrated that she was open to hearing Emma's point of view. Kate also offered a phrase of apology, hoping that would help Emma empathize with her. Then, throughout their conversation, Kate interjected phrases of compromise to continue the dialogue. When Emma mentioned that on a previous occasion she wasn't able to voice her opinion, Kate had an *aha* moment. She was able to see the situation from Emma's perspective and understood how not being able to speak up made her feel. Kate then voiced a phrase of understanding, and they reached an agreement that in the future Emma would hold her comments and Kate would make sure that she allowed time for discussion. A phrase of resolution followed by a phrase of reconciliation ended the conversation on a positive note.

Actions That Enhance Powerful Phrases

You might think communication is just the words you speak, but it involves much more than words. Your nonverbal actions actually communicate more than what you say. That's because your words convey your message, but your actions convey the feelings and emotions behind it. Nonverbal communication is the actions you take as you speak and listen. If used effectively, these actions enhance your powerful phrases.

Nonverbal communication is comprised of body language, facial expressions, voice tone, and level of assertiveness. Body language includes your stance, posture, arm-and-hand movements, and gestures. Facial expressions are your mouth, eye, and eyebrow movements. Tone of voice, though verbal in nature, is considered a nonverbal action because your tone communicates what you're feeling. Assertiveness is reflected outward by acting confidently and with self-assurance. Even when you think before you speak and choose your words wisely, if your nonverbal actions don't agree with your verbal message, it can confuse the other person, who's more likely to assess the message based on your nonverbal actions than on what you said.

Your nonverbal actions have a direct affect on how others view you. They can increase your ability to get along and communicate well with your peers and boss or create a problem between you and another person. Just going about your daily work routine may cause someone to view you negatively. Let's say that you usually greet your coworkers with a facial expression that projects a lack of interest, you don't make eye contact when you speak to others, you speak in a tone tinged with boredom, and you never speak up or defend yourself. It's likely your coworkers will keep you at arm's length or take advantage of you. However, you can learn to use nonverbal actions to your advantage. Let's say that you always maintain a friendly facial expression, make eye contact when conversing, use a calm and