

LESSON 9: RESOURCES TO HELP – YOUR WORDS

Take a moment and reflect on a time that you tried to tackle a difficult conversation that you did not adequately prepare for. How did it go?

YOUR WORDS ARE IMPORTANT IN CHANGING THINGS

You may have realized that you probably need to have a conversation with your button-pusher; and second, that you probably need to know how to do it in the best way possible.

Though it can certainly be an uncomfortable process, your button-pusher most likely needs to hear your words in order to change. That is just the nature of close relationships. We confront, give feedback, ask for change, and so forth, and we speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

There are several aspects to having a talk with your button-pusher about what you want to see changed. Identify which ones you already have the ability and skill on, and which ones may need some work.

TONE AND CONTENT

Every conversation has two dimensions to it: tone and content. Tone has to do with how your voice sounds when you say something, and content is what you are saying.

Tone

Your tone is highly important, as you can negate the words you are saying with the way you sound. The best tone to have is one that is warm. Warmth conveys safety and care, and that stands the best chance of keeping your button-pusher from becoming even more wary or defensive than she already is. You can convey warmth even when you disagree, and you need to learn that ability.

Now, you may be angry or afraid of your button-pusher, and can't feel a lot of warmth for her because of what she has done to you. If so, go elsewhere first, and confess and process those feelings. Don't bring them in, as you run the risk of escalating things and not getting the results you desire.

Speak from experience. When you talk to your button-pusher, speak from your experience and life. Talk from the heart. Use "I" statements as much as possible. Stay with what you feel, think, and perceive.

- *You are angry with me all the time, and you need to stop.*
- *It seems to me that you are angry with me pretty often, and it is difficult for me to be close to you.*

In the first statement, there is little vulnerability. In the second, she lets him know she wants to be close but can't. In the first statement, her reality is fact: he is too angry. In the second, it seems that way to her (it's possible that she has a sensitivity to anger and overreacts to normal anger). In the first statement, it's all the time. In the second, it is often. Learn to talk from your gut and your experience; it helps bring walls down in your difficult person.

Content

The next elements have to do more with the content of what you want to say. Be flexible, according to how things are going.

Affirm the good. It is probably best to begin the talk by taking the initiative to affirm, or validate the reality of, what is good in your button-pusher and in the relationship itself. This is particularly important, as many difficult people do not perceive confrontation as being loving, helpful, or "for" them in any way, shape, or form.

"Thanks for meeting with me. I wouldn't have asked you to take the time unless I thought it was important, and I want you to know that you are important to me. This isn't about putting you down or criticizing you. I am in this relationship with you, and I am here for the long run. I am on your side, and our side. I love you, and I want things to be good for you and for us."

Reasons why affirming the good is important:

- Makes it easier for them to feel safe and able to metabolize what you want to say later.
- They can listen from a loved position rather than from a guarded one.
- It makes your tone warmer and reminds the person that you have good intentions.

"So, all I want to do in this conversation is to talk about a problem in order for us to solve it. I want to get it out of the way and out of our lives because it comes between us, and it hurts the relationship, and it hurts me. I want it resolved because I want to get on with a good life and closeness with you. Does that make sense?"

This question is a real question. It is designed to make sure that he gets it; that you affirm him, don't want to blast him, and just want to get a problem resolved so that you can reestablish closeness again.

He may project his own anger or guilt into what you said, like "You're saying that I'm the bad guy." If he does, clarify it: *"No, no, that's not what I'm saying at all. I'm saying that I love you and I want to be close to you again, and this problem is like a boulder in the middle of the road. I just want the boulder out of the way, because I want you. Does that make sense?"*

Most of the time, this conveys the safety you want to bring, and you can go to the next part. If, however, your button-pusher persists in perceiving that you are coming down on him, you may need to bring in a neutral third party to help. You just can't get to the point of your talk until he first understands the affirmation. It will not be safe enough for him to listen in any constructive way.

Tip: People need to know how much you care about them before they will be open to receiving feedback, constructive or otherwise. If this is not your area of strength, work on it. If you ramble, and overtalk, you come off as insincere and too polished. People won't believe you. Work on it.