



## Communication Breakdown?

### Three strategies for communication success

Miscommunication can lead to misunderstandings, which contribute to our overall stress level. To help you deal with the boardroom bully or the partner who knows how to push your buttons, we offer these three communication tips from Joyce Weiss of West Bloomfield, a conflict-resolution specialist ([www.joyceweiss.com](http://www.joyceweiss.com)). Practiced regularly, these strategies should help you experience less conflict and have more constructive conversations.

- **Use the *Power Talk Formula*.** “It’s a three-part process,” explains Joyce. “Start with ‘I feel ...’ which shows your emotional response. Second, say ‘when...’ – a nonjudgmental statement. Close with ‘because...’ to communicate how it affects you. As an example, you might say, ‘I feel frustrated when I have to ask for help, because I’m not the only one who works here,’ versus ‘You’re all a bunch of slobs, why don’t you pitch in and help once in a while.’”
- **Don’t use “you.”** Starting a discussion with “you always” or “you never” usually doesn’t lead to a productive conversation. Make a point of dropping these accusing statements from your vocabulary

when you’re trying to be constructive. “During a stressful situation, it’s going to help,” notes Joyce.

- **Practice *Verbal Aikido*.** A form of Japanese martial arts, Joyce suggests translating Aikido principles into a communication tactic. “Most of us push back when somebody pushes our buttons,” notes Joyce. “That’s when conversations begin to sound like this: ‘No, you can’t.’ ‘Yes, I can.’ ‘No, you can’t.’ ‘Yes, I can.’ Nothing gets resolved. Instead, when someone verbally pushes you, try an Aikido move, step back or redirect. As an example, imagine someone at work says, ‘You’re always late.’ If you say, ‘No, I’m not,’ you start to look defensive. Instead, counter with the question, ‘Always late?’ Then he or she has to do the explaining. You’ve just gained control. They will usually respond with less aggression, such as ‘Oh, well, it’s just once in a while ...’”

Lastly, don’t overreact. It may not be about you at all. Maybe your co-worker or spouse is just having a bad day. Take time to think first. Saying nothing may be the best response.