



When to Seek Clarification

This is a continuation from last month's newsletter. Here are some key verbal cues which indicate a need for clarification.

Shoulds/Oughts

When someone says they "should workout" or "should make their bed" or "should go on a diet" it is an indicator of rules being used. Shoulds or oughts indicate we have a belief that something needs to be done. However, it is treated as if there are no options. Next time you hear someone say they "should" do something, ask them - according to whom should you do it? It forces the person to question the belief. Be prepared, most people will resist the concept that there are options. They treat it like a rule they can't violate.

Fuzzy Words

Sometimes, many, most, a lot, frequently, often, very, somewhat, several, they, and them are examples of words with fuzzy meanings. They have multiple meanings depending on the person. Even the word "couple" elicits different responses as to the meaning - ask someone what it means to them. You may be surprised that it's not TWO to everyone. The fix? Ask for quantification. How many exactly do you mean? How often specifically does it happen? When was the last time it happened? Who specifically said that/did that? Or, when you hear "they" respond, "who is they?"

Absolutes

Always, never, all, none, all the time, etc. are examples of absolute terms. These indicate that there is no exception. How many things in life, any part of life, are absolute? If you find any exception then the term has been falsely applied. Most often it is a result of an emotional response to the situation being described. It "seems" to the person that it is all the time because it is such an important issue for them. The fix: reflect back to them the term used. Someone says, "I never get any breaks." Reply, "Really, never?" Most often they will come back and clarify the response. Often the use of an absolute term is an indicator of a high emotional content as opposed to fact-based.

Word Meaning

We would all like to think we have the same meaning for words. Nouns mean different things to different people. The word "report" may seem obvious. So when you request someone to "report" back to you on the



progress of a project you know what you expect. But do they? Is it a written report? Is there a specific format or form? Is it in a PowerPoint presentation? Is it a verbal report? Do you want an email bullet pointed update? The fix: be specific with your expectations. Set your staff up for success and don't assume. Once the word "report" has been established as you expect, then you can measure performance against it.

Generalizations

When you hear terms such as: they, all, those people, the corporate office, that department, this business, this industry, etc. they indicate some level of generalization. They group all of that entity together and label them with some characteristic. To uncover these you seek clarification. A conversation may go something like this:

No one at the corporate office can get this right.
You mean no one in ALL the corporate office?

Well, no, but no one in that finance department.
So, NO ONE at all in that department can get it right?

Ok, well some can but they never get this report right.
So, how often does the report come out wrong?

About every other month when Bill does it.
So, about 6 times a year when Bill does the report it is wrong.

Got the idea? That is a lot different than an entire corporate office or department or report process that is in err. You now have specific data to go forth and seek solutions.

Communication is a very complex science. If you would like to improve your ability to "seek to understand" you may benefit from a business coach. If you would like to explore the mindset it takes to improve, contact me.