

**EPISODE 145: 6 WAYS TO LOSE AN ARGUMENT****1. ASSIGNING BLAME: “THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT.”**

- The tendency is to see one person who is at fault and the other who is the innocent bystander.
- In most cases, neither party feels entirely responsible for the conflict. No matter what one person said or did, the other person may share *some* part of the blame.
- But what if one person is to blame? What is the best way to get that person to accept responsibility?
- It is much more productive to simply discuss the issue until individual contributions to the problem become clear.
- It’s easier on the ego to choose to accept responsibility than to have it dumped in your lap.

**2. IDENTIFYING THE ORIGIN: “YOU STARTED THIS.”**

- The tendency is to identify the originator of the disagreement as the one who has the problem.
- Rarely will both parties agree on precisely when a disagreement began.
- Each believes that his or her own anger is nothing more than a response to something the other did first.
- The goal is not to identify the starting point but to arrive at the finish line together.

**3. GETTING HISTORICAL: “THIS IS JUST LIKE THE TIME WHEN YOU . . .”**

- It’s human nature to search for patterns in complex situations; patterns help us make sense of the strange and unfamiliar.
- But it doesn’t help a conflict when we insist on comparing the present situation to something from the past.
- This issue may have *some* similarities to the past, but it may also feel like evasion.
- History lessons are almost always unproductive, because they take the discussion on a tangent. Instead of arguing about the present issue, now you’re arguing about the past, too.
- Don’t pull the past into the present. Having to deal with all of history can be downright exhausting.

**4. READING FROM THE RECORD: “YOUR EXACT WORDS WERE . . .”**

- Sometimes a conflict accelerates over the use of a specific word or phrase. In those situations, you want the other person to face up to the source of the offense.
- But much to your dismay, the other person often disagrees about what was actually said, leading once again to a tangent: Who said what to whom?
- Human communication is a multichannel event. It involves subtle facial expressions, minute variations in tone of voice, and almost imperceptible movements of the eyes.

- Words themselves are not simple; they have connotations and nuances that sometimes communicate far more than the word itself.
- When an offensive word or phrase is spoken, the offense is often the collective impact of a multichannel message.
- What was it that really bothered you—the word itself, the connotation of the word, or the way that it was spoken? All are a part of what was *said*.
- That’s why we can’t always agree on the official record. So why bother?
- Ask the other person to say it in a different way. Keep the focus on the meaning and not on the words themselves.
- Try to listen for the hurt, fear, or disappointment. Be compassionate as you listen.

**5. ABSENCE OF MALICE: “I DIDN’T MEAN TO OFFEND YOU.”**

- Old saying: “We judge ourselves by our intentions, and others by their actions.”
- This applies to conflict: We want to be judged by our intentions.
- It isn’t our intention that matters, it’s our actions and words.

**6. REVERSAL: “ME? WHAT ABOUT WHEN YOU...?”**

- Reversal is a form of defensiveness.
- Sometimes our objection is not to a specific word or phrase, but to the person raising the objection.
- While *defensiveness* is a process of building a protective barrier, *reversal* is the strategy of achieving victory through quick counterattack.
- Another form of reversal is to respond to a complaint with an unrelated complaint.
- We have to be disciplined and courageous enough to patiently consider another’s complaint.

Are there other communication-related topics you’d like to hear the Communication Guys address? Let us know on our [Facebook page](#).