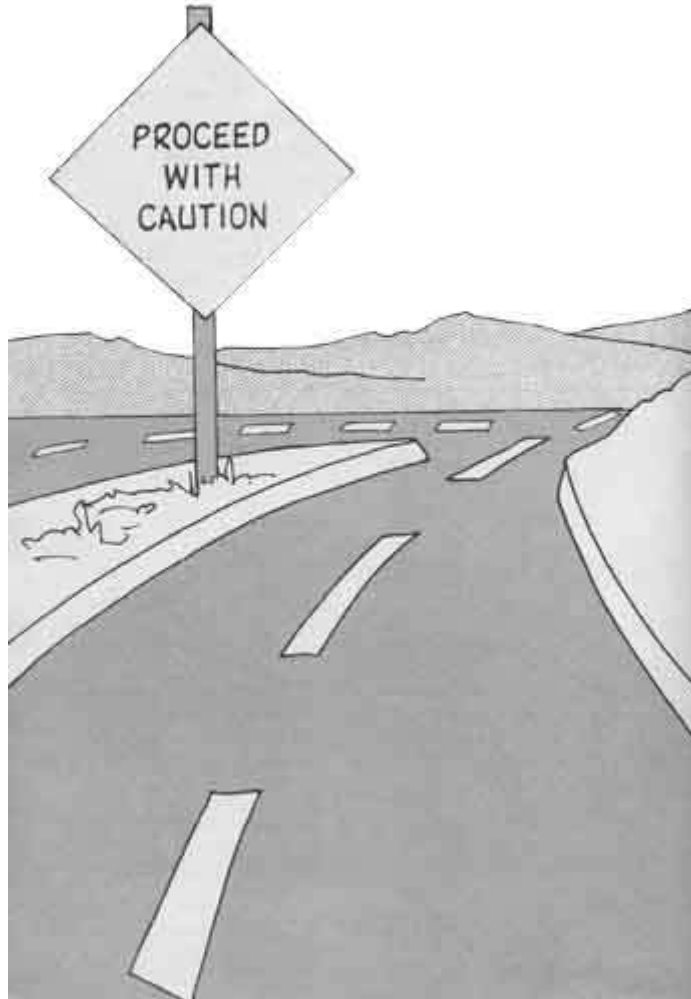


# Red Flag Words



Try to think of communication among people as a highway. The signs along the roadway are the words you use.

Some words open the lanes to better communication. Others inhibit and actually hurt communication with another person.

Some words can provoke a negative response in a person. Some words can prevent people from expressing how they feel.

There are a set of words that are potentially dangerous

whenever they are used. They are called.....

## RED FLAG WORDS.

Red Flag Words are common words, used by each of us every day, that prevent clear communications among ourselves and our friends. These words can actually disrupt or derail our everyday conversations. They are dangerous because people give them VERY LITTLE THOUGHT.

Elimination of these words may be awkward at first. To do so requires that you stop, rethink what you wish to say and then express yourself clearly.

Eliminating Red Flag Words makes your communications with others valid and trustworthy. Friends and family know exactly what you mean, and know you will do what you say.

However...

Before we begin, there are two important principles you must keep in mind.

- 1) Partial misunderstanding is the normal and predictable outcome of every attempt at human communication.
- 2) The only valid test of our communication is the results it gets.

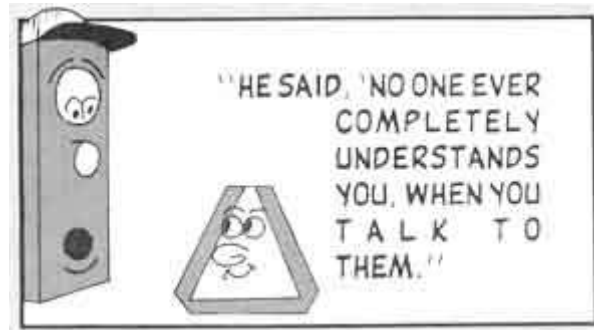
It is very natural for people to assume a misunderstanding is the result of poor listening on the other person's part. But this is generally not the case.

Every person is 100 percent responsible for his or her half of a verbal interaction.

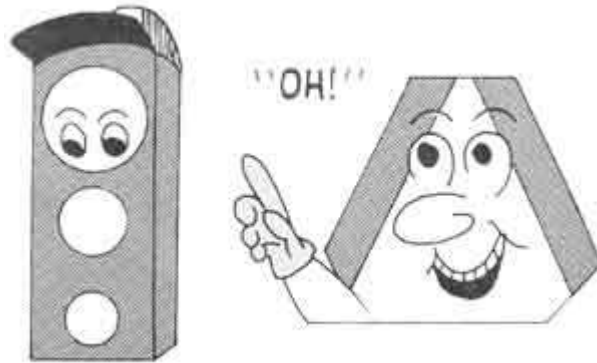
If you do not get the results you need from



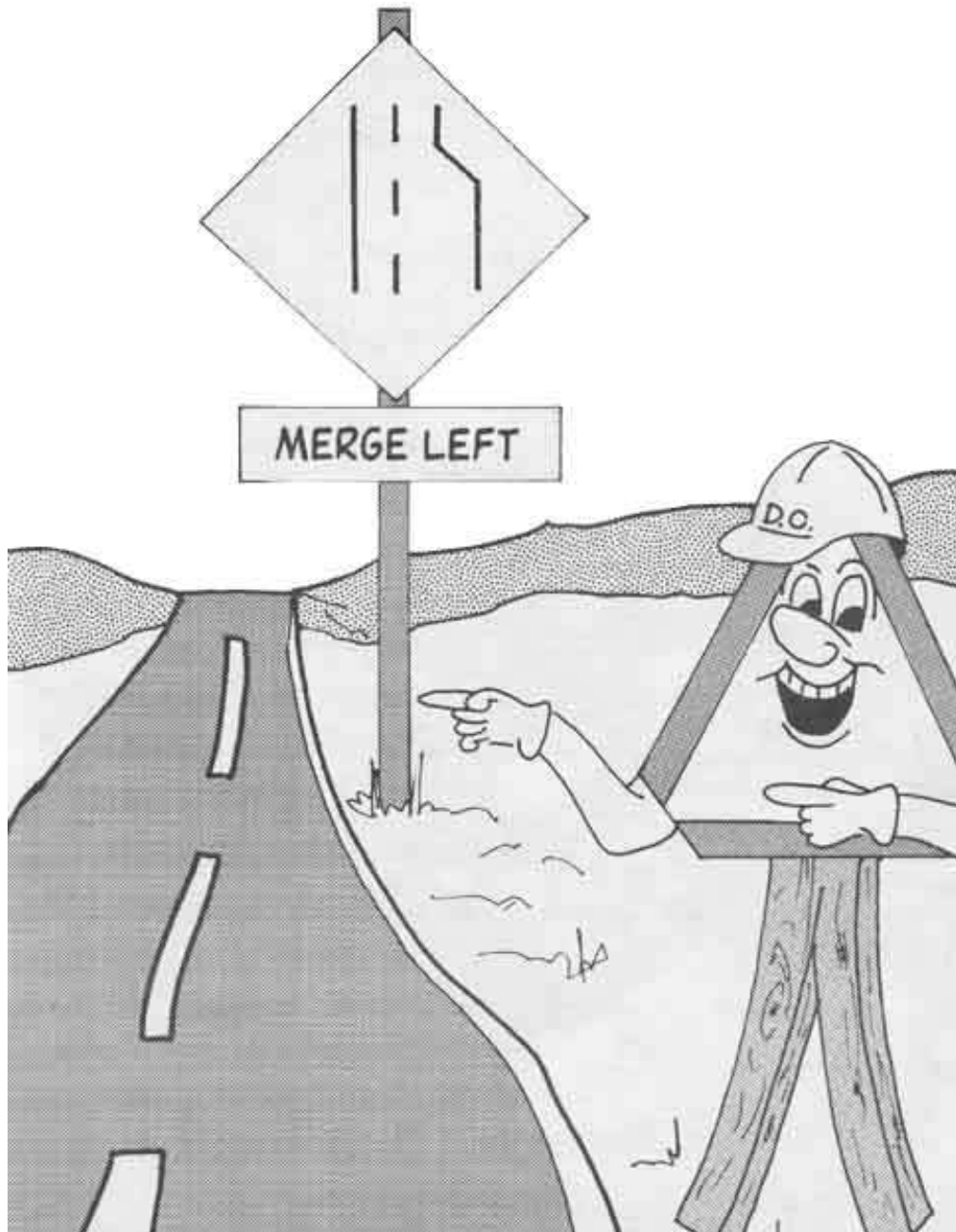
your communications,  
YOU need to change  
the way you communicate



"A LITTLE MIS-COMMUNICATION IN EVERY CONVERSATION IS NORMAL."



Change the way you talk to people. Do not expect people to change the way they understand you. Clear communication begins with the speaker, not the listener.





You were told by your mother certain four - letter words were "bad" words. In interpersonal communications, it is the two - and three - letter words you have to watch closely.

For instance, the word "we." When "we" is used, an assumption is made that everyone has the same experience and/or feelings in the same way.

Doctor: And how are "we" feeling today?

"We" does NOT allow others to express feelings and opinions in their own way.

"We can't wait to see Aunt Georgina this Christmas."

The use of "we" closes open communication.

"We've got it all taken care of! Don't worry."

"We" can lead to a disagreement when, in fact, both parties actually agree.

Wife: We had the greatest weekend ever. Isn't that right, honey?

Husband: It was all right.

Wife: Wait a minute! I thought you had a great time.

Husband: I did. I just wish we hadn't stayed at that expensive hotel.

The husband in this dialogue may have liked the

vacation. His wife's  
"We" statement, however, blocked his opportunity to  
give his own personal  
view.

To be able to state his own opinion, the husband  
qualifies the wife's  
statement. He emphasizes a 5 percent disagreement  
on an issue they really  
both agree on.

Look what happens to the conversation without the  
"we."

Wife: I had a great time on our vacation.

Husband: So did I. I just wish we hadn't stayed  
at that expensive hotel.

"We" also is used  
to avoid  
a direct statement  
about what  
a person thinks,  
feels or  
what he or she  
wishes done.

"We need to clean  
up the back yard  
today."  
Can change to....

"I need you to  
clean up the yard  
today."

"We need those reports out by tomorrow."  
Can change to.....

"I need to get you that address so you can get that  
report out tomorrow."

Good communication occurs when the words you use are  
concrete and specific.

Thus, the Red Flag Word "it" derails good communication



because "it" is an extremely ambiguous word.

"It" is used whenever you assume everyone knows what "it" is.

"It's happening again!"

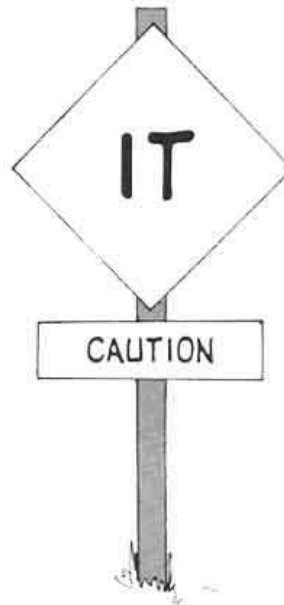
"It's just the way I am!"

"I can't stand it!"

"What are you going to do about it?"

"It" is actually a multi-dimensional word.

"It" can mean a lot of things and have many sides.



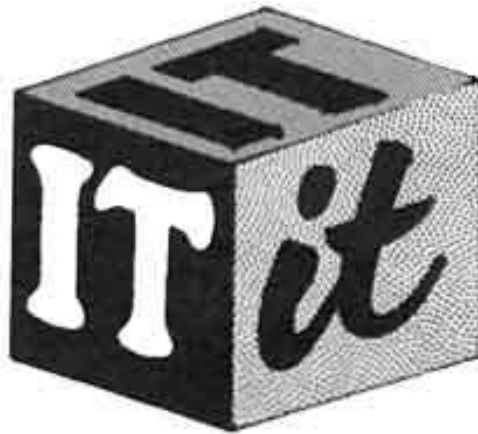
Failing to define the "it" may result in decisions being made from inaccurate information.

Husband: It was great!

Wife: What was great?

Husband: The vacation in Hawaii!

Wife: You're right; it was great!



This may sound as though both parties understand each other, but how do you know there really was agreement? Suppose the husband and wife defined what they loved about the vacation.

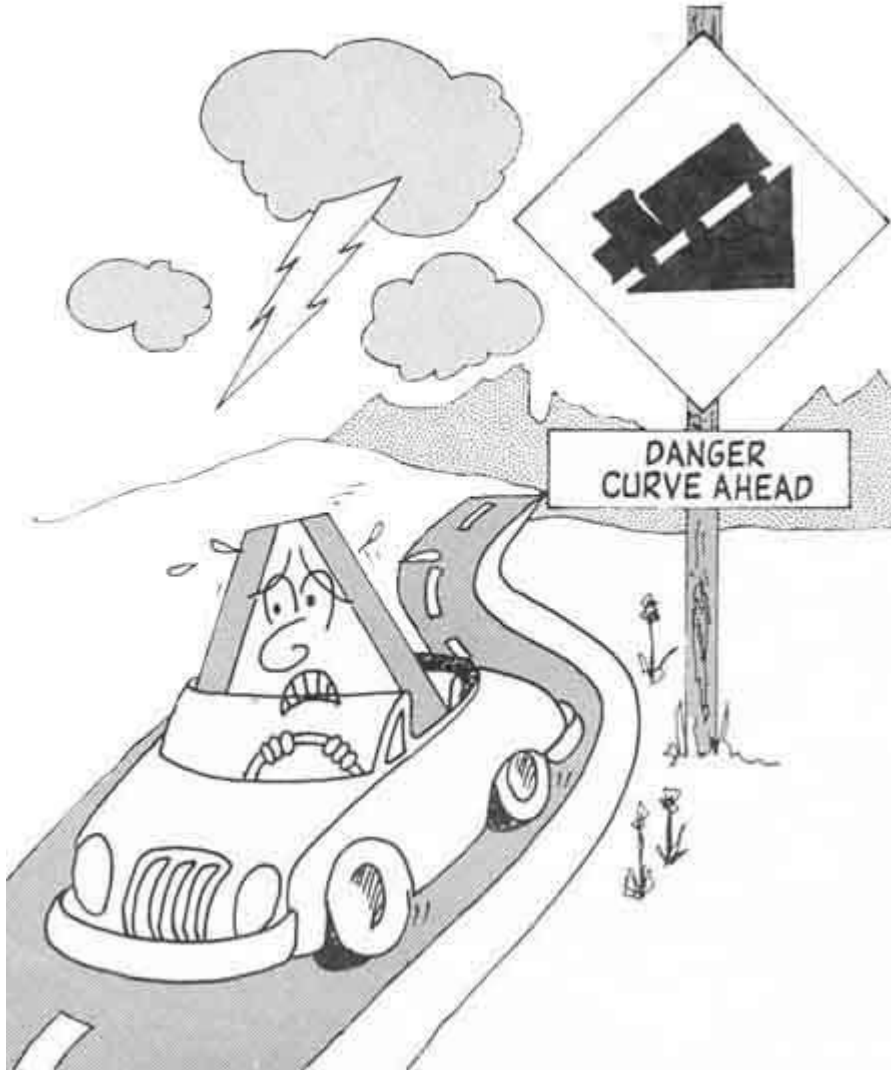
Wife: I loved it. I loved the hotel on Maui we stayed in. You could get great excursions right from your hotel. I didn't have to cook or clean. It was a little more money, but certainly worth it.

Husband: I loved it. I loved being out under the blue sky and the deep-sea fishing. Next time we go, I'm going to rent a boat and travel around the islands.

Because the "it" that made the vacation "great" was not clearly defined, this couple may find the next Hawaiian vacation very disappointing.

**Warning:**

Your first reaction to what "it" is, will often be wrong.



Clear communication starts by clearly, concretely defining what “it” is. That is not easy.

To track down an “it”, start by answering the traditional questions: who, what, when, where, why and how. When these answers are found, you end up with a precise definition of “it.”



The Red Flag Word “but” is a deceptive three-letter word. We often think of using “but” as a way to give a simple evaluation, opinion or comparison. However, even when used in minor ways, sentences with “but” actually imply disagreement. “But” is used to combine two thoughts - one positive and one negative.

However, the positive statement is really a sugar-coated prelude to stating a disagreement with another person’s actions or statements. What is important is not the area of agreement. What you really wish to communicate is your area of disagreement.

“You did a nice job on the lawn, but you forgot to trim the hedge.”

“Your report card was great, but you’re going to have to work harder on your math.”

The question to be answered before using “but” is: How important is the negative? Is the correction essential to the other person’s well-being? If the answer is “yes,” separate the conflict, difference, or discrepancy out and deal with it separately.

Dad: Son, overall your report card looks great.

Son: “Thanks, dad.”

Dad: I'm concerned about your math grade. It is lower than all the others. Is math difficult for you?

Notice how different conversation about feels. Both the positive and negative statements made by the father are valid. One does not undercut the other.



When "but" is used, a person remembers only the negative or the rebuttal.

This is particularly true of children.



The rule of thumb for affirming AND correcting a person is to keep the positive and negative statements separate. In this manner, your child or spouse will benefit from your praise and also will be open to hearing your conflict.

**PRAISE NOW.  
TEACH LATER.**



The Red Flag Word “try” is a myth. In reality, a person cannot “try.” Put an object in front of you. Now “try” to pick it up. If the object is in your hand, you didn’t “try.” You actually picked up the object. If your hand came in close to the object but didn’t touch it, you didn’t “try” then either. You simply did not pick the object up.

There is no such thing as “try.”  
You either do something or you don’t do something. Thus, “try” is used when persons wish to avoid an issue or are unwilling to commit themselves.

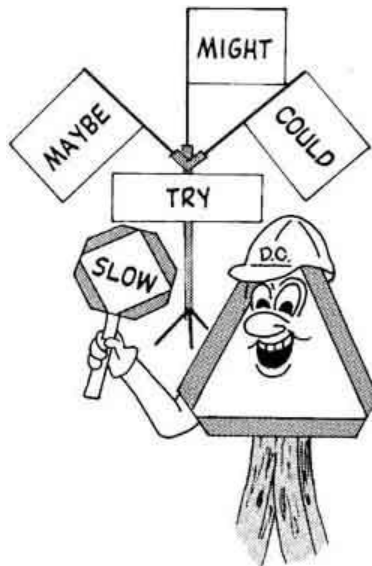
“I’ll try to lose weight.”

“I’ll try to be on time next week.”

To avoid “try,” state clearly what you will or will not do.

Sis: Will you visit mom today?”

Bro: “No, I won’t. I have appointments scheduled all day.”



“Might,” “could” and “maybe” are similar to “try.” They are avoidance words. They are words we use when we want to be “nice.”

“Maybe I will.”

“We might drop by.”

“I could do that. I’ll have to think about it and see.”

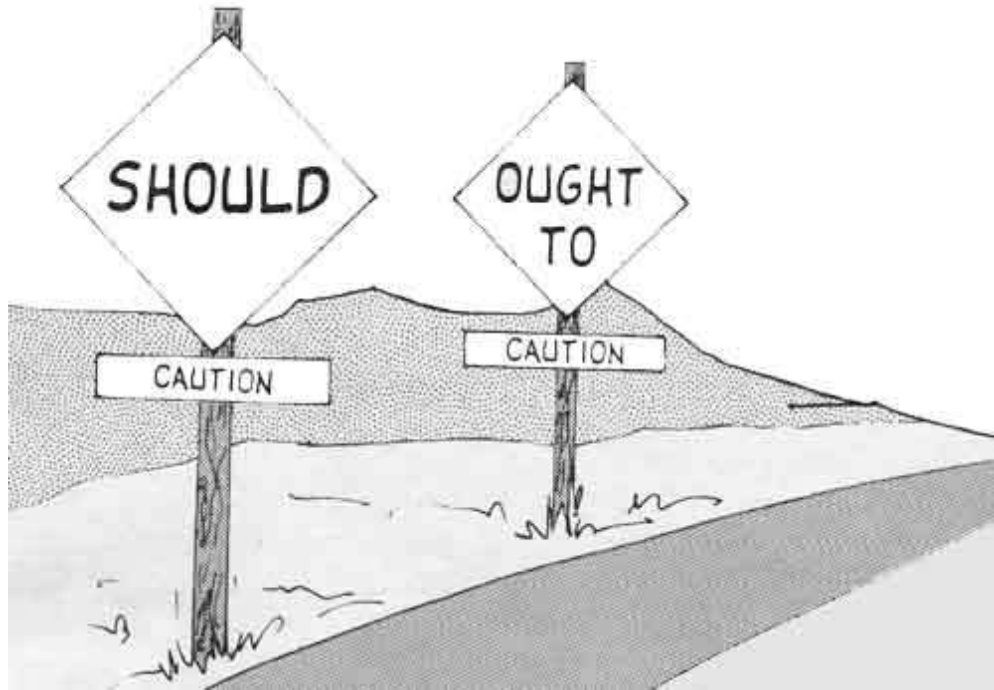
These statements leave the listener to resolve why you do not wish to meet the request

Using “might,” “could” and “maybe” too often erode personal relationships by undermining another’s trust.

These words communicate to others you really do not mean what you say. Thus, frequent use of “might,” “could,” “maybe” and “try” leads others to dismiss even genuine statements.

Stating your true feelings promotes trust, faith and security. Others learn to depend on you, because your words mean what they say.

“Should” and “ought to” are useless words. They do not accomplish what they intend to do.



“Should” and “ought to” are supposedly used to motivate people.

However, they are actually attempts to control another and force them to do or be what we judge they should... As they ought to.. As they... Well, you know what I mean!

“Should” and “ought to” imply the other person is unable to decide properly for himself. They indicate a lack of respect for another person’s individuality.

“You should call your mother.”

“You ought to save more money than you do.”

“Should” and “ought to” assumes:

1. I have the power and the right to make a judgment about your situation.
2. My evaluation and judgment are absolutely correct.
3. You will find my judgment and advice absolutely invaluable and necessary when I tell you what to do.

This is rarely the case.

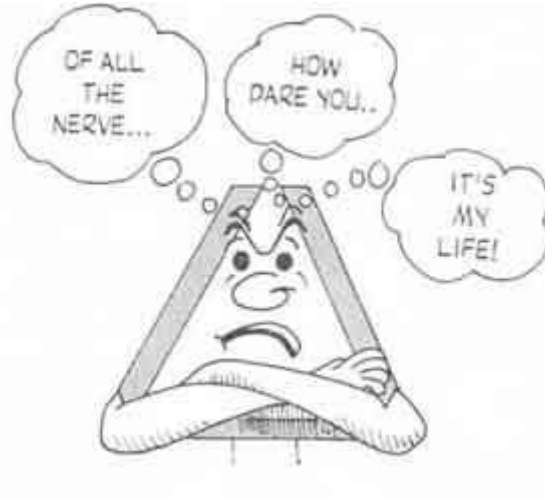
Most of us reserve the right to be the ultimate judge of our own behavior.

In fact, people dig in their heels when others tell them what to do.

“Should” and “ought to” have the same effect when used on yourself. They represent a dishonesty toward yourself. This can erode feelings of self worth or self esteem.

“I should go on a diet.”

“I ought to give up smoking.”





Some things are not in our power to do physically or otherwise. However, “can” or “can’t” are rarely used to indicate what is physically impossible.

“Can” or “can’t” are generally used to avoid conflict.

“I can’t see you tomorrow.”

“I don’t think I can.”

“I wish I could, but I can’t.”

In effect, you state the request is beyond your power to meet, because of outside influences. What “can” or “can’t” really signify is: you are indecisive, or do not wish to commit yourself one way or the other, or you simply do not want to. Ironically, if you have made up your mind, you automatically use the words of decision “will” and “won’t.”

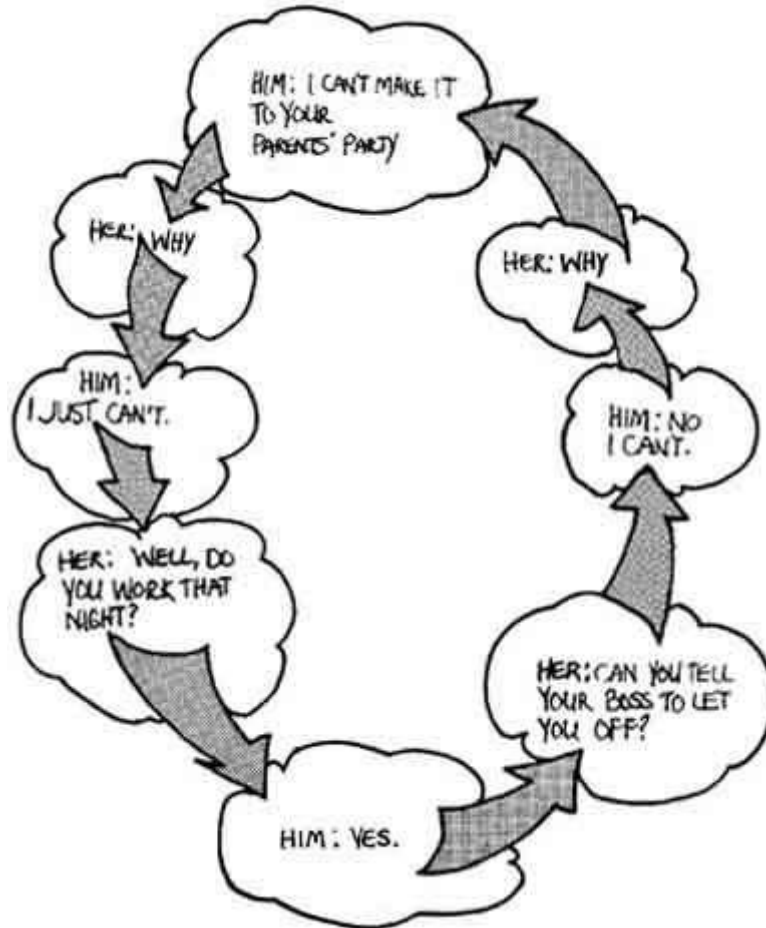
“I won’t see you tomorrow.”

“I don’t think I will.”

“I wish I could, but I won’t”

Using “can” or “can’t” prompts the other person to probe for this outside influence. Thus, a circular argument is created.

In this instance, the woman is uncomfortable with the man’s indecision. Using “can” and “can’t” sends her scurrying to find out the man’s true intentions.



To be clear in communications, substitute “will” and “won’t” for “can” and “can’t.”

Him: I won’t be coming to your parents’ party. I will be working that night.

Her: I’m sorry to hear that. I will see you Monday.

This conversation indicates definite decisions were made. The conversation ends with both parties satisfied.



"Why?" and "you," even when used casually, require others to explain their actions or opinions.

"Why" and "you" are, at their most innocent, a simple intrusion. However, they can also be used to provoke defensiveness or retaliation in others, thereby forcing them to be out of control and powerless.

"Why didn't you clean your room?"

"Why do you do that?"

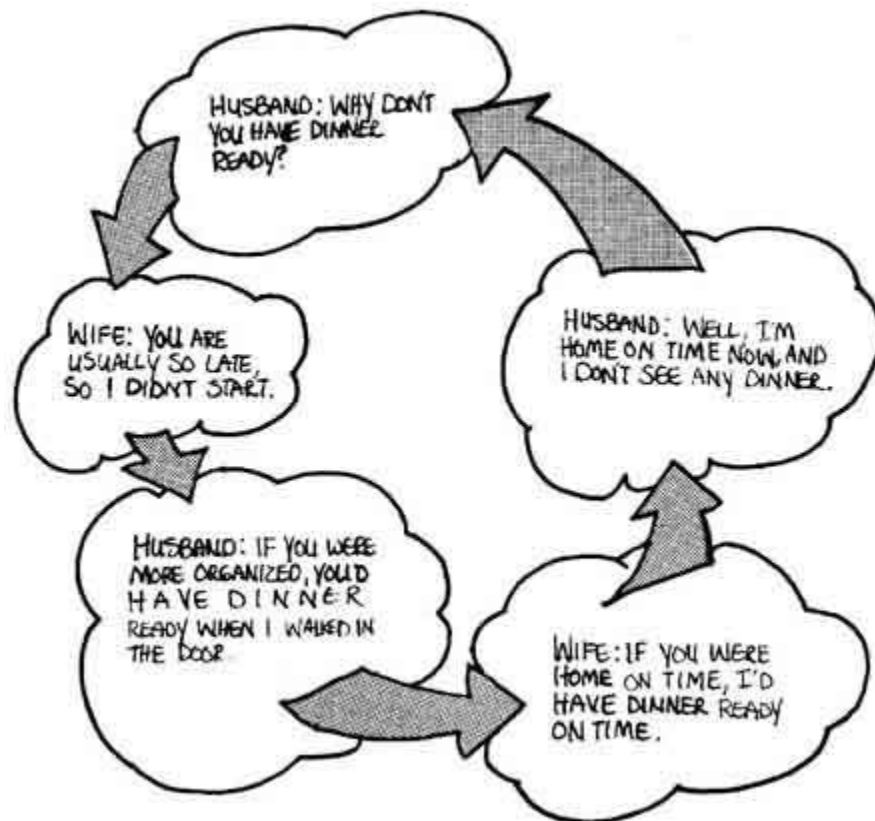
"You always act that way!"

"You're just like your



mother!"

These statements are win-lose statements. There is no acceptable response to the question or accusatory remark. If someone uses "why" and "you," it generally indicates a feeling of powerlessness. To attack becomes a way to balance the power quickly. There is no response good enough for a "why" or "you" accusation. It is the ultimate power play.



In order to get out of the power play, the person attacked is forced to either agree (which they will not do), or justify his or her actions, which merely prolongs the attack by creating a circular argument.

There is no clear intent to this argument. It is anger for anger's sake and the only way to end the conflict is to stop talking to one another.

In a "why," "you" attack, however, even silence is no defense.

Dad: Why didn't you clean your room?

Son: I didn't have time

Dad: You heard me tell you this morning to clean it, didn't you?

Son: Yes.

Dad: Then why didn't you do it?

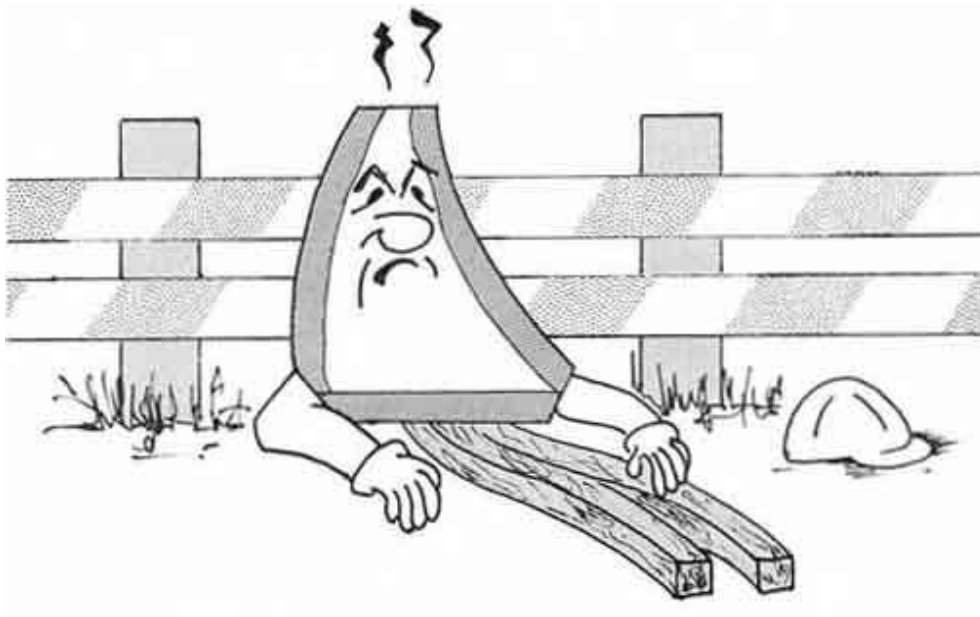
Son: I told you, I didn't have time.

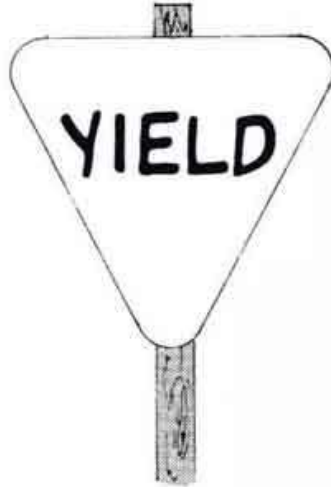
Dad: You had time for baseball, didn't you?

(Son remains silent.) Well, didn't you?....

Answer me!

Clearly, this is a no-win discussion.





An open and more productive conversation is obtained by stating the complaint openly, rather than cloaking it in an accusatory question.

“Son, I see your room isn’t picked up. I asked you this morning to do that. I’m angry you haven’t done what I asked you to do. Do it now, please.”

“Why” and “you” are used to gain power. To change the “why”, “you” habit, look at the reason for your feelings of powerlessness or lack of control.

Finding new confidence and equality in the relationship with another makes the “why”, “you” attack unnecessary.

“Always,” “never” and “every” are exaggeration words used to artificially create a position or opinion that is irrefutable and which stops all opposition.

“Always,” “never” and “ever” assist you in agreeing with me.

“I’m always right.”

“I would never do that.”

“We can never allow this to happen.”

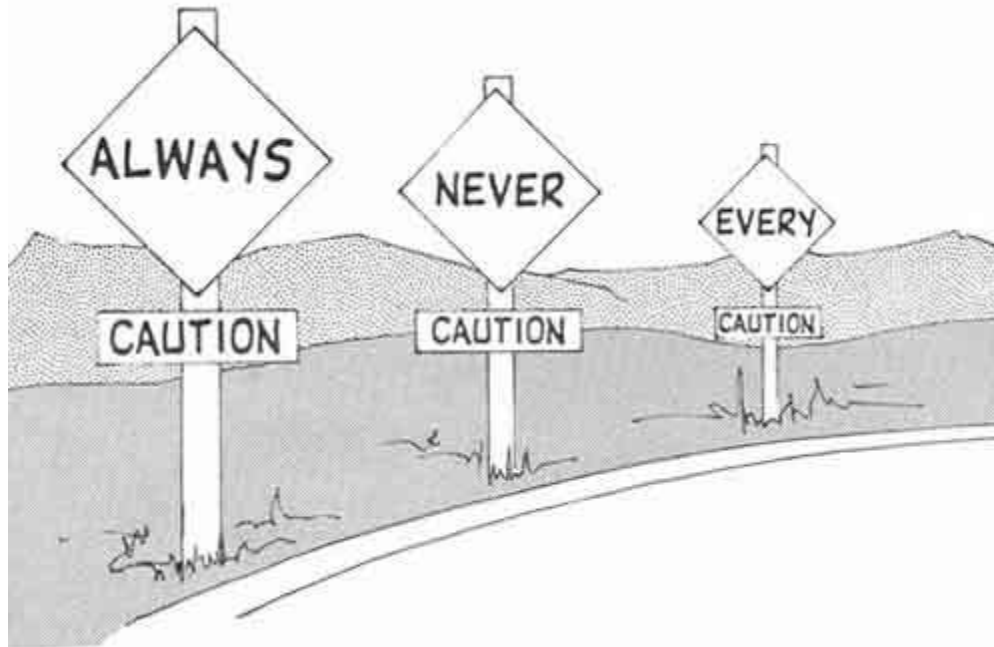
“We always go to see the show you like.”

“Se never go see what I like.”

“Everybody needs milk!”



“You always act that way.”  
“You do that every time.”



To counter your unreasonable stance and keep the conversation open, the other person must find the exception to the rule.

Her: Michael always forgets the little things.

Him: NO, I don't

Her: Yes, you do.

Him: Like what little things?

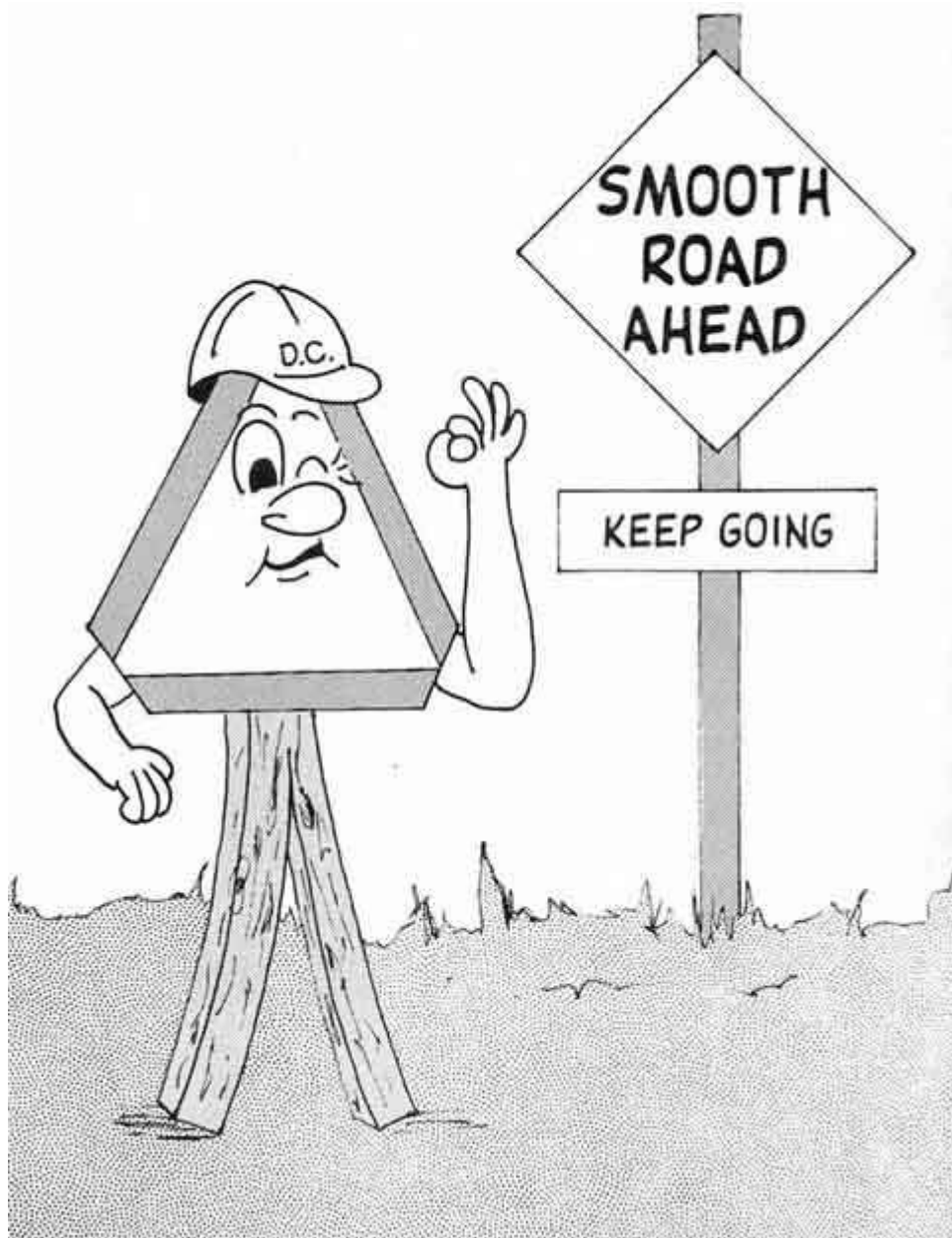
Her: Like birthdays; you always forget birthdays. You never remember my birthday.

Him: Well, I remembered your birthday this year. I gave you a surprise birthday party. What about that?

Clear communication is best when it is concise, specific and concrete. “Always,” “never” and “Every” lead to ambiguity and



misunderstanding.



On the other hand, if Red Flag Words are being used on you, there are ways to counter them and keep the roads of communication open.

If you are “we” -ed.....

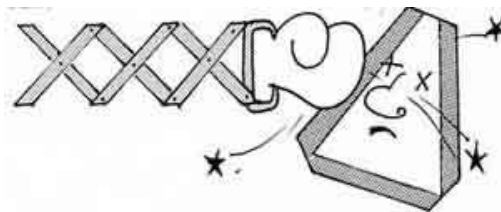
To break the use of “we,” use “I” statements. Become comfortable allowing others to state separate opinions and points of view.

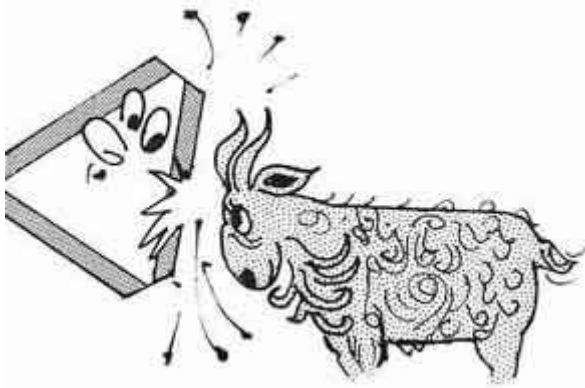
“We really should mow the lawn tomorrow.”

“No, I’ll mow the lawn tomorrow. You can clean the garage.”

When you’ve been “it” - ed....

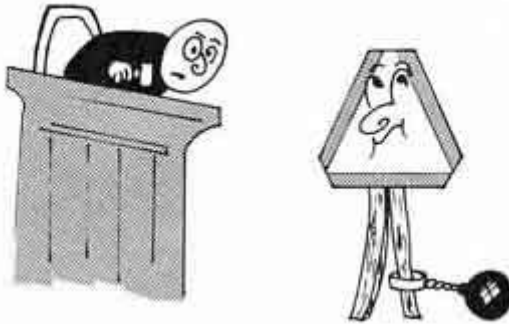
Listen carefully for “it,” and then seek to define what “it” is. Assumptions can be deadly to good communications. Again, ask: Who, what, when, where and how? This will allow you to be specific.





If you are being  
“but” - ed....

Realize the use of the “but”  
generally  
signifies a disagreement or  
conflict.  
Therefore, concentrate on  
the area  
of disagreement and  
seek to resolve  
the conflict.



If you are “try” - ed  
(or “might” “could” or  
“maybe” - ed)...

When another person says “I’ll try,” allow them the freedom to really say  
“no.” Let them know an honest answer is more important.

You: Can you come tomorrow?

Friend: I’ll try.

You: Is tomorrow inconvenient? Would another day be better?

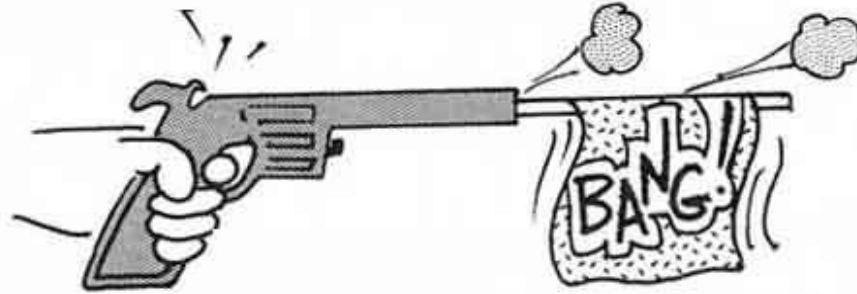
Friend: Well, actually tomorrow would be hard. Wednesday would be better for me.”

If someone “Should” - s on you, or if you  
“oughta” on yourself....The best rule of  
thumb is state clearly what you intend to  
do.

Friend: “You should get a haircut.”

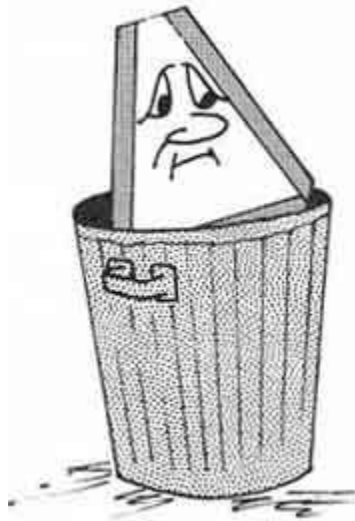
You: “ I like my hair this length.”





Also, be careful of  
"should" - ing yourself.

That phrase sounds similar to  
"shooting" yourself,  
which is exactly what "should" and  
"ought to" do  
to your self-image. Do yourself a  
favor. Eliminate  
all self evaluation that begin with  
"should" and "ought to."



When you are "can't"- ed or (worse yet!) When you are "Can"-ed.

Give the other person verbal permission to make a firm decision.  
Being  
willing to communicate to them an honest answer is more important.  
You: "Can you come tomorrow?"

Friend: "No, I can't make it."

You: "If you would rather not be  
there, that's all right. You won't  
offend  
me if you say "no." We can get  
together later."

When someone is "why"-ing  
"you"...

Again, understand a person who  
accuses you or demands you  
explain your actions is the one  
who has lost power. He or she  
feels out of control.



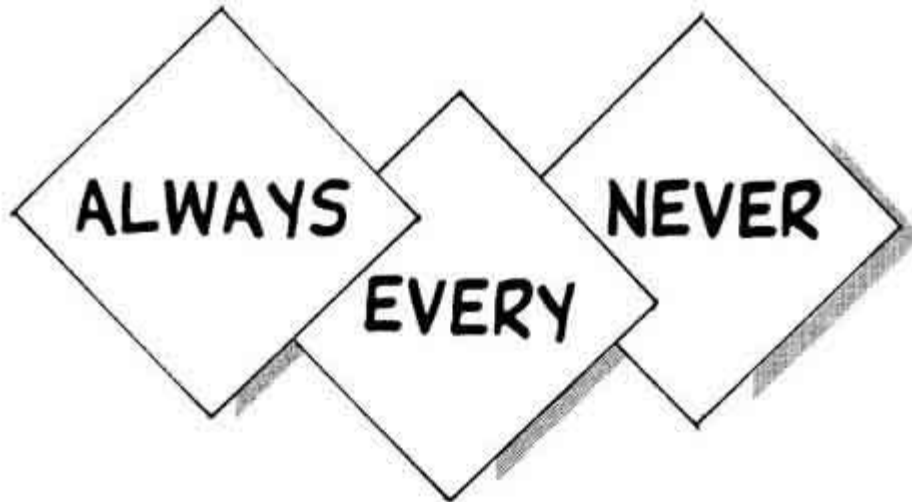
To resolve a “why”, “you” conflict requires you to find the source of inequality in the relationship and bring it out in the open.

This is only possible if the other person in the conflict is willing. Working out the conflict usually requires a third party to act as referee.

For the reason, “why”, “you” statements are the most difficult to overcome. Yet, when the equality of a relationship is reestablished, the relationship is stronger.

It is worth the effort.

When you’re “always”-ed, “every”-ed and “never”-ed....



Resist the temptation to match an “always,” “never” and “every” statement with another “always,” “never” and “every” statement of your own. People tend to do this to keep balance. However, the countermeasure leads to stubbornness.

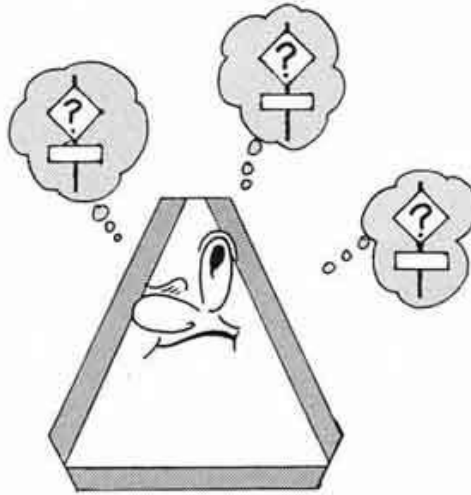
**Unreasonable** ||||➔

➔|||| **Unreasonable**

When confronted with an “always,” “never” and “every” statement, agree and then state clearly and concisely what you will or will not do.

“You’re always late.”

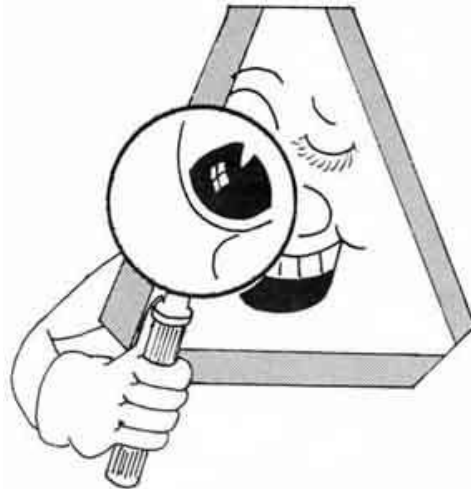
“You’re right. I am late today. I have to take the bus to get here. If it runs late, I arrive late. There will be times when I am late.”



Everyone has two or three Red Flag Words that he or she uses frequently. Eliminating them may seem difficult as you begin. Here are some suggestions to help you. First, memorize these Red Flag Words and teach them to a spouse, friend so they can help you listen for your favorites. Then, work on one Red Flag Word at a time. Role play situations you run into frequently with a friend to learn new ways of responding.

After any conversation, take some time to reflect, particularly if there was misunderstanding. Look for Red Flag Words.

Ask yourself throughout the week, “Am I accurately saying what I intend?”  
“Am I really understanding the other person’s message?”



If Red Flag Words are eliminated....

- 1) The QUALITY of your communication will improve
- 2) The AMOUNT of misunderstanding in your communications with others will decrease.

**This is a hand-written  
money-back guarantee!**

Avoiding the use of Red Flag words can be a challenge, but without them, your communication highway will be smoother and safer.

