

Language, Words, and Phrases that Destroy Relationships  
Arnold Sanow, MBA, CSP  
[www.speakingcoach.com](http://www.speakingcoach.com)  
[speaker@arnoldsanow.com](mailto:speaker@arnoldsanow.com)

Certain words and phrases block connections cold and at the same time can make people steaming mad

Here are some tips on language, words and phrases to avoid:

**You** – If you tell someone “You did this” or “You did that” people get defensive. This is especially true if you use a harsh tone.

**Generalizations** – Words such as “You Always” or “You Never” also get people defensive.

**Labels** – When you say someone is lazy, has a bad attitude, is careless, unprofessional or stupid it really doesn’t say anything. If you use labels make sure you say specifically what they mean. For example, if you say someone has a bad attitude – you might be more specific and say, “you seem to be late for our meetings.”

**Moralize** – Be very careful making statements on how things should be done and what is right and proper. These can trigger negative reactions in others.

**Use Sarcasm** – Although you think you may appear “witty” by being sarcastic, many people may not understand what you are saying and they will get the wrong impression.

**Make Threats** – Threats will only turn people against you.

**Jargon** – For example if you say something like, “Let me tell you about the XR1432” – 10 minutes later people are still thinking what is the XR1432?

**Euphemisms** – Euphemisms are a nice way of saying something. For example, in a war if the word “collateral damage” is used it means that people are getting killed or if a politician says we are going to have “revenue enhancement”, this means that taxes are being raised. Euphemisms weaken the image and confuse people about what you are really saying. And then once they find out what you are saying they get upset.

**Slang and Profanity** – Many people feel uncomfortable with profanity and it lowers the estimation of you in their eyes.

**Red Flag words** – These are words that irritate people and they will tune you out once they hear them. For example some common words that offend some people include; girl, honey, dear, darling, babe, and many more.

**Vague or Abstract language** – Make sure you are specific when you tell people what you will do. Instead of saying as soon as possible or next week, say I will have it on Tuesday.

**Overly Complex Words** – I would recommend that you keep your language to an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level. It's nice to show everyone how smart we are, however, they might not understand the message we are trying to get across. Therefore, use simple and straight forward language.

**Say NO in a Nice Way** – Many people are afraid to say NO because they fear how it will come out and be perceived by others. If said the wrong way, it can make people upset and uncomfortable. To make sure you say NO in a NICE way so that you don't alienate others and derail relationships try the USA method

The U – is Understand

The S – is Situation

The A – is Action/Alternative

Therefore, if someone is interrupting you at work, instead of saying in a harsh tone, I'm busy!!, you might say something like, I **understand** you want to talk with me – by saying this you are acknowledging them --- next I would say, “however **the situation** is this, I've got this report that's due out at 4:15 today” – by doing this you are giving the other person a reason – and finally I'd say (**action**) “let's do this, let's meet tomorrow at 3:00 or today at 5:00 – this way you are giving an alternative or action. By using the USA method you are keeping the relationship alive instead of pushing someone away from you.

**Sex, Politics and Religion** – Don't assume everyone shares your views. Tread lightly when discussing controversial topics.

**Don't Take it Personally** - Be aware that many people will use words and language that irritate and annoy you. They don't know any better. Whatever happens, don't take it personally. Once we start taking it personally we become abrasive, defensive, and argumentative. Also realize that people may be having a bad day. For example, if the clerk at the post office is a little grumpy, realize that they may have had a fight with their spouse or their mother or father is in the hospital. There are many things going on in people's lives and they may not be as content as you are.

Arnold Sanow, MBA, CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) is a speaker, trainer, coach and facilitator. He is the author of 6 books to include, “Get Along with Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere” and “Present with Power, Punch and Pizzazz.” He was recently named by successful meetings magazine as one of the top 5 best “bang for the buck” speakers in the USA  
[www.speakingcoach.com](http://www.speakingcoach.com) --- [speaker@arnoldsanow.com](mailto:speaker@arnoldsanow.com)