

Techniques to De-fuse Defensive Behaviors

Making Requests: Behind criticism is a desire or unmet need. If you are criticizing someone, make a request instead. Be objective, address behaviors rather than attacking the person. Use 'I' statements such as "I would like to be included in the team meetings about the change."

2% Truth: We may react to the person's criticism or defensiveness without realizing it is rooted in feeling a lack of safety. There is typically a grain of truth to what brought on this reaction. Take the time to find out the 2% of truth behind what they are saying.

Ventilate: It is helpful to create a safe place to express what they are feeling. You can create a place to vent your feelings. If you experience someone's venting, be sure to remain neutral rather than fanning the flames. Be sure to distinguish between providing a place to vent and allowing destructive behaviors in a dialogue.

Take a Time Out: If the conversation gets too heated, this is a good time to take a break. Practice your self-awareness so that you can use this when you are triggered. You can also notice when others are flooded. Take care to know when you are delaying with the intention to avoid a difficult situation versus keeping the intention to re-engage at a later time.

Notice Rather Than Interpret: Try to suspend making judgements about the person's reactions or inferring what they are trying to say. Practice distinguishing between facts and feelings. Reflect back to them what you see about their behavior and to help clarify your understanding.

Curiosity: Start with the intention to investigate their reality. It is about taking interest in their concerns by asking questions and being open to different perspectives. Try to investigate and learn and resist the natural instinct to come up with solutions.

Find Common Ground: A person does not feel safe if they feel their goals are not supported. Try to find alignment between one another. It may take curiosity about their needs and goals to discover common interests. You can even find commonality between a shared frustration in the discussion, this common feeling can create empathy and emotional connection.

Articulate Emotions: It takes vulnerability to share emotions. This open and honest sharing of feelings can build trust if it is done in a respectful manner. Model sharing your emotions in a neutral way. You can also create empathy by noticing and sharing your neutral observations about their emotions. When we share emotions openly it keeps them from leaking out in negative ways and reduces misunderstandings.

Reaching Out: This is about taking the first steps to make amends or reopen communication to help repair the relationship. It takes courage to take the first step but can lead to significant improvement in the relationship by opening communication and creating shared understanding.

Adapted from Team Coaching international and Becoming a Conflict Competent Leader, by Runde and Flanagan (2012), adapted from summary by Barbara Blumenthal Leaders in Motion