

STUDY GUIDE



KANTOLA PRODUCTIONS LLC



CONFLICTS IN THE WORKPLACE

SOURCES & SOLUTIONS

USE “I” VERSUS “YOU” LANGUAGE

When we feel the distress of conflict situations, it's natural for us to try to remove the apparent causes of that pain. One way to do so, we tend to think, is to tell the other individuals what they are doing wrong. Or what's wrong with them. We think this will make them change. We say, “You are so...” or “You are a”


The problem with making such accusations, of course, is that other people don't willingly take them to heart. They certainly don't change instantly in response to our put-downs. More commonly, they react by digging in their heels, throwing aspersions back on us, and getting more angry in the process. Using “You” language, in other words, tends to aggravate conflict rather than alert others to their alleged misdeeds.

In the video, Shannon chooses not to respond to Victor's insults by insulting him in return. Instead, she uses a more effective response: “I” language instead of “You” language. She says, “I am really trying to do a good job, here” instead of saying, “You are a jerk!”

Using the “I” pronoun is a way of focusing on what you think and feel rather than the “You” pronoun, which tends to focus on your assumptions about the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. By using “I” language, you steer clear of finger-pointing and take responsibility for your part in the conflict.

In fact, avoiding assumptions is an important part of using “I” language. Stick to observations instead of interpretations. Say “I have observed,” and “I have seen,” followed by a fact. Don't say, “You are always in such a bad mood.” Instead say, “I see that you are throwing things around. Is something wrong?”

Another thing that helps is to talk about the process in a neutral way. Test the other's feelings by asking if they meant to treat you disrespectfully, and if so, why. And name your own feelings instead of showing them. Say “I was upset by those comments.” Don't say, “I hate those comments” or “Your comments make me so mad!” Do you see the difference between naming feelings and showing feelings?



Bottom line: Exchanging insults, calling names, accusing each other of character flaws—these things do not help you make progress. Instead of starting your sentences with “You,” try starting them with “I” and see how that flips the orientation toward better problem solving.

Share Your Insights

When Shannon begins to use “I” language, how does this affect the argument? Does it make Shannon’s position stronger or weaker in respect to Victor’s?
