

COMMUNICATION TACTICS OR PRINCIPLES EXAMPLES

Don't Argue with Reality

Patricia Professional is frustrated because her co-worker, Gabby Gossip, constantly gossips and makes snarky comments about other people in the office; she believes Gabby should be more respectful.



Here's what happens when Patricia argues with reality and tries to get Gabby to be nicer.

Gabby Gossip: Did you see Jeanie this morning, Patricia? I really wonder if she ever looks in the mirror before she leaves the house. What a scarecrow she is!

Patricia Professional: Gabby, that's not very nice. We don't know what's up with Dorothy, and honestly, I didn't think she looked all that bad.

Gabby: Oh, come on, Patricia, she looks like something the cat dragged in. Personally, I think her marriage is in trouble – did you hear her on the phone the other day?

Patricia: I don't like listening to people's conversations – you know that, Gabby.

Gabby: Well, I don't see how you could have NOT listened, she was so shrill and hysterical – the whole office probably heard her!

(Patricia thinks ... how did I get into this conversation? And more importantly, how do I get out of it? Gabby is so mean, and everything she says just pulls me in deeper!)

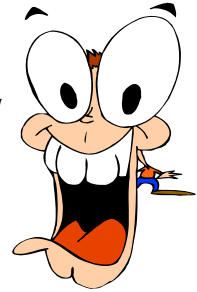
Here's how the conversation might go when Patricia accepts that Gabby is the way she is, and stops engaging and trying to convince her to be nicer.

Gabby: Did you see Jeanie this morning, Patricia? I really wonder if she ever looks in the mirror before she leaves the house. What a scarecrow she is!

Patricia *(thinking to herself, "Hmmm. I'm not going to go there. This is just how Gabby is.")*: Hi, Gabby – good morning! I'm in a rush right now to get a report finished for the meeting this afternoon – can't stay to talk!"

Expect to be Surprised

Cyndi Stoic has to tell her boss, Stuart Stubborn, that the project has hit a snag and might be delayed. Stuart can be a hot-head, and she's worried about how he will react.



Here's what happens when Cyndi expects Stuart to be angry and blame her for the problem:

Cyndi Stoic (*thinking to herself, "He's going to yell at me. I hate being yelled at. I hope I don't cry! I wish I didn't have to do this."*): Stuart? Um, do you have a minute?

Stuart Stubborn: Okay, Cyndi, what's gone wrong?

Cyndi (*thinks ... how did he know something's wrong? He always expects the worst!*): Well, I wouldn't say *wrong* exactly. I mean, yes, we're going to be a bit delayed in delivering the final version, but that's because Jennifer found a discrepancy in some of the work that was already done, so we need to go back and fix that and make sure it doesn't have any sort of ripple effect, and we're just getting started on researching that now, but I wanted to let you know right away. (*Thinks: I'm babbling – why can't I just shut up?*)

Stuart: What?! How long is this going to take? What's the real impact? Why didn't we find this out earlier?!

Here's how the conversation might go when Cyndi expects to be surprised and focuses on the good instead of the bad.

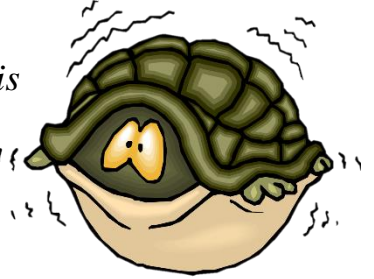
Cyndi (*thinking to herself, "It's good we found this now – even just a few days further down the line, we'd really be delayed. It's up to me to present this in a way that will help Stuart understand."*) Stuart – I wanted you to know that our QA team is really on the ball. They found a problem in a piece that was already complete – and I'm so glad they found it now, because it could have seriously impacted the time frame. Instead, it's just going to be a short delay. We've got the team working on fixing it and on assessing the impact. I'll have a definite date for you later today, but I wanted you to know right away what was up.

Stuart (*frowning, but not irate*): Is QA on schedule with this? Why are they only finding this now?

Cyndi (*with a big smile*): Actually, yes, they're even slightly ahead of schedule. That's why this is only going to take a day or two to fix. I know it sounds like bad news, but it's a whole lot better than it would have been if this had been discovered any later in the game!

Find the Fear

Owen Organized needs to borrow a resource – Tina – from his colleague and fellow project manager Tyler Territorial. Tyler, who’s high on the Competitive scale (see the first segment in this module) doesn’t want to give up the resource, even temporarily. However, Tina is currently under-utilized and is perfect for the job Owen needs done.



Here’s what happens when Owen feels like he has to bulldoze through and insist on the resource transfer.

Owen Organized (*thinking: Tyler is always so argumentative. I just need to go in and tell him it has to be this way. Boy, this is going to be a struggle!*): Tyler, did you see my email about borrowing Tina for this project? I need her to start on Monday, and the project should be over by the first of the month.

Tyler Territorial: Yes, I did, and no, I can’t free her up. She’s got responsibilities she needs to focus on.

Owen: Tyler, you and I both know she’s only working at about 25% of capacity. She’s a star player, and she’s perfect for this project.

Tyler: Excuse me? She’s on my team, not yours; you don’t know how much work she’s got.

Owen (*thinking: I knew this was going to be hard. Now I have to pull our manager into the discussion.*): Look, Tyler, do we need to go talk to Marsha about this?

Here’s how the conversation might go when Owen stops to consider what Tyler might be concerned about.

Owen: Hey, Tyler, I’ve got a question for you.

Tyler: Oh?

Owen: I was thinking about that email I sent you about borrowing Tina, and I realized that I didn’t clear up some of the questions you might have.

Tyler: Oh?

Owen: Yeah. Look, if I were in your position, with a star player like Tina on my team, I’d feel super careful about keeping her. I mean, who would want to even lend her out to another project? Not me! So I was thinking, how can I make sure that you know, without any doubt, that this is JUST a temporary thing – no more than a couple of weeks. That way she looks great because she helped finish up this project – and you know it’s a high-priority thing – and you look great ‘cause you made it happen.

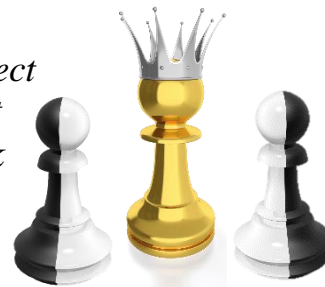
And hey, look, I'll sign in blood if you want – you'll have her back, without fail, by the first of the month.

Tyler: Hmm. Well, maybe. But what if the project runs longer than you expect?

Owen: I've already factored that in. And even if I didn't get it right, I promise you'll have her back. I know how fast she is – and I've got people who can backfill for her if I have to release her before it's 100% done. No worries there.

Explore the Third Truth

*Ian Idealist knows the best possible way to complete a technical project is **not** the way that's in the plan. The client, however, is adamant about their crucial deadline, and Ian's approach will take at least a week longer. Pamela Pragmatist is the project manager, and while she recognizes Ian's point, she also knows that the client is the one paying the bills.*



*Here's what happens when Ian confronts Pamela about his determination to do things **right**.*

Ian Idealist: Look, Pamela, we all know that clients don't get the technology aspects of the job. This isn't the best way to do this, and you *know* it. I'm not going to do it half-way.

Pamela Pragmatist: I understand what you're saying, Ian, but the fact is the client *does* know in this case. I've gone over it with them in detail. They're determined that it has to meet their deadline, and frankly, I understand their reasons. We don't have time to discuss this, much less take the time to do it the way you want. We're going to do it their way, and that's final.

Ian: No.

Pamela (*thinking: I can't believe what I just heard!*): Excuse me, what? Ian, this topic is closed. You *will* do it the way the client wants, or you'll come off the project!

Here's how the conversation might go when Pamela explores options of a Third Truth with Ian.

Ian: Look, Pamela, we all know that clients don't get the technology aspects of the job. This isn't the best way to do this, and you *know* it. I'm not going to do it half-way.

Pamela: Okay, let's take a step back here. I've talked with the client, and here's their perspective: they have some absolute drop-dead deadlines on this where they have no choice; they *can't* push the date back. So, help me out here, because it looks like we've got a rock (their deadline) on one side, and a hard place (your feelings about

the right way to do this) on the other. You've told me that doing it your way will take an extra week. Where do we make up that time?

Ian: What's their deadline about?

Pamela: They have a federal regulatory requirement they have to meet. If this isn't done, it puts them out of commission for a full three months.

Ian: Wow. I didn't know that. Okay, can we borrow Tina from Tyler's team to help with this? She's super-quick and really good at this sort of thing.

Pamela: I'll tell you what. Talk to Tina and see if she thinks that with the two of you working together, you can meet the deadline. I'll check in with the Quality Assurance team and see if they can expedite the QA process. And then we can make a final decision. Deal?

Ian: Deal!