

## POOR COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

by Dr. Donald Gilbert

The ability to communicate effectively and to fight for change has often been marred by the practice of dirty fighting. While dirty fighting can lead to hours of stimulation and lead to getting your own way, it is not particularly helpful to the establishment of a positive friendship, loving intimate relationship, or a good working relationship. While dirty fighting is often considered a natural human endeavor, not all people are equally equipped to engage in underhand warfare. Not everyone has the same awareness of what dirty fighting is. It is with this in mind that I share the following glossary of dirty fighting techniques.

One of the first considerations of dirty fighting is the art of **timing**. Begin an argument just as your spouse is leaving for work. Start a fight at night, in bed, just as your spouse is going to sleep, especially if they have to go to work early the next morning. Pester your children about chores or homework just as they sit down to watch their favorite TV show. Timing, in general, is attacking or bringing up an issue when the other persons guard is down, when they least expect it or when they are least able to handle it.

Another general consideration is developing or displaying the proper **attitude** for dirty fighting. The attitude of: “having to be right”, “I’m entitled because \_\_\_\_\_”, “I’ve got to win”, “you can’t tell me what to do, your not my father/mother”, “I work and bring home the money...”, “because I said so...”, “you should know how I feel...”, “if you loved me you would...”, “your just like your \_\_\_\_\_”, “your not my boss”. These are just a few of the catch phrases that exemplify attitudes that create a negative emotional atmosphere for dirty fighting.

Many people win fights, not because they are right, but because their style of fighting seems unbeatable. The **style** you use can set you apart from others and create a certain way about you that can interfere with healthy communication processes.

Monopolize the conversation. Sometimes that can be a monologue or a lecture. Don’t let any one else get a word in edgewise. If others try to speak, either ignore them or accuse them of cutting you off before you are finished.

Meander without coming to a point. Make short stories long, talk about irrelevant things, and go down rabbit trails jumping from one topic to another. This allows you to accuse them of not listening if they can’t track you.

Be a problem solver. This is particularly difficult to manage when the main concern is the other person's feelings. This approach ignores the feelings and simply gets down to decisions, solutions and suggestions. Be unwilling to listen again until the person has done what you suggested.

Emotional vomiting is a particular nasty style. Never talk about what you are thinking or what the problem may be, just keep vomiting the emotions. Do this until you are exhausted. Doing this by timing it just right, while the other is trying to sleep, read, or relax, makes this particularly nasty to defend. The other person can then be accused of not loving you and you can then have another reason for emotional vomiting.

Be a non listener or a passive listener. While the other person is talking, use the time productively to think about how you are going to answer back. Listen for points of factual errors and make sure to point them out. Listen to the other person to see the ways in which you disagree. When it is your turn to respond, ignore any and all concerns that they have and go right to the point you would like to make.

Power plays are useful to win an argument. Sometimes we establish a pattern in relationships where one person seemingly has all the power. This is of course an illusion, but works even better if the other person buys into the illusion. It will make it much easier for you in manipulating the other person to get what you want. It will allow you to feel superior and the less powerful feel martyred. In reality, you can only control someone if they allow you to.

- a. One-up: Play to win. Threaten, sulk, use shame and guilt talk, yell, call names... you get the idea.
- b. One-down: Don't try to win. Just make life miserable for your "opponent" until they give in or give up. Pout, spend money you don't have, play the martyr... you get the idea.
- c. Pitched battle: Both use the full range of tactics to get your way.

Collect hurts: Personalize slights, hurts and injustices. Hang onto them and let them turn into resentment, bitterness and revenge. Let your anger and frustration build to the point that you overreact and explode over relatively minor issues. An added benefit of collecting and hanging onto hurts is that you can use them to rationalize and justify your behavior in the future.

Play therapist: Analyze others, take their personal inventory, point out shortcomings, and where possible explain their behavior in psychological terms. Be sure to use labels that explain their behavior: "You have a mother complex" or "you're an alcoholic". If they don't like to have sex you could say that they are "frigid". You are so "insecure". You get the idea. Whatever the behavior, you can find some way to skillfully use labels even if they have no basis in fact. If they object, it is undoubtedly because they "can't face the truth".

Some other techniques you can use that are helpful to destroy any relationship:  
Never accept an apology, never back down, never be serious, be a chronic forgetter, sabotage, agree but never follow through, procrastinate, play gotcha games, use silence, use always/never declarative statements, tell the other person what they think and feel, use children and money as weapons, threaten abandonment, never engage in discussing any problem, tell the person that they are being irrational, are just some of the other techniques that you might find useful to destroy any relationship you might have.

All of these can be used either consciously or unconsciously. This is a satirical method to help some people get beyond their self denial so that they can see their own behavior that may even now be killing a relationship. If you use any of these methods, you will probably need to see a professional to identify and help you change your communication practices. I would strongly urge you to consider finding a professional to help you become a relationally healthy communicator. Can you identify the 11 necessary communication skills for healthy relationships? Would you be willing to learn?

You can contact our office either by email from our website or you may call the office at 515-225-4006 for more information or questions.

Adapted from; “The Dirty Fighter’s Manuel” by Transactional Dynamics Institute;  
Scripts People Live, By Claude Steiner; Intimate Enemy, By George Bach and Peter Wyden; Dr Don Gilbert’s Dissertation on Building Intimacy in a Marriage Relationship.