



Exercise: Messages in the I-form

Not mentioning things that irritate you (perhaps because you are afraid of the consequences) usually leaves you with a tense feeling. The danger is that if you structurally don't mention these things the tension builds up. At a certain stage it overwhelms you with an 'explosion' as result. Mentioning issues soon after they come up is more effective. This exercise provides a strategy to get your message across. This strategy increases the chances of you getting what you want. It specifically applies to day-to-day things, also small things.

1. **Signal function:** as soon as you notice that something is giving you tension (slight tension in the belly area, for example) or is making you angry, sad or irritated, ask yourself:
 - a) What exactly is the emotion I am experiencing?
 - b) What exactly is giving me this feeling?You could say something about it straightaway. Or you may address the situation later, in which case you should make a short, telegram-style note for yourself. General rule: delivering your message one-on-one works better than in public.
2. **Ask for attention:** If you are reacting straightaway you may skip this step. Start by announcing your message. For example by saying: *"I would like to discuss something with you. Do you have a moment?"* It could be inconvenient for the other person. Then make an appropriate appointment (that is: agree a time and place).
3. **Mention the behaviour and the feeling it gave you:** Start by mentioning exactly what the other person did. Follow through by expressing how that made you feel, using the I-form. For example: *"It upset me that you did not let me finish my sentence. It made me feel that you do not take me seriously."* Keep it short, clear and describe in terms of concrete behaviour.
4. **Optionally mention the other person's share:** For example: *"I know you have a lot on your mind right now"*, *"I know you would like to give me your opinion"* or *"I realise you were in a hurry"*, etc.
5. **Optionally mention your own share:** For example: *"I know I sometimes use too many words"*.
6. **Mention what behaviour you would prefer:** Again using the I-form and in precise and concrete terms. Say exactly what the other person could have done. *"I would like you to give me more attention"* is too vague. The other person does not know what you mean by *attention*, nor what you mean by *more*. It would be better to say something like: *"I would appreciate it if you would wait until I have finished speaking before you react"*. You may also add what you could do differently, for example: *"I will try to be to the point"*.

7. **Ask the other person's commitment:** By asking the other if they are prepared to use the alternative you offer, you greatly increase the chance the other actually sees this as a request rather than a comment in passing. It thereby increases the chance the other will try your alternative.
8. **Wait for the reaction:** Keep your message short and powerful and once you have delivered it: Be quiet and wait for the other person to react. Listen carefully to the reaction.

It isn't always necessary or desirable to use the complete strategy above. The key elements are mentioning the other's behaviour, the feelings it elicits, and offering concrete alternatives.