

## Avoid connection crushers

**Arnold Sanow, MBA, CSP**

*“Stick and stones can break my bones,  
but words can break my heart.”*

Robert Fulghum

When verbal garbage gets dumped, it causes a cesspool of negative reactions. Put-downs, sarcasm, accusations, and other verbal barbs stir up energy as egos jockey for respect. Verbal attacks usually deploy self-defense mechanisms and obliterate positive connections.

Certain words or phrases block connections cold, and make us steamed simultaneously! (They kick up a whirlwind of emotion, just like in weather patterns, when cold and warm conditions combine to form a tornado!) Connection crushing communication usually brings out the beast, rather than the best in others. This includes: (From the book, “Get Along with Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere ... 8 keys to creating enduring connections with customers, co-workers ... even kids” by Arnold Sanow and Sandra Strauss.

### **Connection-Crushing Communication**

- Blaming and accusations
  - *“If you hadn’t screwed up, we wouldn’t be in this mess!”*
  - *“How could you ever . . .?”*
- Sarcastic remarks
- Profanity
- Discriminatory remarks or insults about age, gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation
- Denial statements
  - *“It can’t be that terrible!”*
  - *“You’re telling a bunch of lies!”*
  - *“You shouldn’t say those things.”*
  - *“You’re wrong!”*
  - *“That’s not true.”*
  - *“I don’t believe you.”*
- Name-calling, put-downs and anything that makes someone else feel inferior or stupid:
  - *“I told you so!”*
  - *“How many times have I told you (or gone over this)?”*

- *“What an absolutely stupid thing to say!”*
- *“I can’t believe how unprofessional you looked!”*
- *“What an idiot! How could you do such a thing?”*
- *“Can’t you ever do anything right?”*
  
- Ultimatums and threats
  - “If you don’t, then . . .”*
  - “You better or else!”*
  
- Demands
  - *“Do it now!”*
  - *“Do as I say!”*
  - *“That’s the end of it. I don’t want to hear another word!”*
  
- Gross generalizations and exaggerations
  - “You never do what I ask! “*
  - “You always say that!”*
  - “Everything is always such a crisis with you.”*
  - “All you ever do is complain!”*
  - “You’re always late!*
  - “I’ve told you a million times to clean up your room!*
  - “Why don’t you ever . . .?”*
  
- Emotionally loaded responses
  - “Here we go again!”*
  - “Oh, brother, I can’t believe you!”*
  - “I know exactly what you’re thinking!”*
  - “That’s not how it happened!”*
  
- Impatient remarks
  - “Not now!*
  - “Keep it short.”*
  - “Hurry up!”*
  
- Especially for parents: Unfortunately like verbal DNA, the least favorite phrases of childhood are often passed down to the next generation, only to get on the nerves of their offspring. This cycle continues, as they in turn, repeat the same unproductive and disempowering statements. Here’s a sampling:
  - “How many times do I have to tell you . . .?”*
  - “If you do that one more time, I’m going to . . .”*
  - “What did I just say?”*
  - “When I was your age, I always . . .”* (Beware! If you use this phrase, just watch their eyes roll!)

Most of these responses invite escalation or discourage communication—they cause resistance, resentment, and reactivity. Although it might be very tempting to litter your language with “zappers,” it’s better to refrain from engaging in any verbal artillery. Verbal blows cause massive damage to relationships and crush your chances for keeping quality connections. To create good connections, make a commitment to consistently choose your words wisely.

### **Avoid going to extremes**

Using extreme statements (never, always, everyone, all, everything) are exaggerations and bound to trigger some extreme reactions; they’re unfair and accusatory. The attacked instantly begin scrolling through their experiences, recalling when their actions proved otherwise, and hurl back the facts in self-defense. Unfair judgments generally fire up defenses!

Focus on the desired action by requesting information, *“When can I expect the final report?”* Ask questions, i.e. *“What needs to happen on Tuesday evenings?”* instead of blasting accusations, i.e. *“You never remember to take the trash out!”* Nudging with a simple one-word reminder, *“Trash”* also makes the point. Nudge rather than nag!

When inflammatory, extreme remarks are unfairly lobbed your way, reverse them with a question that refutes their unfair claim. Let’s say, you’ve been accused of never being on time. You know that statement is simply not true. It’s fair to repeat the statement as a means of discounting its validity, *“I’m never on time?”* Spoken in a dubious tone, with facial expressions to match your disbelief, makes the point. This repositions you in a fair light and demonstrates that you do indeed act responsibly; your actions speak louder than words.

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