

Observations, Evaluations and “You” and “I” Statements, and Ownership

EVALUATIONS LEAD TO DEFENSIVENESS: If someone hears what you’re saying as an “evaluation” (judgment, blame, diagnosis etc.) they will generally become more defensive, and then you will BOTH spend time navigating through that defensiveness. This can take a lot of unnecessary time and energy.

The number one reason that we don't get our needs met, we don't express them. We express judgments. If we do express needs, the number two reason we don't get our needs met, we don't make clear requests.
~ Marshall Rosenberg

USE OBSERVATIONS RATHER THAN EVALUATIONS: We recommend that you wean yourself off evaluative language, and attempt to make more observations.

WHAT ABOUT “YOU STATEMENTS”? Use “You...” statements (or “Your...” statements”) only if they're part of an observation, not as an evaluation. Leave the word “you” out of your expressions of your feelings or needs. This automatically removes things like “I feel like you...” and “I need you to...”, which tend to land with people as an evaluation and a demand respectively. The same could be said of “they/she/he” statements.

OWNERSHIP LANGUAGE: In Connected Communication (aka NVC) your observations of the world around you, and of yourself, trigger feelings. The feelings tell you whether your needs are being fulfilled to the extent you would like, or not. So, using the language of ownership, you relate your feelings to your needs - thinking in terms of “I feel X...and this feeling is letting me know about my met/unmet need for Y” rather than “I feel X... because YOU...” (“I feel because I” rather than “I feel because you”).

Another part of ownership language means you own your thoughts (opinions, beliefs, judgments etc.) as your own rather than stating them as facts – and you include the observations your thoughts are based on:

- OWNERSHIP: “I think that most couples would find this conflict we’re having weird – and I guess I think that because I’ve never heard anyone else talk about going through something like this, and I’ve never seen it on TV or in my family.”
- NO OWNERSHIP: “This conflict we’re having is weird.”

IT’S NOT A LECTURE: If you’re interested in the response of the other person you’re speaking to, then you’ll naturally have something to ask them whenever you express yourself. If you’re not interested in their response, then you’re giving a lecture. There’s a good chance the other person will not enjoy this. I recommend that you include a question or request when you express yourself – ask whatever you most want to know in response to what you’ve said.

Read through the following examples and discuss how you would feel being on the receiving end of each of them. Which would be more or less connecting for you? Which are using the tips above...

1. "You arrived an hour later than we planned, and I didn't get a message from you. I get annoyed and worried if there's no communication, and it brings up a sense of not mattering. Did I just not get your message?"
2. "You're late! You are so disrespectful and such a poor communicator."
3. "You arrived later than we'd planned and you didn't send me a message!"
4. "You're being over-sensitive again, that's why I'm getting frustrated."
5. "I'm frustrated because I really want to have a fun, light, connected evening with you, and that's not really happening. So, I really need you to lighten up a little."
6. "I'm feeling frustrated, and I think that's just about how much I'm wanting us to have a smooth, easy time with each other. It seems to me that no matter how much I try to change how I speak I generally say something that you don't enjoy hearing. I'd love to know if you see any changes in how I speak to you - changes that you appreciate."
7. "Your team is starting to be a problem for my team."
8. "So, some of my team members have really been encouraging me to speak with you about missed deadlines involving some of your team members. I could give you specifics, but it's pretty much a continuation of what we discussed last month, only with apparently more examples. Would you be up for discussing this before the end of the week?"
9. "I don't want to be a nag but I'm starting to feel like your team is a bit unprofessional. I just want efficiency and accountability for your team and mine. Can you get them to shape up a little?"
10. "My boss is such a jerk...totally micro-managing and disrespectful."
11. "My boss has asked me about the work I'm doing 4 times already since I got in this morning. This is not the first time either. And he's asking me about things I've done correctly on all previous times, of which there have been about a hundred so far. I'm getting pretty frustrated at not being treated with trust, and respect...and given the kind of autonomy he told me I'd get in this position."
12. "She was totally lying, I could tell from her face."