

PRACTICE MAKES PEACE

People are born with the ability to move but must be taught how to dance. Likewise, we are given the gift of anger but must learn how to use it to our advantage. Think of situations that trigger your temper. In your mind, rehearse the strategies below and use any mad moments as opportunities to practice peaceful power. Your initial awkward responses will become automatic the more you apply the following techniques:

BETRAYAL, JEALOUSY, AND OTHER WOUNDS

- Don't blame or use "should" and "you."
- Express your feelings with a statement that starts with "I"—"I feel . . . when you . . ."
- Make requests and give choices—"Would you . . . , . . . , or . . . ?"
- Set limits by knowing what action you can take—"I will (not) . . . when you . . ."

COMPLAINTS

- Don't make excuses or pass the buck.
- Agree—"Yes, you have had to wait way too long."
- Apologize or wish—"I'm sorry we are so busy today. I wish we had more help."
- Appreciate—"I'm glad you're pointing out how frustrating this is."
- Act—"I will definitely bring it to the attention of our management."

ASSUMPTIONS AND GENERALIZATIONS

- Don't attack, defend, or be adversarial.
- Subtly point out incorrect statements by repeating them as a question—"I never help?"
- Show concern—"I'm sure you have good reasons for feeling that way."
- Identify specifics—"What do you mean by . . . ?" "Can you give me an example of . . . ?"
- Identify underlying issues—"What is really hurting you most?"

REHASHING OLD ISSUES

- Don't try to make people forget the past.
- Keep a list of resentments to avoid lengthy descriptions of past wrong doings—"Oh yes, you're talking about resentment number . . ."
- Admit what you did, even if it's for the umpteenth time—"You're right, I did . . ."
- Find out why the issue is resurfacing—"What's making you think of that now?"
- Turn resentments into requests—"What can I do right now to help?"

CRITICISM AND ADVICE

- Do not attack, defend or withdraw.
- Agree with any actual or possible truth—"I could have been better at . . ."
- Exaggerate wrongdoing to help others back off—"I guess I was totally thoughtless."
- Clarify confusing criticism—"How was what I did difficult for you?"
- End criticism with consideration—"I'll give your ideas full consideration."
- Make your own decisions about what you need to change. (See demands.)

DEMANDS, EXPECTATIONS, AND SOLICITATIONS

- Avoid excuses and "can't" or "but" words.
- Focus on what you can do—"I can do that as soon as I . . ."
- Use the words "wish" and "and"—"I wish I could . . . and I need to or can . . ."
- Set limits when necessary—"I know you want me to . . . and I'd rather . . ."
- Refuse with sympathy—"I know it's hard on you when I don't . . ."

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

- Don't insist on having your way.
- Clearly state the conflict—"I want . . . and you want . . ."
- Use "and" instead of "but" to be inclusive—"You think . . . and I think . . ."
- Express confidence and use the word "we"—"I'm sure we can resolve this."
- Suggest solutions and seriously consider others' ideas.
- Point out how both parties will benefit from suggestions.
- Anticipate deadlocks and voice alternatives—"I know you're concerned about . . . and I think we can get around that by . . ."
- Reevaluate impasses. Make sure you understand the other person's objections.
- Stay focused on the issue—"Let's get back to . . ."

DIFFERENCES OF OPINION

- Do not try to prove your point or change someone's mind.
- Point out the process—"I disagree." "You would really like me to reach your conclusions."
- After saying you disagree, wait to be asked for your opinion. It is a waste of words to express your ideas when others don't want to listen.
- Appreciate other viewpoints—"Your ideas have helped me clarify my own."

LAZINESS, NEGLIGENCE, AND UNFAIRNESS

- Don't exaggerate, judge or be "one-sided."
- Empathize with others' position. There is a reason for behavior you don't like.
- Put it in perspective. How important will this be a year from now?
- Pick your battles. Decide what issues are worth your energy.
- Generate solutions—"What can we do so this doesn't happen again?" "What can we do to put this behind us?" "Is there anything I can do about this?"
- Maintain a future orientation. "From now on . . ." "Next time, would you . . .?"
- Use a positive tone—"I know you meant toWould you . . . ?"

NOSINESS AND PRYING

- Don't answer, refuse to answer, or focus on others' insensitivity.
- Thank people for their interest—"It's so sweet of you to be concerned about . . ."
- Answer a question with a (humorous) question—"Is this an official survey?"

HEAD GAMES AND MANIPULATIONS

- Don't focus on content by attacking or defending.
- Point out the process—"Do you want me to break a confidence?"
- Use the word "try" to weaken others' tactics—"Are you trying to put me in the middle?" "Are you trying to pressure me into reaching a decision?"
- Use compliments to change the game—"You're good at putting me on the spot."

RANDOM ACTS OF RUDENESS

- Do not take insults seriously, attack, or withdraw.
- Treat cruelty as kindness—"Why, thank you." "You're just trying to help me . . ."
- Use humor to distract and confuse—"You say that like it's a bad thing."
- Elicit the cause of meanness—"What's really bothering you?"
- Set limits when you've had enough—"I'll talk to you when you're in a better mood."

For more information about any of these areas, see *Tongue Fu* by Sam Horn (St. Martin's Griffin, 1996, www.samhorn.com); *When I Say No, I Feel Guilty* by Manuel Smith (Bantam Books, 1973); or *How to Handle Bullies, Teasers, and Other Meanies* by Kate Cohen-Posey (Rainbow Books, 1995).