

Skills 360 – Defending Your Ideas (Part 2)

Discussion Questions

1. Are you good at remaining calm during an argument or disagreement?
2. How do you deal with a situation in which you don't like the way someone is talking or behaving?
3. What words can we use to soften our ideas when we want to criticize someone?

Vocabulary

For that matter: we use "for that matter" to emphasize that something is true about another thing; "I don't support the idea of expanding into Mexico, or anywhere else for that matter."

Rational: based on logic and thought rather than emotion; "Marketers must learn to understand the rational decisions that consumers make when shopping."

To take an approach: to deal with or handle a situation in a certain way, normally used with an adjective; "My financial advisor suggested taking a cautious approach to the current upswing in the stock market."

Worked up: excited or upset; "Union leaders are extremely worked up about management's proposed changes to the pay structure."

Passion: any strong or intense feeling about something; "Gilbert has had a passion for design ever since he got his first box of crayons at age three."

Counterproductive: if something is "counterproductive", it has the opposite effect of what you intended or it prevents work or progress; "At this point, I think that another meeting about the issue will be counterproductive, since everyone will just disagree again."

Patience: the ability to wait or continue doing something for a long time; "Tad's still pretty new here, so let's just have patience and see how he develops throughout the year."

To fire back: to respond or react with anger to something someone has said; "If you feel criticized, don't fire back immediately; rather, think about the criticism and whether it has any truth to it."

War of words: a situation in which people argue or criticize each other publicly; "The debate about cheap outsourcing to developing countries has led to a war of words in the American press."

Mudslinging: saying hurtful or negative things about people to harm their reputation; "The two political candidates were engaged in some pretty nasty mudslinging in the leadup to the election."

To keep your cool: to remain calm, especially when other people or a situation is difficult; "While others debated angrily during the meeting, Howard kept his cool and waited for a good opportunity to present his ideas."

To shoot something down: to show that an idea, theory, plan, ambition, or dream is not realistic or possible; "I thought we should hold a big in-store event for Valentine's Day, but Dave shot down my idea and suggested an online promotion."

To praise: to show approval or say good things about what someone has done; "Employees need encouragement, so a good manager needs to learn to balance criticism and negative feedback with praise."

Feedback: information about someone's performance or work, usually to help them improve; "You should give your employees regular feedback rather than saving it all for the annual performance review."

To take the high road: if you "take the high road", you do what is right or honorable and avoid getting involved in negative disagreements or personal attacks; "While our competition was trying to discredit our ideas, we took the high road and didn't attack them back."

Aggressive: if someone is "aggressive," they want to fight or argue, or they are rude and angry in how they do something; "A workplace bully will often get his way through an aggressive approach to discussions and problem-solving."

To tone it down: to soften or reduce the energy or intensity of something; "All right everybody, this argument is becoming vicious, so let's take a break and tone things down a bit."

To call someone on something: to point out that someone is wrong or deceptive, or to ask someone to justify something; "Nathan often exaggerates the facts or statistics in his presentations and hopes that nobody calls him on it."

Behavior: the way someone acts; "Consumer behavior may change during the holiday season, as people are more willing to spend money on big-ticket items."

Character: the qualities or aspects of a person; "A job interview is a relatively short time in which to accurately evaluate a potential employee's character."

To watch: while "watch" can mean look at, it can also mean to be careful with something; "As you tour the lab, please watch where you put your hands, as there are dangerous implements and chemicals around."

To phrase: to choose certain words or grammar to express an idea; "Jill has the amazing ability to phrase her criticism in a way that makes you actually feel good."

To strike something from something: to remove words or items from a document or list; "Well, because Tony has little experience, I think we should strike him from our shortlist of candidates."

To qualify: to change, limit, or soften what we say; "When I say that everyone agrees with this plan, I should qualify that and say that everyone in *marketing* agrees."

Uncertainty: if there is "uncertainty" about something, there is doubt or a feeling that something is unknown; "With so much economic uncertainty, households are saving rather than spending money."

To make no sense: to not be logical or reasonable; "With their high prices and bad service, it makes no sense to continue buying from OfficeGate."

To play it safe: to avoid risk or make cautious decisions; "Government bonds are a good choice for an investor who likes to play it safe."

To get off track: to do or talk about things that are not relevant or are not working toward the primary goal or purpose; "Okay folks, I think we're getting off track by arguing about food for the event. We haven't even got a date yet."

Tactics: a way or method of doing something or achieving a goal; "Telemarketing and direct sales are still very popular sales tactics for large companies."

In the face of: when dealing with something or situation, especially one that is negative; "Senior managers decided to issue an apology in the face of intense criticism over their handling of safety problems."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host Tim Simmons, and today I want to continue our look at how to defend yourself and your ideas in a competitive world.

One of the tough things in business – and life [for that matter](#) - is that you're not just dealing with ideas, and numbers, and [rational](#) decisions. You're dealing with *people*. And people don't always [take](#) a cool and logical [approach](#) to things, even if *you* do. They get emotional about ideas and [worked up](#) about disagreement. And you might get that way too. [Passion](#) is a good thing, but too much *negative* emotion is [counterproductive](#). So how can we manage people's emotions while continuing to defend ourselves?

Well, one thing I'd like to emphasize is the importance of [patience](#). Listen carefully before reacting, and think before speaking. If we think someone is attacking us or our ideas, it's easy to start [firing back](#). But the [war of words](#) is usually won by the person with the more strategic approach. Don't get into [mudslinging](#). Just be patient, and [keep your cool](#).

The opposite of this is getting defensive, which means being emotional and reactive. So when a difficult colleague says, "Sam, I'm afraid your plan will never work," don't respond with something like, "What are you trying to say? I spent a lot of time on this, and you just [shoot it down](#)..." Instead, show patience and listen, which means you could respond with, "Okay Dave. Can you explain exactly why the plan won't work?" You see, like I said in our last lesson, we need to keep it focused on ideas.

And we want to keep it *positive*. Believe it or not, that can mean actually [praising](#) the people who seem to be attacking us, like, "Thanks Dave, you've got some good points there." And it can mean actually thanking them for their comments, like, "Dave, I appreciate your [feedback](#)." Even when that feedback came in a way that you don't like, praising and thanking is part of [taking the high road](#) in debate. And in many cases, you get back what you give out, so you may find that [aggressive](#) colleague actually [toning it down](#) a bit.

Of course, there are times when you have to say something negative, when someone continues with an aggressive approach. And at times like these, sometimes you have to address the issue directly, or [call someone on](#) their behavior. The important thing there is to make sure you focus on [behavior](#), not [character](#). What's the difference? Focusing on behavior means saying, "Karen, could you please lower your voice and just stay calm about this." But focusing on character means saying, "Karen, you are too loud and emotional." Which do you think is going to serve you better in an argument?

So, we exercise patience and we stay positive. That's great. And the third big thing we need to do is [watch](#) our language. You've surely been in an argument that starts out about ideas, but pretty quickly becomes about the words people choose or the way they [phrase](#) things. And I'd bet that a lot of those arguments have been about two big words to avoid: "always" and "never." You can just [strike](#) those words [from](#) your professional vocabulary right now. They will only lead to trouble.

Watching your language usually means making your statements softer and gentler. We sometimes say that we *qualify* our statements. And there are many ways to do that. One way is by using words that show *uncertainty*, like “maybe” and “might.” Another way is to find indirect ways to *make a point*. For example, saying something like, “Gordon, what you say *makes no sense*” might get you into trouble. But if you say, “Gordon, we might want to reexamine whether that’s the best option”, you are *playing it safe*.

Softening your language can also mean *couching* – or surrounding - your ideas with extra words. Take a statement like, “we are *getting off track*.” Saying it just like that could come across as aggressive. But what if you said, “I’m kind of thinking that we are getting off track here on this issue.” Again, softening your language can help reduce the level of emotion in the room. And you’ll be in a better position to explain clearly why you, or your ideas, are right.

So, just to review here, we’ve focused on three key *tactics* for defending yourself and your position *in the face of* difficult emotional people: number one, stay patient; number two, stay positive; and number three, watch your language.

That’s all for today. If you’d like to test yourself on what we’ve just covered, have a look at the myBEOonline.com website. There you’ll find a quiz about today’s show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. What does Tim say can be *counterproductive*?
 - A A cool and logical approach
 - B Passion
 - C Rational decisions
 - D Too much negative emotion
2. Which of the following is a good, non-defensive way of responding to someone's criticism of your idea?
 - A "Are you seriously going to criticize my ideas again?"
 - B "I'd be curious to know why you think that."
 - C "What are you saying? That I don't have good ideas?"
 - D "I'd like to see you come up with a better plan."
3. Tim talks about keeping things *positive*. Which of the following does that involve? [choose TWO]
 - A Changing the topic during an argument.
 - B Taking an aggressive approach.
 - C Praising people.
 - D Addressing issues directly.
 - E Thanking people for their comments.
4. When someone is acting too aggressive and you have to tell them, Tim recommends focusing on _____, not _____.
5. According to Tim, which two words will lead to trouble?
 - A "Always" and "Never"
 - B "Might" and "Maybe"
 - C "Should" and "Must"
 - D "Loud" and "Emotional"
6. What is the ultimate purpose of *softening* our language?
 - A Making our ideas clearer
 - B Reducing the level of emotion
 - C Avoiding uncertainty
 - D Winning arguments

Review Answers

1. What does Tim say can be *counterproductive*?
D Too much negative emotion
2. Which of the following is a good, non-defensive way of responding to someone's criticism of your idea?
B "I'd be curious to know why you think that."
3. Tim talks about keeping things *positive*. Which of the following does that involve? [choose TWO]
C Praising people
E Thanking people for their comments
4. When someone is acting too aggressive and you have to tell them, Tim recommends focusing on **behavior**, not **character**.
5. According to Tim, which two words will lead to trouble?
A "Always" and "Never"
6. What is the ultimate purpose of *softening* our language?
B Reducing the level of emotion

Online Practice

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