

Don't Do Me Any Favors

Examples:

- *Don't do me any favors.*
- *Don't do me any favors. Forget it.*

Explanation:

This phrase is typically used when one person (you) asks another to do something, and receives complaints, whining, or other responses that exasperate or frustrate you.

Unfortunately, it's an indirect, and somewhat manipulative way to deal with the complaints and whining, often understandable if the other person typically tries to get out of doing things they ought to be doing. It's snarky. It also reinforces (rewards) the very behaviors you don't want, if you allow the person to wiggle out of responsibilities because he or she creates such a hassle.

Make It Better:

Realize that when you allow yourself to get frustrated, and say things like this, you may end up actually encouraging behavior you do NOT want, particularly if you give up, and back down from your request when faced with the whining and complaining. You need to be both more direct, and stay firm, assuming your request is reasonable and appropriate.

- *Al, when you complain to me when I ask you to take out the garbage, I feel like you are trying to avoid your chores, and I don't feel very happy with you.*
- *Jane, we all need to do our share, so why not just get it done with no complaining. Then I won't have to ask again, and you won't have to hear it again.*

Don't Take It So Seriously

Examples:

- *Don't take it so seriously, it's no big deal.*
- *Don't take it so seriously, it's only...*

Explanation:

We can all benefit by not taking things so seriously, but what are the odds that saying this to someone is going to actually help them “lighten up”, or think more positively? Not much of a chance at all. The person DOES think it's a serious situation, whether you think so or not. If you try to impose your view of a situation on someone else who has an emotional reaction, you put yourself in the situation of CONTRADICTING the person, albeit in a subtle way.

Telling someone to take something less seriously says: “You are wrong to think this is a serious situation”, even if that's not what you mean to say. Remember, it's not about your intentions, but about how the other person perceives your comment.

Make It Better:

If you want to help someone view something from a different, more positive perspective, don't TELL them to do that. Help them to do it. Here are some examples you can try:

- *Let's see what the worst case scenario is here, and whether it's that serious.*
- *Would you like to talk this through? Sometimes having a sounding board can help.*
- *I can see that you think this is a serious situation.*

Don't Take This The Wrong Way, But...

💣💣 Ten Worst Phrases 💣💣

Examples:

- *Don't take this the wrong way, but I think you need a new deodorant.*
- *Don't take this the wrong way, but do you have a clue about what you are doing?*
- *Don't take this the wrong way, but I can't stand your friends.*

Explanation:

Well, don't take this the wrong way, but if you don't know why you shouldn't use this phrase, you're an idiot.

How does that make you feel? Pretty angry, I'd bet, but why do these phrases anger people? Because it's dressing up an attack in an attempt to avoid the heat. It's a cowardly way to communicate, and it never works.

As soon as someone hears, "don't take this the wrong way", they KNOW they are going to hear something they don't want to hear, and that the person speaking is trying to avoid any responsibility for being insulting or offensive.

Apart from that, there's a presupposition operating here. For this phrase to make sense, one has to presuppose that there is a "wrong" way, and a "right" way, and the person speaking is the one who decides which is which. Thank you very much, but if you want to insult me, I will decide what's wrong and what's right!

Make It Better:

First, if you feel you need to talk about a sensitive issue, don't tell the person not to take it the "wrong" way. Be upfront. There is no wrong or

right way.

Second if you feel someone will be hurt, react defensively, or angrily about what you have to say, consider not saying it, unless it's really important. After all, if you know you will hurt someone's feelings, then you should have a good reason for doing so.

Third, take responsibility, if you decide to say something that might offend. Here are some examples:

- *It's hard for me to say this to you, and I hope you won't be upset.*
- *I'm not sure how to say this, but here's something that I think you might want to know.*
- *Just wanted to do a buddy check with you. I noticed that sometimes you forget to zip up your fly, and you probably aren't noticing.*

Since you already know the other person might be embarrassed or hurt from what you “need” to say, make sure you phrase the actual issue in as sensitive a way as possible.

Don't You Realize...?

Examples:

- *Don't you realize how stupid you look in that outfit?*
- *Don't you realize that you are acting like a fool when you...*
- *Don't you realize that you are making a bad first impression at interviews because of the clothes you wear?*

Explanation:

The “don't you realize” phrase is a double whammy, since it suggests that the person is oblivious and “less than” because he or she doesn't “get” the impact of what is being done.

The second whammy? What comes after the “don't you realize” phrase. Usually, it's not a GOOD thing the person is unaware of.

The negative impact is doubled, and the recipient has more to be embarrassed about.

In addition, the phrasing suggests a “one up—one down” situation, since YOU realize it, and you are pointing out the other person is not getting it.

Make It Better:

Take ownership of your observation and offer it as an opinion, NOT a fact. For example:

- *It's just my opinion, but I don't think that outfit flatters you as much as the green one.*
- *You might want to consider whether your clothes are sending the wrong impression when you go to a job interview. It's up to you, but I think companies look at that kind of thing.*

Every Time We...

💣💣 Ten Worst Phrases 💣💣

Examples:

- *Every time we talk, you have some sort of complaint.*
- *Every time we meet for dinner, you're late.*
- *Every time you call me, all you ever do is criticize me.*

Explanation:

Is there anything that is true ALL THE TIME? Outside of the sun rising, and having to pay taxes every year? That's where the problem lies.

Let's say you have a legitimate concern about something — the late for dinner situation mentioned above. You have a right to express your concern, and work with the other person to see if the two of you can find a solution.

Your phrasing however, is factually incorrect. The person probably isn't late EVERY time (although it might feel like it). By stating things in this way, you create a very natural, argumentative response that goes like this: ***I am NOT late every time. I was on time last week.*** So, you end up arguing about how often the person is late, rather than finding a solution, and a lot of emotional energy is wasted.

Make It Better:

Be specific, and stop saying things that aren't true. Don't exaggerate to make a point. You'll have less arguments, and more constructive conversations. For example:

- *John, I think you were about fifteen minutes late for our dinner date today, and if I recall, I was waiting for you at the restaurant the last time. Is there some way we can figure to ensure I don't have to wait, because I only get a one hour dinner hour.*

Everyone Agrees With Me

Examples:

- *Everyone agrees with me that you come across too strong.*
- *Everyone agrees with me that you ignore me when we go out.*
- *Everyone agrees with me that you drink too much.*

Explanation:

Does everyone REALLY agree? How do you know that? EVERYONE? It's impossible to say this and be accurate. The reason that's a problem, is that using this phrase will provoke some of the following responses:

- *Well, who is everyone?*
- *How do you know that? Nobody's said anything to me.*

Then you end up arguing about the "everyone" part, and completely lose the issue you wanted to address.

Beyond that, these phrases are used to pressure, marginalize and force the other person to conform to the mythical opinions of unnamed people. It's dirty fighting. Do you want to win the argument so badly that you would do this? And at what cost?

Make It Better:

Speak for yourself. Take responsibility for your own perceptions and don't use the alleged opinions of unnamed people to buttress your position. You could, however, invite the other person to talk to others.

If you feel you must mention the opinions of other people, think again. If you absolutely feel

it's necessary, indicate who said what, AND ask permission from those people to share their opinions, before you mention them.

- *John, I've noticed something about this, and I don't know if your friends might have seen the same thing. It might be a good idea for you to ask Derek and Mary what they think?*
- *Jerry mentioned to me he has noticed you seem to be drinking more often, and he was OK with me mentioning this to you. Is something going on we need to talk about?*

Get Off My Back

Examples:

- *Would you get off my back. I'll do it later.*

Explanation:

Why do people say this kind of thing? Why do you say it? It's because you're upset, and you feel you are being nagged at. And maybe you are being nagged, but this isn't the way to handle it.

When you say "Get off my back", you aren't saying anything specific enough to be of any use to either of you. You might as well say "F*** off", for all the positive results it will create.

It's not a factual statement, but a judgment you are making about the other person. As such you are making an accusation, and the result? You spend time and energy arguing about whether the other person is on your back, or not.

Consider also whether your emotional reaction is as much a result of feeling stupid in your own eyes, because you really haven't been doing what you agreed to do. If that's the case, you have no right to take it out on someone you care about.

Make It Better:

- *Mary, I know you want me to get it done, but you've mentioned it three times in the last two hours (don't exaggerate for effect), and I promise I'll get it done by eight o'clock.*

Or take responsibility for both your actions and your reactions:

- *Mary, I feel a bit stupid when you remind me to do [the task] so often, and I know I need to get it done, so can we leave it and I'll finish it tomorrow?*

How Can You Say... You Won't

Examples:

- *How can you say you won't come? You know how important it is to me.*
- *How can you say that about my family? I wouldn't say that about yours.*
- *How can you say you aren't going to the staff meeting? It's mandatory, you know.*

Explanation:

You want someone to do something. The person indicates he or she isn't going to do it. You responds with phrases like those above. What's the problem?

In all the examples, the speaker starts off with a question, which could be a good thing except that the specific words used tell the other person that you aren't really asking a question so you can learn about his thinking. Implicit in this "question" is underlying shock, disbelief and judgment. If you use these kinds of phrases, the other person knows you are expressing disagreement, but without taking responsibility or stating your position clearly, and non-manipulatively.

It would be bad enough if the speaker in the examples stopped at the question mark. By continuing, it's clear the speaker is trying to pressure or coerce the other person. But in a sneaky way.

People don't like to feel coerced, and tend to argue back, so using these kinds of phrases tends to ignite argument, primarily because of the lack of directness in expressing an opinion.

Make It Better:

So, you have an opinion. You have a right to an opinion. You also have a right to talk about your opinion. How do you do that, in the spirit of dia-

logue, rather than pressuring?

- *I know you don't want to go to my class reunion, but it's really important to me. Is there anything I can do to help you enjoy going?*
- *Families can always seem strange, Bob. I get upset when I feel you're making negative comments about my family.*
- *Have you considered the consequences of not attending the staff meeting? I understand that they've said it's mandatory.*
- *I can tell you don't want to..., and I'd really like to know how come you feel so strongly about that*

How Many Times Have I Told You...

Examples:

- *How many times have I told you to clean up your room?*
- *How many times have I told you I'll be home by my curfew.*
- *How many times have I told you that we can't afford...*

Explanation:

If there's royalty among imperfect phrases, this one would be the king or queen because it's used by so many people. It doesn't work, but people say it anyway, when they get tired of repeating themselves, and/or the other person isn't listening or "obeying".

Of course, if your goal is to say to the other person, **"Are you deaf, stupid or just don't care about this"**, this IS the phrase for you. If you don't want to say that, then don't use this phrase. If you want to elicit cooperation, don't use this phrase. It's a way of expressing your anger and frustration, yes, but indirectly, which makes it destructive.

Make It Better:

- *John, I'm sure you get tired of me asking you to clean up your room, so let's make a deal for today. You spend twenty minutes right now on your room, and I won't mention it again today. Deal?*
- *John, I know you really want [purchase], but we can't afford it right now, and I don't think we'll be able to afford it this year.*
- *Jackie, asking me the same question is going to get the same answer, and it's making me angry.*

How The Hell Should I Know

Examples:

- *How the hell should I know where you left your glasses?*
- *How the hell should I know. It's your responsibility?*
- *How should I know?*

Explanation:

So, you've had a bad day and you are tired of being asked questions for which you have no answer. Understandable. You can't help everyone all the time. However, this kind of response, loaded with frustration, isn't the way to go.

What does the phrase say? "Don't **bother me with your problems**" is one message underlying this response. The other is "**Not only are you bothering me, but it's not even my responsibility, so solve your problem on your own.**"

Is that what you really want to say to someone you care about? If not, don't.

Make It Better:

- *Mary, I don't know where your glasses are, but if you haven't found them by dinner time, I'll be able to help you look.*

Notice the volunteering to help, but also the message that it's Mary's task to look on her own first.

- *I don't know the answer to that. I thought we agreed that you'd take care of that when we talked last week. Did I get that wrong?*

Don't be deceived by the "hell" part. The problem with the phrase remains even if you simply say, *How should I know.*