

#6 "No, But, However"

by **Marshall Goldsmith**

An easy habit for people who like to win to fall into, and a surefire shortcut for killing conversations, is to start a sentence with "no," "but," or "however". It doesn't matter how friendly your tone is or how honey sweet you say these words, the message to your recipient is "You are wrong." It's not "Let's discuss," "I'd love to hear what you think," it's unequivocally, "You are wrong and I am right." If your conversation companion is also of the winner variety, you have a potential battle on your hands, and there is nothing more that can happen that is productive.

Are you interested in a little test to see how competitive your co-workers are? Try this. For one week, keep a scorecard of how many times each person uses "no," "but," or "however" to start a sentence. You will be shocked at how commonly used these words are. And, if you drill a little deeper, you'll see patterns emerge. Some people use these words to gain power. And, you'll see how much people resent it, consciously or not, and how it stifles rather than opens up discussions.

I use this technique with my clients. Practically without even thinking, I keep count of their use of these three little words. It's such an important indicator! If the numbers pile up in an initial meeting with a client, I'll interrupt him or her and say, "We've been talking for almost an hour now, and do you realize that you have responded 17 times with either no, but, or however?" This is the moment when a serious talk about changing behavior begins.

If this is your interpersonal challenge, you can do this little test for yourself just as easily as you can to gauge your co-workers. Stop trying to defend your position and start monitoring how many times you begin remarks with "no," "but," or "however."

Pay close attention to when you use these words in sentences. For example, "That's true, however.." (Meaning: You don't really think it's true at all.) Another oldie but goodie is "Yes, but.." (Meaning: Prepare to be contradicted.)

Along with self-monitoring your behavior, you can also easily monetize the solution to this annoying behavior to help yourself stop. Ask a friend or colleague to charge you money every time you say, "no," "but," or "however." Once you appreciate how guilty you've been, maybe then you'll begin to change your "winning" ways!

Dr. Marshall Goldsmith was selected as the #1 Executive Coach in the World by GlobalGurus.org, and one of the 10 Most Influential Management Thinkers in the World by Thinkers50 in both 2011 and 2013. He was also selected as the World's Most Influential Leadership Thinker in 2011. Marshall was the highest rated executive coach on the Thinkers50 List in both 2011 and 2013. What Got You Here Won't Get You There was listed as a top ten business bestseller for 2013 by INC Magazine / 800 CEO Read (for the seventh consecutive year). Marshall's exciting new research on engagement is published in his newest book Triggers (Crown, 2015).

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