

Trigger and Spark Words



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Trigger words / phrases

How and why they provoke increased resistance

**Universals such as:
always, never, every, all, nobody,
everybody, and everything.**

When one of these words are used, the other party stops listening to what you are saying and begins scanning their experience for the exception: For example: "You never take out the trash."

"That's not true, December 17th, 2017 I took out the trash."

This is example is an exaggeration, but it does demonstrate the extreme we will go to prove that the speaker is wrong. If we can provide ourselves with evidence that the speaker is not credible, we can feel justified in dismissing their perspective on other issues. Rarely will a universal hold up under scrutiny because they are almost impossible to prove!

**Absolutes such as:
avoidable, certain, correct,
defective, exact, harmless,
incomplete, inevitable, irrefutable,
literally, necessary, needless,
obvious, superior, total, temporary,
thorough, unavoidable, unequal,
unimportant, universal, valid, worst
and wrong.**

Words that represent an absolute judgement, something is or isn't, will usually evoke push back from the other party. When the judgement leaves no "elbow-room," the other party will defend his/her position. A judgement is just an opinion or a conclusion and the other party is quite likely to have a different opinion or conclusion, particularly about the degree of something.

For example: "That was a total waste of time."

"I think there were parts of that presentation that were useful to me."

This list of absolutes is by no means complete. It is the most common offenders. A longer list is available in the Appendix but even this longer list is not the universe of all absolutes. That would be difficult, if not impossible, to gather. You will notice, I used an absolute in the previous sentence but I carefully qualified it.

Why

This is a perfectly appropriate word in most circumstances but if you use it when there is tension between you and another party, it is almost guaranteed to create defensiveness. From the time you were very little, if an adult was annoyed or upset with you, they asked you why. "Why did you give the dog your vegetables?" "Why didn't you clean your room?" "Why is your homework not done?" "Why are you late for curfew?" The list of examples could be endless. Your parents, teachers, coaches, supervisors, all do the same thing. When your performance is at the expected level, the authority figure is likely to ask you "Why?" The result of all this experience is that when we hear the word in any context in which there is tension, our amygdala goes on high alert. We immediately recognize there could be trouble and become defensive.

Just, At least

Just is a tricky word because, depending on the context, it can mean a lot of different things, many of which are not a problem. "I just got here." "I'll just be a minute," "It was just three dollars!" It is when it is used to minimize something that it can cause a problem. For example,

"I was just trying to point out..." This sentence suggests that the listener is making something more of what is being said. "Could you just do it?" This suggests that whatever it is you are asking, is not a big deal. If you just did it, things would be better! The listener is quite likely to have another opinion when the word "just" is used to minimize.

"At least" has the same effect. It is used to lessen the effect of a sentence and in a tense situation, the listener is not likely to appreciate the inference. "Could you at least give it a chance" suggests that you are not being fair in your resistance. A perfect recipe for resistance!

Demands:
You need to..
You have to...
You should...
You must...

Phrases that imply a requirement evoke that little voice in the back of our heads that says, "you aren't the boss of me." Having control in our environment is a basic need, it's what drives a little one to pull the spoon from your hand even though the child has not yet developed the coordination to steer that spoon to the mouth. When we are in control, things are more predictable. With increased predictability comes the capacity to predict where and when threat might occur and that allows us to take proactive steps to protect ourselves. When someone else is in control, we feel vulnerable. The result is, we resist others telling us what we have to do, should do, must do.

But and however

Although but can be used in many ways, when we are in a tense situation, they are almost always used to negate whatever preceded them. For example, "I love your attitude but I really need to see more cooperation." When we hear something like this, we discount or disregard the first half of the sentence and focus on the second half. In tense situations, but or however always signal a reprimand, criticism or demand is about to follow. However works the same way – it's just the "city cousin" of but!

Don't take this personally
Don't be defensive
Don't take offense at this

Any phrase preceded by the word don't is a warning that something unpleasant, a reprimand or criticism, is about to occur. In a previous chapter I explained that when we are told not to think about something, we have to actually think about it to NOT think about it. It's the proverbial, pink elephant. You weren't thinking about it but if I tell you not to think about, you immediately picture a pink elephant. Telling someone don't take something personally or don't take offense works the same way. You just warned them that whatever you are about to say IS probably offensive or personal.

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Spark words / phrases	How and why they provoke increased resistance
Your name	When you hear your name in a novel, or unexpected context, a surge of dopamine immediately follows. This can be useful if, during a difficult conversation, you say the other party's name in a soft caring manner. It will work the opposite, however, if you don't get the tone right.
I wonder, imagine	These words appeal to the subconscious. They evoke a picture or visualization and in doing so, bypass the critical, analytical judging prefrontal cortex that works with words and numbers.
Because	Our history with the word "because" is that it is usually followed with a logical, rational reason for something. When we hear the word because, we tend to get a little lazy and don't always analyze the merit of whatever follows.
Perhaps, maybe, you might	These work well when you want to offer advice to the other party because these words/phrases create the illusion that it is their decision and they are in control.
Yes, and	When you respond to something the other party has said with "yes" the other party recognizes that you are not opposing their idea. This removes the need to be defensive and allows you to add and additional thought to their suggestion. Example: "I think we need to repeat the marketing campaign we used last year." "Yes, and if we add some tweaks to it based on the new data, I think we would have a winner."
Yes, if	Yes, if is a cousin to Yes, and. The difference is that it puts a condition on the agreement. For example, "I think we need to repeat the marketing campaign we used last year." "Yes, I would agree if we were dealing with the same market issues. Since the new data shows some very different trends, we might need to ..."
You probably already thought of this.. You probably already know ...	When you use either of these phrases, you are basically saying to the other party that you believe they were smart enough to already have considered something or to know something. This signals respect and mitigates resistance because if the other party tells you no, they didn't think of ___ or they didn't know _____ they are admitting that they are not smart enough!
Easily, naturally, automatically	If something is easy, natural or automatic, there is no reason to resist. We are much more likely to cooperate if we have reason to believe it will not take a lot of effort and we can anticipate success.

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Words that spark the production of energizing hormones:

Dopamine	Oxytocin	Serotonin	Endorphins
You / your	Belong	Imagine	Adventure
Customer's name	Support / help / assist	What if...	New
Success	Guide	I wonder...	Change
Wow	Together / partner	Possibility	Better / best
Want	Team	Idea	Challenge
You deserve	Secure	Creative	Surprising
Greatest / best	Peace of mind	Accelerate / Increasing	Unconventional
Exclusive	No pressure	Potential	Instant / Instantly
Ideal	Journey	Boost	Powerful
Perfect	Earn your trust	Enhance	Secret
