

Everyone Hates Hearing "I Told You So." Here's the Perfect 2-Word Response

As any seasoned business person knows, making blunders, having missteps and being just plain wrong at times is part of the journey to success. What else is a part of that occasional bumpy path to profit? Having to endure hearing, "I told you so."

Few phrases make people bristle as much as "I told you so." First of all, when we've gotten something wrong, we certainly don't want to be reminded of it. This can lead to feelings of shame, which, according to research, can make us feel exposed and vulnerable, and can lead to anger. It's embarrassing and belittling, neither of which create healthy working relationships.

Second of all, "I told you so" can be interpreted as a way of someone seeking credit for their intelligence or foresight-- which is fine, except when it's clearly at the expense of your project or your ego.

Third, it's often an indirect or passive aggressive way of someone expressing hurt that you didn't listen to them in the first place, frustration that you ignored their counsel, or even anger that you picked a different approach despite their warnings.

Our hindsight bias (also known as the "knew-it-all-along effect") where, after something has already happened, our natural inclination kicks in to see that event as having been predictable-- whether or not we actually predicted it. In other words, we already tell ourselves "I told *me* so" without needing to hear that grating phrase from others.

Of course, there are multiple ways of responding to "I told you so", including:

Genuine gratitude:

"Thank you so much for trying to warn me."

Vulnerable:

"You had no way of knowing this, but hearing that makes me feel hurt and embarrassed."

Direct:

"I don't appreciate that."

Challenging:

"Yeah...and?"

Humorous:

"...said nobody who was ever really trying to be helpful!"

Deflecting:

"I think the research shows that phrase is a serious conversation ender."

Simply:

"Ouch."

Snarky:

"Who do you think you are - my mother?"

Redirecting:

"So, as I was saying..."

Corrective:

"May I offer you some feedback on how you might approach me next time so that I'm more likely to heed your advice?"

Depending on the relationship you have with the other person, you might try one of the above responses. But regardless of the relationship you have, this two-word response should work in almost any situation:

"You did."

It's just that simple. You're acknowledging the truth of the matter-- that the other person warned you about something or gave you advice. It doesn't imply fault, or personalize it, or dramatize it, or draw it out. It's a simple statement of fact. It's direct, non-defensive, clean, concise and clear.

And you can certainly follow it with a "thank you" if you experienced their "I told you so" as helpful. Or you can follow it with "And I wish I had listened" if indeed you wish you had. You can even use a humorous tone to turn it into a question ("You *did*?") -- assuming there's deep trust in the relationship, you do it with a smile, and you're sure the other person will know that you're teasing.

Whether you decide to respond in two simple words, or in some other way, how you choose to react to one of the most maddening phrases in the English language can go a long way to demonstrating your professionalism, self-possession and poise.