Hello!

In this video we are going to look at 6 vocabulary tools that can help you communicate any negative information in a more positive way and make your message sound less direct and abrupt.  Let’s now move on to our first tool.

At work we sometimes have to express our disapproval of other people’s ideas or behavior. And when expressing our criticism, we run the risk of sounding unfriendly and uncooperative. As in the following example,*I am unhappy with the progress.*

To make this message appear slightly more friendly and slightly more positive, instead of the negative word ‘unhappy’ we could use the positive word ‘happy’ together with adverbs‘not entirely’ or ‘not totally’.

For example, I *am* ***not entirely happy*** *with the progress.* Or *I* ***am not totally happy*** *with the progress*.

Let’s look at another example. Instead of saying *Her report was very bad.* You can say *Her report was* ***not really up to standard,*** replacing the negative word ‘bad’ with a more positive phrase ‘up to standard’ and the adverbs ‘not really’.

People usually react better to positive sounding words, even if they are used in the negative form. So avoid such negative words as bad, unhappy, etc. – instead use positive words in the negative form.

If you have to communicate some bad news to a colleague or a customer, for example introduce a refusal or apologize for missing a deadline, you may want to start your message with such phrases as*Unfortunately….. / I’m afraid….. / I’m sorry but…. / Sorry but… / To be honest…*

These phrases are called softeners.

For example, instead of saying *I haven’t finished the task.* You should say ***I’m afraid*** *I haven’t finished the task.*

Or instead of *We have to cancel the trip.* ***I am sorry but*** *we have to cancel the trip.*

 Softeners prepare the listener for some bad news and make you sound apologetic about the situation.

Besides softeners you can also use restrictive phrases to make any negative information you have to communicate sound more acceptable and positive.

 Let’s take the sentence from our previous examples *I’m afraid I haven’t finished the task.* By adding a restrictive word *yet I’m afraid I haven’t finished the task yet,* you sound more optimistic about completing the task in the future and SO let the listener expect a more successful outcome.

Other restrictive phrases are *at this stage, at the moment, so far, to some extent, to some degree.*

 For example, *Unfortunately, I don’t know the answer* ***at the moment*.**

The phrase a*t the moment* implies that although you do not know the answer now, you will probably know it in a couple of hours or tomorrow, or some other time in the future. So, such restrictive phrases make us sound more cooperative and leave the door open for a successful resolution.

One more useful tool for toning down the message is to use minimizing words. **These** are expressions like ‘a little’, ‘a bit’, ‘a little bit’, ‘slight’, ‘slightly’ ‘somewhat’. They make the situation sound not as bad as it really is.

For example, instead of saying *His presentation was long.* You can say *His presentation was a bit long.*

Another example. Imagine that your colleague arrives late for an important meeting. Saying just ‘*You are late for the meeting.’* might sound harsh to the speaker.

It’s better to say *You are* ***somewhat*** *late for the meeting.* The minimizing word ‘somewhat’ softens the impact of the critical comment.

Another tool that can help you be more polite is the use of opinion phrases. Such opinion phrases as *‘in my opinion’, ‘from my point of view’, ‘ as far as I know’, ‘as I see it’, ‘from my perspective’* allow you to emphasize that what you are saying is just your personal viewpoint, and your listener can either accept it or question it.

Let’s take a look at the sentence*The candidate’s technical skills are below average*. This statement sounds as if you are 100% sure about the candidates’ low level of expertise and present this information as a fact. A less categorical version would be *Overall, I feel that the candidate’s technical skills are below average.*

The phrase *Overall, I feel that* implies that you are expressing your opinion rather than claiming something as a fact.

Besides opinion phrases, you can also make your message sound less categorical with the help of tentative verbs. Such verbs as *appear, seem, suppose, look like, tend, guess and suggest* make any personal statement less direct and thus more tentative.

For example, a sentence *Mark has some difficulties in building rapport with the team.* can be made less direct in the following ways

*Mark* ***seems to*** *have some difficulties in building rapport with the team.*

*Or Mark* ***tends to*** *have some difficulties in building rapport with the team.*

Alternatively, you can start with an introductory phrase with a tentative verb in it. For example,

***It appears that*** *Mark has some difficulties in building rapport with the team.*

 The phrases ‘seems to’, ‘tends to’, ‘it appears that’ help to avoid broad claims and demonstrate politeness.

*In this table you will find all the six vocabulary tools we’ve covered in this video.*

1. Rephrasing negative sentences

2. Softeners

3. Restrictive phrases

4. Minimizing words

5. Opinion phrases

6. and Tentative verbs

Table

Description automatically generated

When you use diplomatic vocabulary in your speech, it sounds as if you are being more careful about what you say. However, you go overboard and get too wordy, the people listening to you might become impatient or annoyed. So, you need to add extra words carefully, especially if you are dealing with someone who’s very busy.

Thank you for listening.

Please go to the practice section and do the activities there.

1. I am afraid our estimate for adding the new feature to the support library was a bit low.

2. In my opinion it would be a bit cheaper to fill this position with a lab student. ,

3. I feel that your course applicant projections for the next term are rather high.

4. I’m afraid he doesn’t seem to be particularly effective as a team lead.

5. I am sorry, but the report wasn’t written very well.

6. From my perspective, if we implement the idea, we might have a little problem.

7. It looks like there is a mistake with my course placement.

8. I would be grateful if you could provide some clarification regarding the training below.

9.Unfortunately, we are not able to meet the original timescale, but we undertake to do everything that we can to get the project in by the end of the contract date.

10.Shouldn't you spend a bit more time looking for a compromise here?