

Hot Tips

Good info for the new ham, and old stuff to refresh your memory



Avoid using absolutes and blanket terms

This is one of those ideas that didn't come about because I'm aware of some big problem in our community, but because it's something I personally need to improve on, and just wanted to share my thoughts. So, if you're planning to offer this page as a training topic, please ignore this first paragraph.

An **absolute** term is a word such as **only**, **always**, **never**, **everybody**, **nobody**, **all**, **none**, and so forth; they're words that often corner a sentence to exclude every other possibility. For example, is the statement **Nobody likes a poor sport** true for all people, and all the time? Is it possible that somebody might like a poor sport on some days?

Absolutist thinking

Using absolutes often arise from our inner thoughts of compartmentalization, because most of us feel more comfortable when ideas fit well into simple boxes. Before using an absolute term, ask yourself whether your statement is truly a fact, or simply a high probability of several possibilities. For example, it might be tempting to say, **My radio always makes a hissing sound**, but is that really true all the time? Instead of using absolutes, try using words such as **often**, **sometimes**, or **rarely**, as in **My radio often makes a hissing sound**, or qualify it like **My radio makes a hissing sound at night**.

Say your spouse has forgotten to make the car payment twice in a row. You might be tempted to exaggerate, **You always forget!** Not only will you be inaccurate, but you'll also come across as accusatory and confrontational, which is not likely very healthy for your relationship. In fact, people often perceive absolutes and certainties as arrogance, portraying a know-it-all attitude. And is often quite abrasive when directed at a person.

To be, or not to be

In the English language, the verb **to be** is perhaps the most common verb, which no doubt contributes to many abused absolute terms. It includes words such as **is**, **was**, **are**, **were**, and their negatives, and in sometimes subtle ways are often used by us to form blanket statements. For example, the declaration **Card games are evil** seems to imply that **all** card games are evil, even though the wordage didn't actually state that.

You can often avoid making such **to be** blanket statements by adding the qualifier **might be** or **tends to**. To fix the previous blanket statement about card games, I might say **Card games tend to promote evil**, which can come across as being less dogmatic.

Use qualifying prefixes

When you do plan to make a statement, it's often better to start your assertion with a qualifier, such as **In my opinion** or **As I understand it**. These can keep your statement accurate while admitting that it can also be incorrect. For example, saying **It seems to me that a dipole is the best antenna** is not technically correct in every circumstance, because sometimes a vertical ground plane might fit the signal polarization better. Yet the statement is accurate because, technically correct or not, it's true that a dipole being the best is *how you personally perceive it*.

Conclusion

I find that the more absolute terms and blanket statements I use, the more people tend to turn away from me. At the same time, the more I soften my certainties, the more inviting I sound to others, and the more welcome they tend to feel asking questions.

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