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Radiation Safety Counseling News

What Can You Say, When You Don't Know What to Say?

Dear Reader,

Greetings. If you are receiving this Newsletter for the first time, it is because we have updated our mailing list with friends of the Dade Moeller Radiation Safety Academy. [Ray Johnson](#) is the connection between the Academy (where he serves as VP for Training Programs) and the Radiation Safety Counseling Institute (where he serves as Director).



Ray Johnson

Ray initiated the Counseling Institute in 2010 to offer services to people and organizations with concerns for radiation safety. While Ray is a Certified Health Physicist, he was also trained as counselor in the 1970s. He has spent his career attempting to provide a bridge between radiation safety specialists (who know about radiation, but not how to deal with fears of radiation) and psychologists (who know how to deal with fears, but do not know about radiation). For Radiation Counseling services, Ray has assembled a staff of career specialists in radiation safety, risk communication, behavioral sciences, neurosciences, counseling, and coaching on radiation safety issues. Please feel free to check out our website, weekly blogs, and monthly Newsletters (see links in the sidebar).

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Continuing with the issue of communication challenges that I wrote about last month, I offer guidance on choosing the right words when responding to questions, concerns, fears, and accusations about radiation safety expressed by others.

As always, your questions or feedback are welcomed. Feel free to contact us through email, our blog, or our Facebook page.

Regards,

[Ray Johnson](#)

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Radiation Safety Counseling Services

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We are on

facebook

We have created a Facebook page for the Radiation Safety Counseling Institute. This is another resource for the sharing of radiation safety related information and questions.

Click below to visit our page!

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Got Questions?

If you have a question about radiation safety that you would like to share, please post your question on our Forum (blog) or our Facebook page. Each week our experts will select a question and post an answer that will also be included in our monthly newsletter.

To post a question go to:

[Radiation Safety Forum](#)

or

[RSCI on Facebook](#)

What Can You Say, When You Don't Know What to Say?

Do you ever find yourself stuck and trying to think of a good response? Have you ever suddenly realized that what you would like to say may not be helpful for the conversation (such as a derogatory comment or a challenge to the other person)? How do you respond when the communication gets emotional? How often do you think of what you would have liked to have said hours or even days later? These are issues common to people who prefer introversion as a way of processing information. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) describes introversion as a preference for inward reflection. This is the preference for about 30% of the general population and about 60 to 80% of technical people engaged in radiation safety (based on more than 4,000 profiles gathered from over 100 MBTI workshops which I have presented since 1983). Introverts are energized by the internal world of ideas, thoughts, and feelings. They prefer quiet and solitude to allow concentration for better understanding of information and situations.

Thus, introverts tend not to be as adept at quick responses as extraverts. About 70% of the general population prefers extraversion which means they are energized by interactions with people. They tend to be outgoing, social, and expressive. They like to process information verbally by give-and-take with others. Since they tend to think out loud, they do not have to carefully organize their thoughts before speaking as introverts prefer.

In [November](#) we looked at how to respond non-defensively to challenges. We know that it is very difficult not to get defensive when challenged, especially when the challenge is emotional.

Suppose you are confronted with the statement, "I don't want any nuclear dumps poisoning my water and killing my children!" As a radiation specialist, you may attempt to explain that radioactive waste disposal sites can be operated safely. The person then exclaims, "You work with radiation and you are paid to tell us not to worry. You just want to cram this dump down our throats. You think you can do anything you want. You don't really care because you don't have to live here. Why should I believe anything you say?"

When you are confronted in this manner, you may find your stomach knotting up and suddenly you realize there are greater risks in life than dealing with than radiation. How do you respond when challenged about your motives, your integrity, your honesty, your ethics, your competence, and your sense of caring? How do you avoid getting defensive when everything your life stands for, and your most cherished values, are challenged? How do you avoid an automatic reaction and return the challenge or offer some criticism of the other person? When introverts respond quickly without having time to reflect on their answers, there is a good possibility that the response will come from an emotional reaction rather than rational analysis. When both sides get emotional, defensive, and challenging, the communication may not proceed favorably for either.

So what can you say that will keep the door open for helpful dialogue? The first step, and perhaps the most difficult, is to make a decision to stay non-defensive. For myself, I find that I have to keep repeating the words "stay non-defensive" to continually remind myself to listen carefully to the other person and not let myself get emotionally hooked by challenges and

Communication Insights

Each week, we post another installment of guidance to improve communication with others. To stay informed, you can go to our [blog](#) and click on Follow: RSS, then choose to "Subscribe to this Feed".

You can also go to our [Facebook](#) page and choose "Like" to have our status updates displayed on your Facebook wall.

We hope you find this information helpful and welcome your comments, questions, or other feedback.

criticism. The goal is to hear what the other person says as data that does not have to be judged as good or bad, right or wrong.

Five Things to Say, When You Do Not Know What to Say

There are five ways you can respond non-defensively and keep the door open for a continuing dialogue.

1. You can state your perceptions of the other person's feelings. "You are worried about the effects of a radioactive disposal site on your family and you are concerned that I may be a paid spokesman for the nuclear industry and therefore not telling you the truth." This is the Active Listening response described in the November newsletter. If your response does not accurately reflect the feeling or content of the other person's message, this opens the door for them to clarify their concerns. Also, people usually do not expect a "feeling" response from a technical person. A feeling response may also surprise the other person especially if they are hoping to get you to react emotionally and to show that you are only a technical person who does not care. There is also another aspect of hearing another person's feelings. When you really hear their feelings and they know it by your response, their feelings will diminish or even go away. This could result in a less emotional or confrontational exchange of information. In contrast, when you do not hear and reflect the feelings, the feelings may escalate and the other person will keep repeating their story (perhaps more loudly). Anytime, you are aware that the other person is repeating his or her story; you should remind yourself that you have not heard their feeling. When they know you have heard their feeling, they do not need to keep repeating themselves. By using the active listening response in a public forum, you may also get much of the audience on your side when they realize that you are making a sincere effort to really listen.
2. You can state your own feelings. "I hear the concerns you are sharing and I am also concerned about the safety of radioactive waste disposal sites. I also feel badly that you would doubt my efforts to provide a helpful response to your questions." You might even say, "I am feeling defensive and I am wondering how to best respond in the most helpful way."
3. You can describe the situation briefly. "You do not like the idea of a radioactive waste disposal site in this area and you have doubts about what I am telling you." This response also opens the door for the other person to clarify their feelings or concerns.
4. You can state what you would like. "I would like to hear all of your concerns and I would like to answer your questions the best that I can as a professional in radiation protection."
5. You can ask the other person what they would like. "I hear your concerns, how can I be most helpful for you in this situation?"

The use of any of these responses is intended to help you unhook from your own defensive feelings. At the same time, your response does not challenge, threaten, or make the other person wrong. Your response invites a continuation of the dialogue for mutual benefits.

Whenever you anticipate a confrontation, you may want to have the five options above printed on a small card which you can refer to quickly. By repeated use over time, these five

responses could become automatic for you. With one of these responses readily available, you do not have wonder what to say.

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