



How To Do Savvy Paraphrasing

Have you seen this kind of conversation?

One person says, *“Our company has to immediately change our customer relationship program.”*

Person Two, *“What you said was that we have to immediately change out our customer relationship program. What are you talking about? You’re wrong. You’re crazy.”*

Person One, *“I’m not crazy. I did this at my last company where we experienced the same nightmare we had today.”*

Person Two, *“Well you have to realize that where you worked before was 5 times our size. And besides, just the last year, we invested in almost \$200,000 on this program.”*

Person One, *“\$200,000! We should be able to get the training redone for no more than \$30,000 or \$40,000.”*

Person Two, *“Oh, wait a minute — you don’t want to redo the entire program, you mean you just want to redo the training part of the program. I get you now — I thought you wanted to revamp the entire system. I didn’t understand you want to focus on the training part. I thought you were talking putting in an entirely new system. That’s a big job and with what we spent last year, we just wouldn’t replace the system. But just beefing up our training might be a good solution.”*

Person One, *“Right. It’s the training that caused the problems we had today, not the overall system. I’m saying we need to focus on how the program trains people so the Customer Relationship people don’t get tangled up the way they did today. If they had more skills to deal with today’s issue, we probably would have had a positive outcome.”*

Person Two, *“Whew! Training only. I agree. A training revamp might really make the difference. How do you think we can get started?”*

It took a while to get to it, and now, finally, they can move forward to address the issue.

Now, let’s replay that conversation using a Savvy Paraphrase:

One person says, *“Our company has to immediately change our customer relationship program.”*

Person Two, *“I’m hearing you say we need to change out our entire customer relationship program. Is that right?”*

Person One, *“No, no, I mean to say we need to rethink how we train people so the Customer Relationship people don’t get tangled*

up the way they did today. If they had more skills to deal with today's issue, we probably would have had a positive outcome."

Person Two, *"I agree, today was a fiasco. I like the idea of refreshed training. What do you think it would cost? Do you have a plan?"*

And now, they can move forward to address the issue.

What did you notice here? Conversation #1 took a lot more time. And, in Conversation #1, the people spent time and energy defending themselves. Whereas Conversation #2 was a clear and efficient exchange between two professionals. Which would you prefer?

Savvy Paraphrasing is one of your most powerful Relationship Tools. It promotes understanding and clarity between people. It reduces the need for defensiveness and debate. It saves time. It makes things easy. It contributes to a positive field.

Here's how to do the Savvy Paraphrase:

- 1. Always start with "What I heard", not "You said"**
- 2. Use your own words to state what you heard.**
- 3. Ask if you got it right or left anything out.**

Altogether it goes like this:

"What I heard you say was (your own words)... Is that right?"

Savvy Paraphrasing indicates respect for the other person, indicates that you listened, creates the opportunity to clarify, and allows you to check the

other person's intention. Wow, that's a lot in a simple little sentence, isn't it?

Make sure:

- Start with *"What I heard (or think)"*
- Use your own words;
- Use *"...is that right?"* every time;
- And keep it neutral and non-judgmental — no hidden barbs or sarcastic tones.

Why the Savvy Paraphrase makes a difference

Using your own words does a few things:

- Indicates respect for other person because you cared enough to consider the meaning of their words and then articulate them in yours. *"What I heard you say was..."* as compared to *"What you said was..."*
- Creates the opportunity to compare how you heard it with how they meant it. We each carry different perspectives on the world, and this is an efficient and common sense way to discover overlap or identify gaps.

Pay Attention:

CAUTION #1: Be sure you don't parrot back word for word what the person said. "Parrot-Phrasing" repeats verbatim. Parrot-Phrasing can be discounting because it implies that the person might be a little stupid because they may not know the words they just said.

CAUTION #2: Be sure to include the “...*Is that right?*” part of Savvy Paraphrase. In this way you avoid getting this kind of response (usually a little louder, maybe strained or sharper): “*What I said was...*” which can quickly degenerate into “*You’re not listening to me!*” (Oops! Discount!). Of course what’s behind this response is the person’s concern that he/she isn’t important enough for you to listen. (This is a profound discount, so it immediately ramps up defensiveness).

CAUTION #3: Pay attention to your content and tone when you paraphrase. It’s very important that your paraphrase is non-judgmental. Avoid statements like, “*What I hear you say is that the only way to ever do it is...Is that right?*” Being human, when we hear something we disagree with, or that offends us, our tendency is to insert a tone, or words, that express our disagreement. We sound negative and defensive. Defensiveness, of course, is one of the great enemies of effective relationships because it shifts the focus from content to emotion. Emotions are contagious, so pay attention to where you’re coming from when you paraphrase. Realize that when you state a judgmental paraphrase, you are stating your reaction to what you’ve heard as compared to simply reflecting the content, the essence, in what you’ve heard. Before you paraphrase, take a moment to double check if you’re reacting instead of reflecting.

Especially good times to paraphrase:

- When there is disagreement between people. Sometimes you can help two disagreeing people by paraphrasing each of them in turn. This helps them hear the other person’s point of view. Also, when

you're in a disagreement, paraphrase the other person's point of view and then ask the other person to paraphrase you. See below.

- When you're not sure what was said or meant, especially if/when you start to feel defensive or angry or strongly disagree. It can be difficult to focus on content when your emotions are stirred. Focusing on the content rather than how you're feeling can help.
- When you want to be sure you both understand before proceeding. You sure don't want to move ahead on something unless you've checked that you're both going in the same direction.
- Before a decision to insure common understanding. Make sure you share the decision and its implications for each of you.
- My Favorite: Paraphrase when you don't know what else to say or where to go from here. The conversation stalls; you want to keep it going, but you're not sure where to go. Try paraphrasing what you've just heard, or paraphrase the gist of your conversation. Works like a charm because it helps both of you.

And when do you ask someone to paraphrase you?

A way to ask someone to paraphrase you without offense: *"I'm not sure I'm being clear – could you please tell me what you're hearing me say?"* [As contrasted with an arrogant, *"You're not getting this, are you?"*]

Another time to ask someone to paraphrase you is when you find yourself tangled in disagreement. Before it gets heated, first, you paraphrase what you're hearing (remember slow down to reflect and not react), and, once confirmed, then ask the other person to paraphrase what they're hearing. This gives both of you a chance to actively think through what the other person is saying because it shifts the focus onto what the other person is saying rather than the emotions involved.

Note: There's nothing wrong with emotion, but when we aren't sure what someone is saying, we're likely to feel some defensiveness. And, as we've discussed, defensiveness reduces our ability to learn and understand.

Summary

Be Sure To:

- You start with "*What I heard (or think)*"
- Use your own words to capture the essence.
- Include, "*...Is that right?*"
- Reflect instead of react.

Infuse the Savvy Paraphrase into your personal interaction repertoire. Practice it until it becomes an automatic way of responding. Make it part of your interaction style. This is a biggie. Don't wait. It will change your relationships, both at work and at home. Others will sense your positive approach and will open up with you.