Using Verbal Judo

Similar to the martial art Judo, verbal judo is about using or “rolling with” the person’s energy to gain better control over the situation. Ultimately, your goal is to create an environment where the individual begins to cooperate and you gain voluntary compliance through the use of persuasion and not force. While useful in all facets of life, these tactics are especially useful when dealing with individuals that are angry, upset, disruptive, or distressed.

Verbal Judo starts with:

1. Reframing how we view and approach conflict. We all must remember the words of Max Lucado, “Conflict is inevitable, combat is optional.”
2. Responding to situations and NOT reacting to personal feelings.
3. Understanding that our words and phrases have the ability to completely reshape a situation depending on how they are used.

Multiple authors and researchers in the area of verbal self-defense and defensive communication styles offer several different techniques for defusing potentially volatile and/or abusive situations of conflict.

Awareness and Avoidance
Being aware of situations, be aware of your approach, particularly in situations that will likely lead to verbal conflict or abuse and making an effort to avoid them.

Project Empathy
The ability to connect with the other person’s perspective and try to honor it. Acknowledging and understanding the person’s motivation provides a window into the person which can be used to develop connection.

Treat People With Respect
If for nothing else, do it because it’s the right thing to do! Giving respect can lead to the other person responding in kind. It also leads to them not feeling the need to justify their feelings.

Silence The “Cocked tongue” by:
- Using words to redirect the negative force of others.
- Practicing mind-mouth harmony. Just because you think it, doesn’t mean you need to say it!
- Taking control of situations without escalating stress and frustration.

Withdrawing
Once engaged in a discussion, situation, conflict, or when being verbally attacked, making an excuse and exiting the area. Arguing with someone is like wrestling with a “pig,” you get dirty and the pig enjoys it.

Deflecting
Changing topic or focus on the interaction as a means of avoiding any disagreement or negative reaction on the part of the aggressor.

Compromise
Openly offering ideas and seeking ways to placate the attacker and/or their reasons for the abusive communication.
Verbal Judo Do’s And Don’ts

The do’s and don’t are about avoiding phrases that tend to cause a knee-jerk antagonistic reaction from the receiver.

Don’t say: “That’s the rule!”
Do: Explain why the rule is in place, it’s purpose and your purpose.

Don’t Say: “Calm down.”
Do: Use calming phrases like, “Let’s talk.” “Explain what’s going on?” “I want to hear what’s going on with you.” As stated in the poem, “Please Just Listen:”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>When I ask you to listen to me</th>
<th>But when you accept as a simple fact</th>
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<td>And you begin to tell me why</td>
<td>No matter how irrational (I feel),</td>
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<td>I shouldn’t feel that way,</td>
<td>Then I can stop trying to convince</td>
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<td>You are trampling on my feelings.</td>
<td>You and get about this business</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Of understanding what’s behind</td>
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<td></td>
<td>This irrational feeling.</td>
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Don’t Say: “Be reasonable.”
Do: Understand that the person is likely to believe their feelings or behaviors are reasonable. Not to mention that reasonable can be in the eye of the beholder. With this understanding, try connecting with the person’s message. Remember the above poem, specifically that accepting someone’s feelings leads to a discovery of what’s behind them.

Don’t Say: “Your feelings are wrong.”
Do: Offer acknowledgment of what the person believes they are experiencing. “I can see how you would feel that way.” “I hear and appreciate your perspective.” Once you acknowledge the feelings, then you can gently offer other perspectives or possibilities.

Don’t Say: “Come here.”
Do: Persuade the individual to comply with statements like, “I would like to speak to you over here for a few moments?” “I’d really like an opportunity to listen to you over here away from everyone else.” “Would you like for me to listen to you? Let’s do it over here away from everyone else”

Don’t Say: “What’s your problem?”
Do: Show that you care and want to help with phrases like, “I’d like to help, what’s going on?” “What can I do to be helpful?” “Explain to me what just happened.”