

3.8—PRACTICING INDIRECTNESS

The next two exercises give you a chance to practice the skill of indirect communication. In this first activity, you are presented with a series of seven direct statements. Try to rephrase them to make them more indirect, writing your suggestions in the blank space below each one. While these statements could be appropriate in some situations, the setting here is a meeting, where allowing people to save face is important. Suggested rephrasing of the first statement is offered as an example.

1. I don't think that's such a good idea.	<i>Do you think that's a good idea? Are there any other ideas? I like most parts of that idea.</i>
2. That's not the point.	
3. I think we should....	
4. What do you think, Mr. Cato? <i>(Calling on people sometimes embarrasses them. How can you find out what Mr. Cato thinks without directly asking him?)</i>	
5. Those figures are not accurate.	
6. You're doing that wrong.	
7. I don't agree.	

[See page 241 for suggestions.]

It's just not in their culture to tell or even suggest what they think you should do. Even when you are asking for advice, I don't think they feel comfortable giving it. The direct American style is often taken as impolite.

—PCV Papua New Guinea

—INSIGHT—

The direct way of saying certain things may strike some listeners as too harsh.

3.9—DECODING INDIRECTNESS

This exercise is the opposite of the one you just completed. In this activity, you are presented with a series of indirect statements and asked to decode them—to explain in direct language what the speaker probably means. Looking at the first statement, “That is a very interesting viewpoint,” remember that the person may mean exactly that, but *sometimes* it’s an indirect way of saying “I disagree with you.” In communicating across cultures, you need to *at least entertain the possibility* that the speaker may mean something other than what he or she has said. The first statement has been rephrased for you.

1. That is a very interesting viewpoint.	<i>I don't agree. We need to talk more about this. You're wrong.</i>
2. This proposal deserves further consideration.	
3. I know very little about this, but....	
4. We understand your proposal very well.	
5. We will try our best.	
6. I heard another story about that project.	
7. Can we move on to the next topic?	

[See page 242 for suggestions.]

—INSIGHT—
The actual meaning of the words may be a poor guide to what an indirect communicator is saying.

Attachment A



DIRECT STATEMENTS:

1. I need this completed by tomorrow at 10 A.M.
2. You will need to provide your own equipment if you want to show a video in class.
3. Your office seems very sparse.
4. The information you gave in the nonverbal section of your presentation was wrong.
5. Your management style is very laissez faire, which doesn't encourage growth in your subordinates.
6. I need you to get this project finished by the deadline.
7. If you don't get your homework done you will not complete this class.
8. You need to let me know what type of food you want for the party.
9. You have difficulty arriving on time, don't you?
10. I would like it if you would quit the small talk so we can get a work plan finished.

INDIRECT STATEMENTS:

1. When I worked for Division A they allowed us to establish our own deadlines.
2. The early bird gets the worm.
3. My mother used to tell me that it was important to listen to the whole story before making decisions.
4. The nail that sticks up feels the hammer first.
5. I am not sure . . . what would you like to do?
6. I would like to watch you do that again.
7. Would Tuesday be a good day for that?
8. It may get here tomorrow (in response to an inquiry about a product that is never going to be available).
9. That could be very difficult (in response to an inquiry about whether something can be delivered by a certain date—meaning “no,” which would be rude to say).
10. I wonder if people are comfortable with the temperature in here.

