



Episode 14: The Reason You Need to Stop Using “But”

Welcome to In the Right Direction podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness, one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Today, we're talking about two different three letter words that are often used interchangeably. One of these three letter words is one that I encourage all of my clients to stop using because it has a resistant and negating energy to it. The other three letter word is the one that I encourage all of my clients to use in its place, because it has an additive allowing, energy to it.

I'm guessing you know the words that I'm referring to. That's right. We're talking about those two little and very powerful words: But and And. We all use these words all the time, often, without even being aware of when we're choosing to use one versus the other, and they're different words with different inherent meanings and very different impact.

So let's talk about them. Let's talk about the problems I hear with the word but, and let's talk about how using the word and can help you think more expansively. And is a powerful word. When you start using it intentionally, it will change how you think, how you communicate with others, and more importantly, it will change how it makes the people you're speaking with feel.

If you are going to take one idea from today's podcast, please take this. Change your but's to and's. Changing your but's to and's will help your thinking, your relationships and your outlook on situations you're problem solving. Let's start with the word but. The word but is a word of resistance. When we use it, it's like an immediate wall goes up. It is a conversation blocker. It stops the flow of energy. It immediately negates whatever was said right before it, as in, I like your haircut, but you'd look better with longer hair. We all know how that feels to be on the receiving end of a but: like you did something wrong.

I like your idea, but we've decided to go in another direction. We hear that as, I did not like your idea, you made a bad decision, your efforts are lacking. If you're having a conversation or a brainstorming session, a but can also put up a roadblock and derail the process.

The other day, I was coaching a physician client who was dealing with a number of stressors. He's a smart guy, and he also really likes to use the word but. We were discussing various processes in his office and he described a situation that he didn't agree with. I suggested we talk through different ways he could convey his message to his admin partner. To which he replied, Deb, I agree with you, but here's the problem. When he used that word but, he was essentially saying, I am discounting your suggestion. He was saying, I see the situation in one way, and that's that. When we have that attitude, it's a problem. It makes it really hard to generate solutions, to coach others, or to be coached. And if you've ever been talking with

someone and they throw that but in there, you know how it feels. It shuts down alternative perspectives and has a negative energy.

So what can you do? The solution is to switch your but to an and. In fact, switch all of your but's to and's, because they can all be and's and what's great about and is that allows for both pieces of what you're saying to be true. It makes room for opposing opinions and different points of view. Because often both points of view can be true and holding two opposing ideas at the same time, knowing they're both true, is how effective leaders think.

Leaders can hold dichotomies and different opinions. Leaders can allow people to have different opinions and still be right. Here's an example. Another client of mine was talking about a big change at her organization. She said to me, it's a really tough situation, but I want to stay positive. I asked her, can you say that again and this time change your but to an and? She repeated, it's a tough situation and I want to stay positive. Absolutely. By switching the but to an and and she was allowing both ideas to be true because both are. That's how life is. Two different ideas can be true at the same time. And if we use but, we ignore one of those truths.

In my client's case, it was a tough situation. And there were other things that were also true. She is relatively new and she's under lots of pressure to make big changes now. And she's facing a lot of resistance from below and she is innately a positive person who does know how to harness a positive mindset.

By saying and, she can honor all of the pieces that are true in this situation. And when we honor all of our ideas, it helps our brain. It gives our brain an opportunity to calm down because we aren't pitting one idea against another. We can allow different ideas and make space for problem solving. The gift of the word and is that it is one of acceptance, accepting that all our feelings and thoughts are valid. I can acknowledge them and I can decide what to do next.

Using the word and in an intentional and emphatic way can also make what you're talking about seem more lighthearted. Here's some recent thoughts swirling around in my head. I want to grow my business. And I feel vulnerable posting my podcast on LinkedIn. And I know it's important. No but's, all and's. And I get to add on as many and's as I like. By linking all of these ideas, I'm honoring them all as true because life is messy and complicated and we have lots of seemingly contradictory thoughts and feelings that are often at odds with each other. And that's okay because that's what it means to be human.

Let's bring this to you. In the next few weeks, I invite you to take what I'm calling the and challenge. Listen to your self-talk. Notice what you write in emails and texts and count how many times you use the word but. Really try to catch yourself. Then restate or rewrite your thoughts with the word and. Use it liberally in your speaking and your emailing and in your writing. See how it feels in your brain and in your conversations and notice how the other person reacts.

And one last thought for all of you, networkers, job seekers, and interviewees. It's especially important to eliminate that word but from your conversation. You need all the positive

energy you can get, and changing your butts to ands will allow you to come across as less resistant, less negative, more agreeable, and more enthusiastic.

Thank you so much for listening and for being part of my community. If you have a colleague who uses that word but all the time, please share this podcast with them. You can even take the and challenge together. If you do. I'd love to hear how it goes. Until next time!