

POLITENESS PRINCIPLE 4 -The Sensitive Correction Principle

When we make a mistake and we are corrected, we can feel pretty stupid - Nobody actually likes being corrected.

It's essential to correct people in a sensitive way so they don't lose face.

Let's say I said something wrong like:

The capital of the United States of America is New York.

As this is not true, you could correct me in different ways:

You are so stupid! How many times do I have to tell you? The capital is Washington not New York.

Now, how would I feel if you corrected me that way?

That's right. I'd feel pretty stupid and pretty small. And I'd probably hate you in that moment for and I'd be really angry with you.

If I have a positive public image (I'm an intelligent and knowledgeable person) and you correct me really directly, I'll lose face.

Now, if you corrected me in a more polite and sensitive way I wouldn't lose face.

New York? I think the capital is actually Washington.

Here are some ways we can correct in a sensitive way:

- **Apologising then correcting**

*Actually, she works in a school not a bank.
I'm sorry. She works in a school not a bank*

- **Questioning what the other person said**

In a bank? Did you say she works in a bank?

You repeat what the other person has said then question what they have said.

Remember one of the golden rules of politeness is to give options. By querying what the other person has just said, I'm giving them the option to correct their error.

The question may indicate to the other person that a mistake has been made. They can correct themselves without losing face.

- **Present another option**

If we present another option (the correct one perhaps), we give the other person the option of agreeing with you and correcting their mistakes or they could confirm their original statement. Then you can decide how important it is to correct the error.

In a bank? I thought she worked in a hospital.

New York? I thought it was Washington.

You indicate that an error has been made. You don't force the other person to change their mind. Give the other person the option to agree or disagree with your statement.

SUMMARY

Correct sensitively by

- **apologising before correcting**
- **politely questioning what has been said**
- **presenting another option.**