



Minnesota Women of Today

Leadership Toolbox – The Negative Effects of Can't

Our words have power. **When we are constantly told that we cannot do something, we become disenchanted and eventually give up or walk away.** Don't let the negative effects of "can't" overpower your chapter and members. Take time to read through this information and learn the techniques needed to turn a can't into a can.



Turning Can't into Can Basics

- Delegate. If you are running into issues with a particular member and find yourself using the word can't as a go to word, step back. Ask another member of your board with a different communication style to communicate with the member. Be kind and make an effort not to overwhelm the member with negative feedback.
- Include Others. Sometimes we use the word can't when others are trying to change something that has always been done a certain way. Include others and take the time to have a conversation about why things were done that way, the future of the project or event, and how change could benefit the project or event.
- Communicate. Take the time to listen to what the other person has to say, instead of saying we can't do that. Will the end result be similar if it is done that way? If change or redirection is needed, take the time to explain why you feel something cannot be done a certain way. Use facts, not opinions to explain your point.
- Respect Others. Respect each other at all times. Avoid speaking down to others. Value everyone's contributions and ideas.
- Own It. Take responsibility for your words. Prepare your thoughts ahead of time. It is okay to defer a surprise conversation until you are better prepared to discuss it.

The top three issues that arise with negative energy

- Personality Conflicts
- Reduced Participation
- Members Leave the chapter/organization

Why Can't is not Effective

- Upon hearing the word "can't", members may tune out and stop listening to your words.
- Using "can't" without explanation implies others' ideas and thoughts are not valid and/or worthy of thought or discussion.
- "Can't" alone, without reason lacks substance and becomes a condescending phrase.
- Members who feel they are always told no without reason stop participating.

Difficult Members

- It is a misconception that misusing the word "can't" is only an issue for the leaders of our organization. General members can be some of the most common violators of the word.
- They use it when they are afraid of change. They use it when they feel superior to others. They use it when they are insecure in their thoughts. They use it when they feel defensive. They use it because they have not been challenged to come up with a reason or an idea to support their thought.
- The word "can't" has caused many leaders issues and put them in defensive positions. Do not allow others to do that to you. Address the issue head on. Politely stop the member. Say something to the effect of "I'm sorry I stopped you. You used the word "can't" and I (we) do not understand your point. I (we) would like to better understand where you are coming from. Can you please repeat what you said using two or three sentences to explain why you feel we cannot do that?"
- If the member refuses, remind them that "can't" is not enough of an argument to support their claim. Ask them if they would like to revisit their suggestion or point after they have had time to think about it for a few minutes, day, week, month...

Cannot

/ ka-'nät/

Verb: an auxiliary verb expressing incapacity, inability, withholding permission, etc.;

Usage: Cannot is sometimes also spelled can not. The one word spelling is by far the more common. The contraction can't is most common in speech and informal writing.

Idioms and Phrases: can't abide, can't but, can't complain, can't do any- thing, can't fight, can't help

Don't fall into the "can't" trap. Read over the included tips and tricks and put them to work for you. If you find yourself needing help please contact the MNWT Chapter Management Vice President (CMVP) cmvp@mnwt.org