

# Don't Tell Me it Can't be Done

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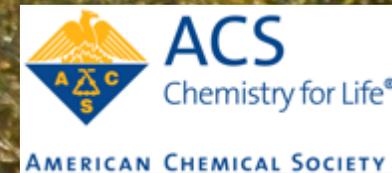
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When it comes to getting things done, who you listen to matters.

Trying to implement changes that improve the safety of the department, a laboratory, or even an experiment, will often meet with resistance.

- “There is no money for that”,
- “The administration won’t go for it”,
- “I don’t have time for that, and the most popular one,
- “It can’t be done”.



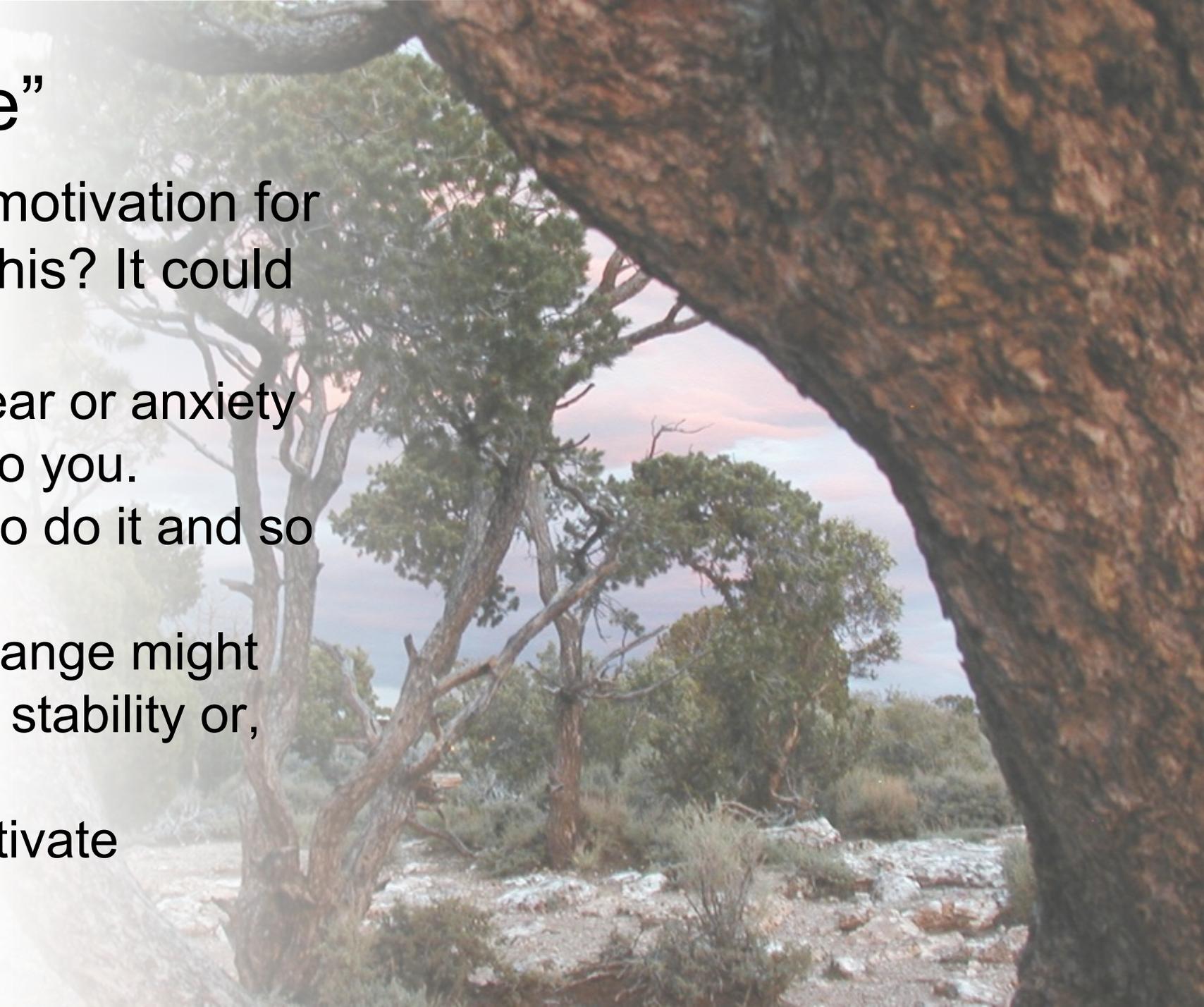
“It Can’t be Done”

When I am on the receiving end of this response, I have been known to react by tucking my tail between my legs and sulking off, but more often than not, I think to myself, “Just watch me”.

# “It Can’t be Done”

What is the possible motivation for someone telling you this? It could be:

- A projection of their fear or anxiety of something new onto you.
- That they don’t want to do it and so you shouldn’t either.
- That they think the change might affect their position of stability or, maybe
- They are trying to motivate you...??



# Reactance Theory

The theory of psychological reactance was first described by Brehm & Brehm (1966).

“Reactance is an unpleasant motivational arousal that emerges when people experience a threat to or loss of their free behaviors. It serves as a motivator to restore one’s freedom.”





# Reactance Theory

Reactance is an “unpleasant motivational” trigger because it conjures up the emotion of anger mixed with negative thoughts.

“Don’t tell me what I can and cannot do”

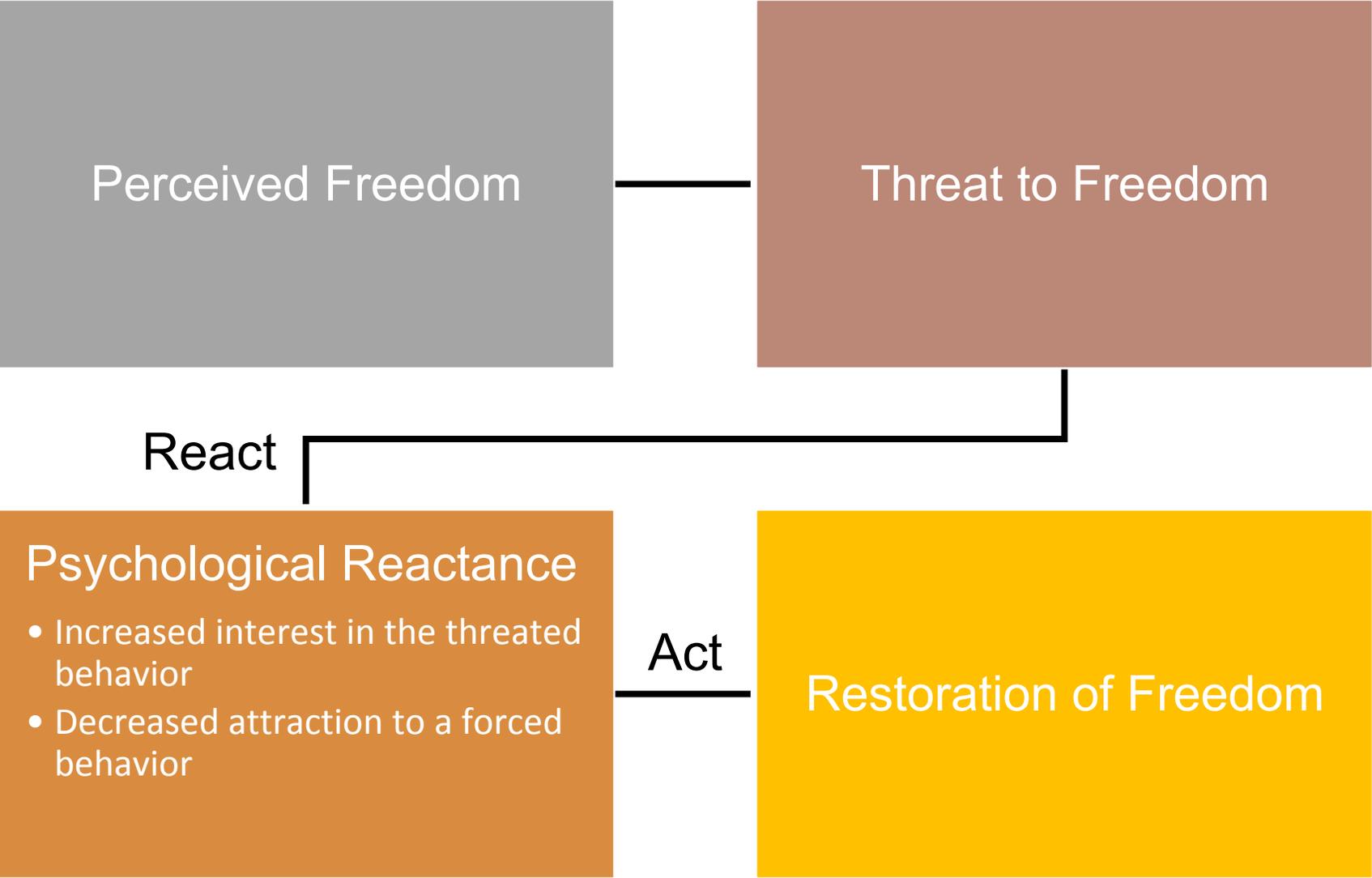


# Reactance Theory

“According to this model, when people feel coerced into a certain behavior, they will react against the coercion, often by demonstrating an increased preference for the behavior that is restrained, and may perform the behavior opposite to that desired.”

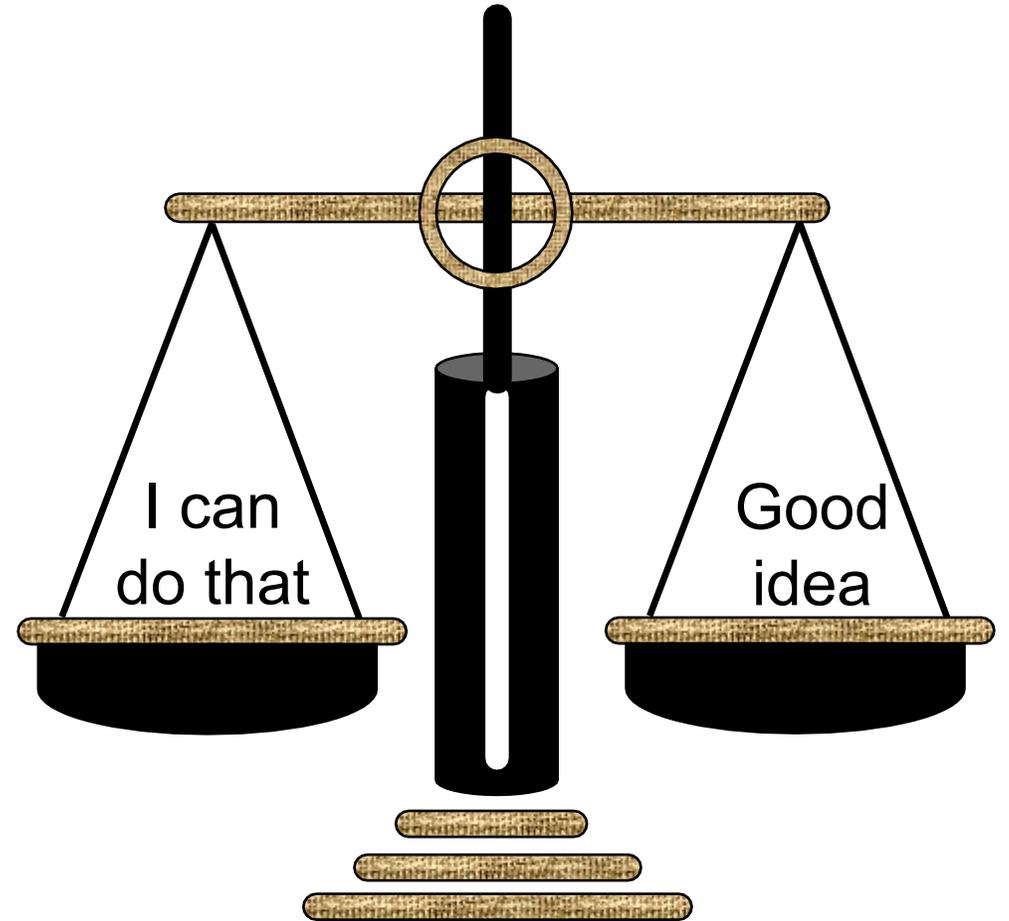
[APA Dictionary of Psychology](#)

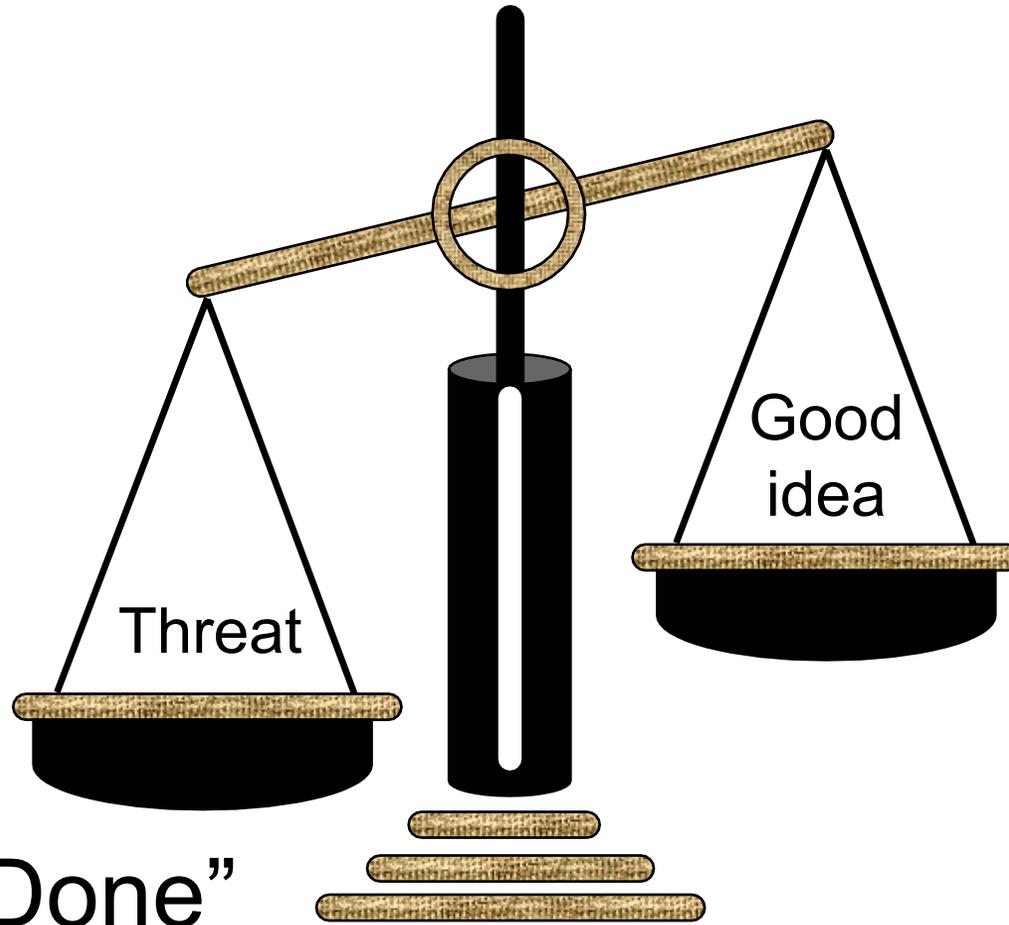




We all have an awareness of self and what we are realistically able to achieve.

This can be internalized as a perceived freedom to accomplish things.





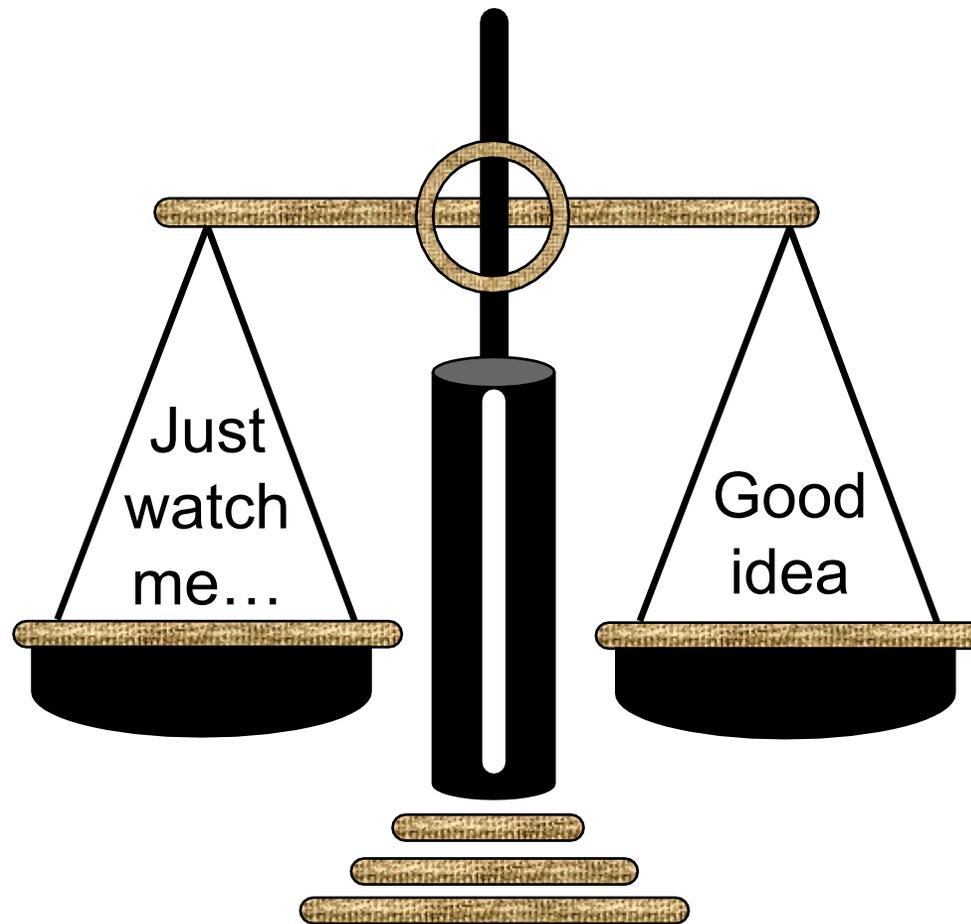
“It Can't be Done”

Perception of  
loss of freedom  
and a reduction  
of my self worth

Reactance is  
activated

You are  
motivated  
to action to  
reduce or  
remove  
reactance

~~“It Can’t be Done”~~



I did it!

Self  
validation  
and my  
behavior  
rewarded



The reactance response can be very strong depending on the individual and how big the perceived threat is to their loss of freedom or choice.



By now, you should have connected the reactance theory to the decision-making process for wearing a mask or getting vaccinated.

## Messaging

“As health campaigns and messages often directly discourage unhealthy behaviors, or in the case of those that encourage healthy behaviors, implicitly discourage unhealthy ones, promotional health messages may inherently be perceived as freedom threats.

“This underlines an inherent contradiction that exists when crafting persuasive health messages.”

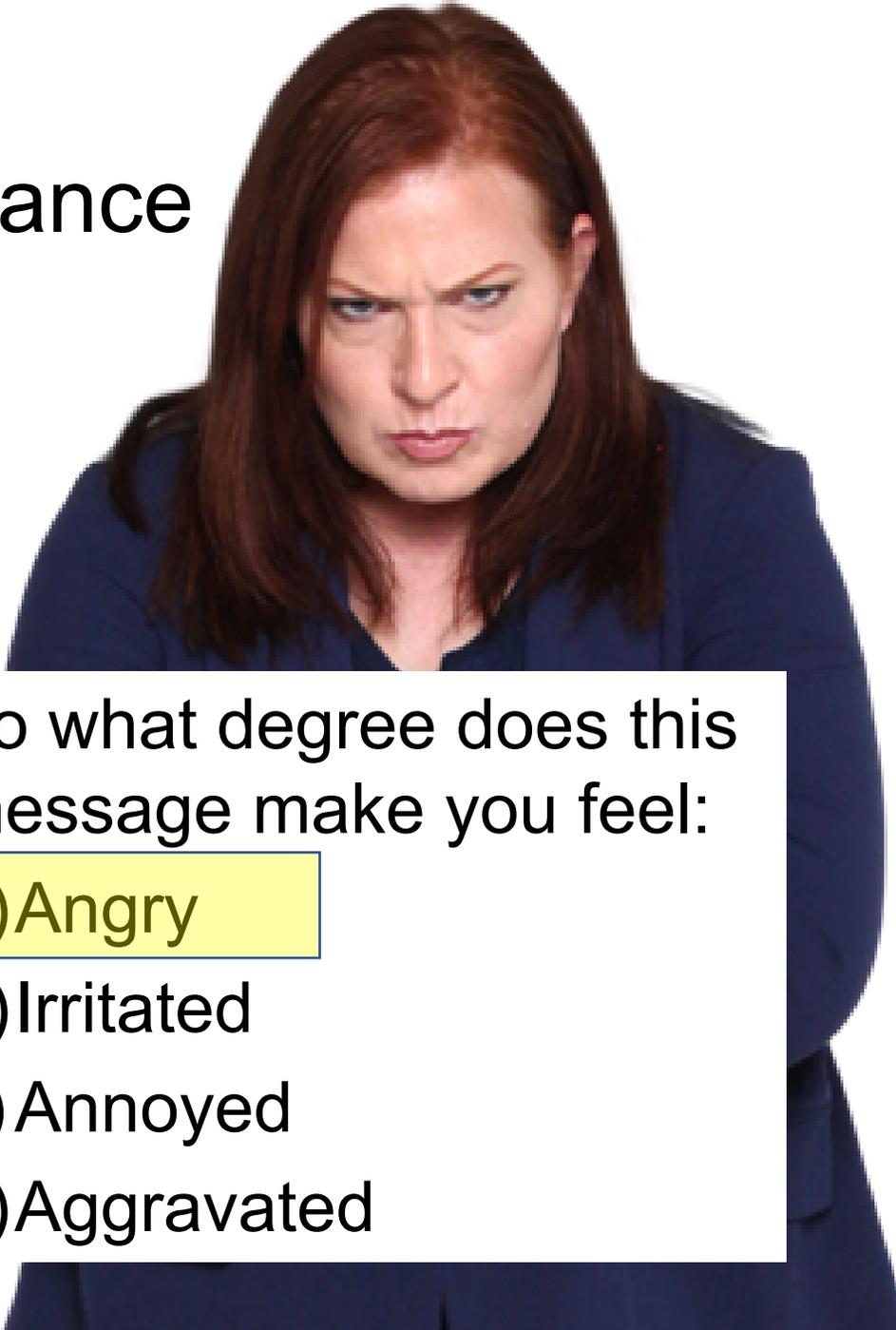
# Messaging

When you are trying to persuade people to do things, you should try to avoid triggering the reactance response – unless you think it might motivate to someone into action.



# Using Messaging to Reduce Reactance

“You are going to have to reduce the number of chemical containers in this laboratory space by 50% before work can continue.”



To what degree does this message make you feel:

- a) Angry
- b) Irritated
- c) Annoyed
- d) Aggravated

# Using Messaging to Reduce Reactance

“Can we schedule at time to look through a printout of your inventory and see what chemicals you no longer use?”

Maybe we can remove some unused chemicals and create a safer working environment?



To what degree does this message make you feel:

- a) Angry
- b) Irritated
- c) Annoyed
- d) Aggravated

# Help People Understand

- Reactance is one reason why rules are so hard to enforce.
- Implementing any rule reduces autonomy and choices.
- Don't make rules that you are not prepared to enforce or that are unenforceable.
- Use communications that minimize choice limitation.





# The Hardest of Most Jobs is Getting Started

What I have come to understand is that if you never start – then it can't be done.

Don't let anyone keep you from starting...



Don't Tell Me  
That the  
Stockroom  
Will Never be  
Renovated

# Don't Tell Me We Can't Shift the Safety Paradigm by...

- teaching safety education
- training with risk-based models, and
- giving people more choice in their safety management system (within the limits of the law)



# Playing with Fire: Chemical *Safety* Expertise Required

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Don't Tell Me  
That We Can't  
Help Prevent  
More Injuries in  
High Schools



“The person who  
says it cannot be  
done should not  
interrupt the person  
who is doing it”  
– Chinese Proverb



A photograph of a sunset over a field of ferns. The sun is low on the horizon, partially obscured by the silhouettes of the ferns. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and purple. The text "Thank you!" is written in white, sans-serif font in the center of the image.

Thank you!