

Toolbox 2009 dialogue: Bookcases and Big Reports

Susie and Shu-Hsien are office mates and share the bookcases and file cabinets. Shu-Hsien is sitting in the office looking at her papers, and Susie comes in.

Susie: Hi Shu-Hsien – how are you?

Shu-Hsien: Oh, hi Susie – I'm fine – how are you?

Susie: I'm good. So, I see you rearranged the bookcases?

Shu-Hsien: Yes, but we don't have to. I could put all the books back the way they were.

Susie: *(surprised)* No, that's fine. I just saw that the reference books were in a different place so I was kind of wondering.

Shu-Hsien: So you don't like them there?

Susie: No, really, they're fine. (TO AUDIENCE: I WONDER WHY SHU-HSIEN KEEPS ASKING ME IF I MIND THAT SHE REARRANGED THE BOOKCASES? I ALREADY TOLD HER TWICE THAT I DIDN'T!) *(smiles at Shu-Hsien)*

Shu-Hsien: (TO THE AUDIENCE: I THINK MAYBE SUSIE DOESN'T LIKE THE WAY I ARRANGED THE BOOKCASES, BUT SHE DOESN'T FEEL COMFORTABLE TELLING ME!) *(smiles at Susie)*
Sometimes people don't want to say they don't like something. So if you ask a question it opens a door for them to say something.

Susie: *(hesitates, looks confused)* Umm, No, they're fine. I wasn't trying to say anything like that. Oh, by the way, I have to go to the Regional conference today, but my car is getting inspected. Do you think you could give me a ride to the airport?

Shu-Hsien: What time do you need to be there?

Susie: At about 1 pm.

Shu-Hsien: *(looks at her watch quickly, nods)* Oh, I see. *(pauses)* I'm working on my report.

Susie: *(sounding interested)* Oh, you've been working on that for weeks!

How's it going?

Shu-Hsien: OK, I guess. I still have a LOT of work to do on it.

Susie: It sounds like it will be really good, you've put so much work into it. (TO THE AUDIENCE: I WANT TO ENCOURAGE SHU-HSIEN ABOUT HER REPORT - SHE LOOKS KIND OF STRESSED ABOUT IT!) I'm sure it will be great! So, you think you'll be able to give me a ride around 12:30?

Shu-Hsien: (*sounding somewhat brief*) So today I'm working on organizing the whole thing.

Susie: What is your report about?

Shu-Hsien: Cross cultural differences in Communication. (TO THE AUDIENCE: SUSIE IS ASKING ME A LOT OF QUESTIONS!)

Susie: Oh that sounds really interesting! What aspects of communication are you focusing on?

Shu-Hsien: (*sounding annoyed*) I don't want to talk about it right now – I want to organize my report! I have to present it this afternoon!

SUSIE: Oh, really? What time?

Shu-Hsien: At 3 pm. I have a lot to do to finish it!

Susie: Oh why didn't you just tell me? (*Shu-Hsien looks at her with a surprised expression, then shrugs*) I can just ask someone else for a ride. Good luck with your report!

Shu-Hsien: OK...Thanks.

(*Susie leaves – both she and Shu-Hsien look a little puzzled.*)

Characters stay in their roles and the audience asks them questions

Discussion questions:

Does Susie like the new bookcase arrangement?

Does Shu-Hsien think Susie likes the new arrangement? Why or why not?

Is Shu-Hsien planning to drive Susie to the airport? Why or why not?

Why is Susie asking Shu-Hsien questions about her report?
How does Shu-Hsien feel about Susie's questions?

Indirect vs. direct communication techniques

Purpose of:

Asking questions
Changing the subject
Repeating the subject
Nodding and saying "Oh, I see"

Skit Explanations:

Shu-Hsien

assumes that by asking **questions**, Susie is trying to tell her **indirectly** that she doesn't like the new bookcase arrangement.

Shu-Hsien is busy writing her report and tries to **indirectly** tell Susie to stop talking to her by **mentioning several times** that she is working on her report. When Susie asks her for a ride, Shu-Hsien nods and says, "Oh, I see," but she does not mean "yes." Instead of directly saying "no" to Susie, she uses the **indirect** technique of **changing the subject** as a way of showing she is uncomfortable with Susie's request, especially since she is too busy and cannot help her friend.

Shu-Hsien also **keeps repeating** how busy she is, to **indirectly** let Susie know that she cannot drive her to the airport.

Susie

is surprised by Shu-Hsien's reaction to her **question** about the bookcases, since she meant it as a neutral question.

Susie asks **questions** to show interest, and in the case of Shu-Hsien's report, to encourage her in doing her work. She notices that Shu-Hsien seems stressed, but does not understand why she is stressed.

Susie is used to stating things more **directly**, and when she asks for a ride to the airport, she wonders why Shu-Hsien does not simply tell her directly that she is busy and cannot give her a ride. She is surprised to hear that Shu-Hsien's report is due that same day, especially since Shu-Hsien does not tell her about her upcoming deadline until the end of their conversation.