Too often organizational effectiveness suffers as a result of language that, though intended as factual, is subject to various interpretations. Engineers in their reports, supervisors in giving feedback, quality inspectors, employees attempting to be clear about concerns; all confuse phrases that make a judgment from those that report a fact. And this coloring of fact often gives rise to conflict: "You're being careless" vs. "Three jars were broken this past hour." or, "The second shift isn't working as hard" vs. "Production is down 40 cases today compared to yesterday."

A differentiated person makes this distinction and strives to communicate with specificity. The judgment/interpretation not only inflames, but worse, it draws attention and energy away from the problem (i.e., three jars were broken) toward the feelings of the accused and to the accusation itself.

In this exercise, see how well you can distinguish between being factual or being interpretive. In other words, distinguish between non-judgmental and judgmental statements.

Review the eighteen statements below and put an "S" beside each one that you consider to be specific, an observable fact, rather than an inference or interpretation.

1. ___ Joe was not being professional.
2. ___ Harry was not sincere.
3. ___ Harry misinterpreted Joe.
4. ___ Joe was discouraged
5. ___ Harry's voice got louder when he said, "Cut it out, Joe."
6. ___ Joe was trying to make Harry mad.
7. ___ Harry talked more than Joe did.
8. ___ Joe was aggressive.
9. ___ Joe said nothing when Harry said, "Cut it out."
10. ___ Harry knew that Joe was feeling discouraged.
11. ___ Joe talked about the weather and the baseball game.
12. ___ Jane deliberately changed the subject.
13. ___ Bill forgot the meeting.
14. ___ Harry didn't show respect to his boss.
15. ___ That's the third time you've started to talk while I was talking.
16. ___ The furnace repair was inadequate.
17. ___ The thermostat was set at 180 degrees.
18. ___ I expect to receive this report by 3 p.m. tomorrow.