

## #30 Rules for Softened Startup

We all use these skills. Softened start-up is basically the way we treat guests- respectfully and courteously. Soften Start-up has six components:

### 1. Start the conversation gently – Complain but don't blame.

Complaining is okay, but criticizing is not. Criticizing is a statement-often generalization, using words such as “always” and “never”- that attack another person's character.

On the other hand, effective complaining looks like this:

- Describe the situation nonjudgmentally
- Express how you feel about it
- Ask for what you need.

### 2. Make statements that start with “I” instead of “you.”

Psychologist Thomas Gordon noted that when statements start with the word “You” instead of the word “I,” they are usually more likely to be critical and to make your partner defensive.

Say this:           *“I would like it if you'd listen to me.”*  
Instead of this:   *“You aren't listening to me.”*

Don't cheat and form an “I” statement that is actually a “You” statement such as: *“I think you're mean.”*

### 3. Describe what is happening; don't evaluate or judge.

Instead of accusing or blaming, just describe what you see happening, non-judgmentally.

Say this:           *“For the last seven evenings, I've cleaned up the kitchen by myself.”*  
Instead of this:   *“You don't help clean up.”*

### 4. Talk clearly about What You Need in Positive Terms.

Say what you wish for or hope for, and/or what you want more of (versus what you don't want). Instead of asking your partner to guess what you need, or to read your mind, express it explicitly.

Say this:           *“I'd appreciate it if you would clean your stuff off the dining room table.”*  
Instead of this:   *“This dining room is a total mess!”*

## 5. Be polite.

Make requests politely, adding such phrases as “please” and “I would appreciate it if…”

## 6. Give appreciations

Noticing what our partners are doing *right* is always the best way to go. If your partner has, at some point, been better in this situation, then ask for what you need, and couch it within an appreciation of what your partner did right in the past, and how much you miss that now. *Be Specific! Don't Store Things Up!*

Say this: “*I always appreciate it when you made the bed in the morning. I miss that.*”

Instead of this: “*You never make the bed in the morning.*”

While being specific is a better idea than global criticism, storing things up is not a good idea.

### Additional Examples:

**Topic-Affection:** You want your partner to express more affection toward you.

Harsh Start-up: “*You never touch me.*”

Softened alternative: “*I love it when you kissed me in the kitchen the other day. You're such a great kisser. I would love it if we could do that more often.*”

**Topic- Your partner's car has a new dent in it.** You are worried that your partner is not being a careful enough driver, and you are concerned over your partner's safety.

Harsh Start-up: “*I saw that new dent. Were you ever going to tell me about it? When are you going to stop being so reckless?*”

Softened alternative: “*I saw that new dent. What happened? Honey, I'm getting worried about your driving. I want you to be safe. Can we talk about this?*”

**Topic: Your partner has not been paying much attention to you.**

Harsh start-up: “*You are so emotionally unavailable to me!*”

Softened alternative: “*I have been missing you lately, and I'm getting a little lonely.*”

When complaining, think about what you need.  
Instead of criticizing, think about how your partner can shine for you.  
Catch your partner doing something right.  
Then thank your partner for it.

## Exercise: Softened Start-up

**Instructions:** Below you will see a situation described and an example of a harsh start-up. Supply a softened alternative. This is not a test, but rather an opportunity to learn how to apply this skill. Sample answers are given on the back, but try not to peak.

1. **Topic: Housework.** You wish that your partner would cook dinner tomorrow night or take you out to dinner.

**Harsh start-up:** *"You never take me anywhere and I am sick of doing all the cooking."*  
Your softened alternative:

2. **Topic: Parties.** You sometimes get shy in social situations. You think that your partner ignores you when you go to parties and prefers to spend time with other people instead. Tonight, there is a party, and you want your partner to spend time with you.

**Harsh start-up:** "I just know that tonight you're going to just dump me off in some corner while you shamelessly flirt all night long."

Your softened alternative:

3. **Topic: Sex.** You are upset that you and your partner have not made love in some time. You are feeling unsure that your partner finds you attractive. You wish that the two of you could make love tonight.

**Harsh start-up:** "You are so cold to me! All you care about is yourself!"

Your softened alternative:

4. **Topic: You want your partner to ask for a raise.**

**Harsh start-up:** "You are too wimpy to get a raise for your own family."  
Your softened alternative:

5. **Topic: You want to spend some time having more fun on the weekends.**

**Harsh start-up:** "You have no idea how to have a good time. You're just a workaholic."  
Your softened alternative:

6. **Topic: Finances.** You wish that the two of you could save more money.  
Harsh start-up: "You have no clue how not to overspend, do you?"

Your softened alternative:

7. **Topic: Finances.** You wish your partner would spend more money on surprise presents for you.

**Harsh start-up:** *"You are such a miser. When was the last time you spontaneously bought me anything, hub?"*

Your softened alternative:

## POSSIBLE ANSWERS

### Sample Softened Startup Statements

1. I am very tired of cooking and would love a break. It'd be so nice if you took us all out.
2. I can tell that I'm going to feel shy tonight. I don't want to cramp your style- you are so much more comfortable at these parties than I am. But it would help me so much if you would spend time with me. I don't know why, but when you do, it makes it easier for me to talk to other people.
3. I've been thinking about you all day and about how incredibly gorgeous you are. Is there any chance we could have a long, luxurious and romantic evening together?
4. Maybe I'm nuts, but I think you deserve so much more than they are paying you at work. I'd love it if you would bet a raise soon. Could we talk about this and maybe come up with a plan?
5. Hey Honey, I would really like to spend time with you this week-end. How about not working, and let's do something fun together? There's a great movie I'd really like to see with you.
6. I am feeling anxious about our savings. I know we look at these things differently, but it would really help me if we could talk about coming up with a savings plan.
7. I don't know about you, but I'm feeling a bit deprived lately. I would love it if we surprise one another with a present out of the blue this week. What do you think?