

*OY! I can't believe  
I just said that!*



Have you ever said something, but then immediately wished you could take it back? Are you tired of living with the bad taste of your foot in your mouth?

# BLURTING and HURTING

## HOW TO AVOID Misunderstandings and Hurt Feelings

By June Paris

If not you, then you certainly know someone who is forever opening their mouth and inserting their foot. This person has raised tasteless, thoughtless, tactless, or otherwise terrifically awful remarks into an art form. If there is a wrong place, a wrong time, or a wrong person to whom to say anything, they're on the spot and ready.

Although we often joke about having our foot in our mouth, careless speech is no laughing matter. Words really hurt. They hurt not only the person whom they're aimed at, but they also hurt the speaker. Relationships, career and other areas of life, can all suffer as a result of unmindful and hurtful words.

Of course, you want to say the right words to the people in your life so that they will like and respect you. You want others to listen to your words and value what you have to say. You hope that what you say will bring people closer to you and not chase them away.

But you're human. You get stressed, grumpy, frustrated and irritated by the many obstacles that you face in a day. It could happen at any moment that you lose your self-control and suddenly hurtful words just slip out of your mouth.

### Open Mouth, Insert Foot

You may have spoken much too sharply to a family member, provoking him to defend himself. Perhaps you couldn't stop yourself from making that sarcastic comment to your friend, when she was late for your meeting, and now she's not talking to you. Maybe your boss was the recipient of your frustration when you blurted to him what you thought about your new coworker.

You certainly did not intend to derail your relationships with your words. In fact, as soon as those words left your lips, you probably realized that you shouldn't have said them. But it was too late. Your words have already done their damage. Trying to patch them up is like putting a band-aid on an open wound.

The family member who has been hurt before by your outbursts can't forget what you said to him. Even if you genuinely said, "I'm sorry", he probably doesn't believe you when you say that you won't do it again. Your friend has had enough of your sarcasm and if you could take back those remarks to your boss, you certainly would!

In your defense, there are people in your life who can be difficult at

times. There is the family member that has an annoying habit of blasting his music, and driving you nuts when you come home from work. Your friend is often late for appointments with you and this time she ruined your entire schedule for the day. You think that your boss is short-sighted and doesn't see that this particular co-worker is the key to many of the office's problems.

You may be right in every one of these relationships. But you stand alone in your righteousness! Good relationships don't flourish from your being right and saying whatever is on your mind. They grow from thinking if what you have to say are the best words for the relationship. Successful relationships require:

- ✓ Thinking about the other person before you speak.
- ✓ Considering what effect your words are going to have on another.
- ✓ Knowing that no words are neutral; everything you say affects someone positively or negatively.
- ✓ Giving kindness and speaking kindness, understanding that what you give is what you get back.
- ✓ Understanding that truthfulness is no excuse for thoughtlessness.

✓ Remembering that silence is golden. If no good can come from your words, why say them?

### Thoughtful Communication

No matter what state of mind you are in, you can be in control of your words, with a simple skill called, *thoughtful communication*. Thoughtful communication is a new skill in communications that asks you to stop before you utter a word. Ask yourself one of the following six questions. Answering just one question will help you to neutralize your emotions and negative thoughts and help you to stop blurting and hurting.

#### The Six Questions In Thoughtful Communication Are:

##### 1. “Who am I speaking to?”

This question will help remind you to focus your attention on the person and your relationship with that person. If you had taken a moment to consider this question before you spoke sharply to your close family member, you would have realized how much you care about this person and how fortunate you are to have him in your life. Your thoughts would be softened about the person and so would your words.

##### 2. “What am I not seeing?”

If you had asked yourself this question, when your friend showed up so late for your appointment, you would have given yourself a chance to step back a moment to see a bigger picture. Before judging her negatively and getting angry at her tardiness, you would have realized that there has to be more to her story that you don't know and that she must have a very good excuse for being so late this time.

##### 3. “Where will my words lead me?”

When you complained to your boss about your co-worker, if you had thought about this question, you would have considered the long term effects of your words. This question allows you a moment to evaluate if what you would like to say is going to accomplish what

you want. This question would have helped you to realize that it might not be in your best interests to complain about your co-worker, since that action may cause your boss to not view you as a team player.

##### 4. “How will he react to my words?”

When you come home from work and your family member is blasting his music, you could have asked yourself this question. This question will help you realize that when you ask him nicely, he always lowers his music, but when you are sharp with him, he responds in kind.

##### 5. “Why must I say it all?”

The question encourages you to speak when something must be said. On the other hand, it gives you license to keep quiet. When your friend comes rushing up to you out of breath ready to explain to you why she was so late, listen. Give her a chance to explain instead of making a wise crack about her lateness.

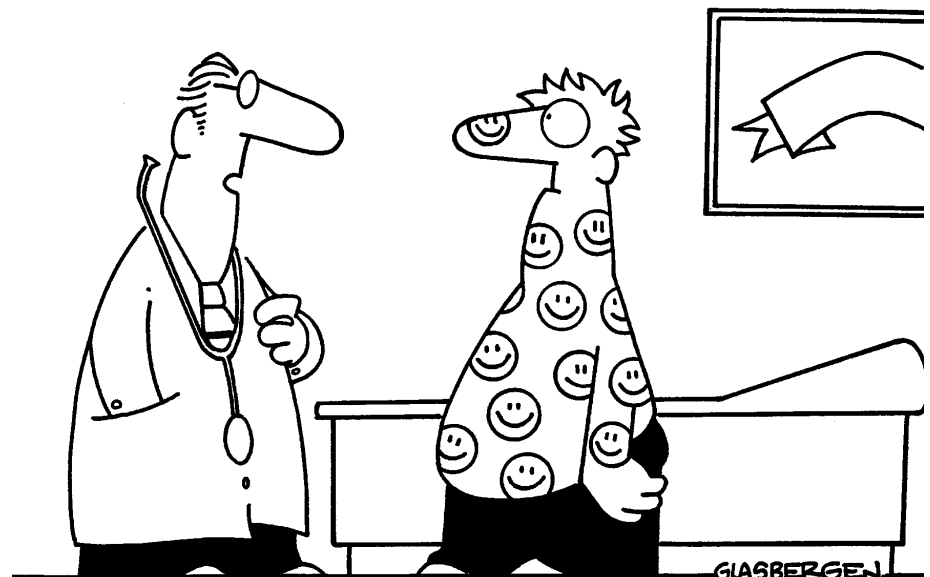
##### 6. “When do I say it?”

This question will help you to wait for

the right time. Wait for a calm moment to discuss the problem when both of you are able to listen to what each other has to say.

There are endless opportunities for you to use this new communication skill in your everyday life. The more you use it, the more control you have over your words, the better you are going to feel about yourself and the better others will feel about you. GB

**June Paris** is a free-lance writer and writing teacher who, along with Rachel Small, a former special education teacher and vice president of a flourishing family business and Richard Heyman Ed.D., Professor of communication and education at the University of Calgary, developed the skill of thoughtful communication. The skill is taught in depth with real life practical situations in their new book, *“But I Didn't Mean That! How to Avoid Misunderstanding and Hurt Feelings in Everyday Life.”* Share your challenges, successes and questions by visiting [www.butididntmeanthat.com](http://www.butididntmeanthat.com).



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