Think before you speak

I recently asked my wife if she could think of an example where I have said something dumb. “Just one?” she replied innocently. She reminded me that I have this curious habit of using people’s names in conversations with them even if I am not certain of their names. Someone’s name might be Frank, but I call him Fred. Or someone’s name might be Mary, but she looks like someone I know called Susan and another mix-up occurs. I try to explain that it is because when one has a ‘super brain’, working on so many complex problems simultaneously, mistakes are bound to occur. But this does not hold much sway with my wife.

There seem to be a lot of people out there like me who do not always think before they speak. Some think just because they have something to say, then they should say it, even if it is hurtful, inconsiderate, or in my case, inaccurate. A good rule of thumb is that we should not always say what we think, but we should always think what we say. It does not matter how right we are, if it is going to come out in a hurtful way, we need to rethink how we say it and, perhaps, whether we even say it at all. So often, it is not just what we say, but how we say it that counts.

A good way to think before we speak is to ask ourselves if what we are going to say is going to hurt or if it is really that necessary or important. Sometimes when we allow ourselves to cool down, we discover that it wasn’t that important after all. If it remains important, we tend to be in a better position to choose our words well. I don’t think I have ever regretted allowing myself time to cool down before I have had a difficult conversation with someone, though I have often regretted times when I did not.

If we do not think before we speak, we are leaving ourselves at the mercy of our learned relationship patterns. Some of these patterns are functional, but often when faced with frustrations or the challenging behaviour of another, some of our old unwanted patterns can emerge. By thinking before we speak, we are interrupting the patterns that do not get us the relationships we want. Such self-evaluation can also reinforce our healthier patterns.

Ultimately, it doesn’t matter how intelligent you are if you do a lot of dumb and hurtful things in relationships. Even though we are all human and say dumb things at times, we can at least be quick to apologise when that occurs. Even someone with a ‘super brain’ can sometimes speak before they think.

About Ken

Ken Warren, BA, M Soc Sc, PACFA reg’d, MACA (clinical), is a Counsellor, Workshop Leader & Professional Speaker. Ken provides counselling for individuals, couples and families, mentors helping professionals, and speaks at conferences and in-house training programs throughout Australia. He also writes columns for a number of newspapers, hosts his own radio programs, and writes on private practice development for a national journal.

Ken specialises in delivering enjoyable, tailor-made presentations that enhance his audience’s professional and personal skills. Ken’s entertaining and interactive approach to professional speaking inspires audiences to embrace more effective ways of working with people.

His structured workshops and seminars are based on extensive industry experience and proven formulas that provide practical, everyday solutions for issues in the workplace and at home.

Ken’s presentations will help you to

- Deal well with difficult people
- Manage and resolve conflict
- Improve workplace motivation and morale
- Address bullying and other problem behaviours in schools
- Motivate people to change
- Work more effectively in a helping role
- Excel in private practice

Counselling with Ken and his colleagues can help you to

- Improve your relationships
- Resolve conflicts
- Break problem patterns
- Improve your mental health and well-being
- Develop a deeper understanding of yourself and others
- Reconcile with your past
- Create a better future

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