

SPEAK CANDIDLY

There are times in life when most of us think *I should have said something*.

Maybe we were angry when someone insulted us, and we were too frightened to stand up for ourselves.

Maybe we came up with an idea that would have been a great solution to a problem, but we were too embarrassed to share it.

Or maybe the timing was perfect for the hilarious comment we had in mind, but we were too self-conscious to say anything.

Being frightened, embarrassed, or self-conscious is just one of the ways we stop ourselves from speaking candidly. And in stopping ourselves, we might cheat ourselves and the people we love.

We always have another option—full self-expression. Instead of withholding our thoughts and feelings, we can share them. We can tell the truth—not *The Truth* (as in assuming that our ideas are always right) but *our* truth, the way we honestly think and feel.

Our ideas can be a source of nurturing feedback for others. Instead of using them to cut people down or diminish others, we could speak our thoughts in ways that help people experience success. Feedback is just a tool. And like any other tool, it can be used for harm or for good. Feedback can be given with the intent to hurt, or it can be given with love.

Ways we stop ourselves from speaking

There are many strategies we use to block our full self-expression. At times, these strategies are appropriate. Too often we use them as excuses to stop ourselves from speaking.

- Instead of simply starting to speak, we begin an internal dialogue:

*What if this idea sounds stupid?
I'll probably just make a fool of myself.
They know more about it than I do, anyway.
What if I'm wrong?
Nobody else really cares.
Do I have any right to meddle?
If I say this, I might create an ugly scene.*

When this happens, we can easily get lost in a tangled web of doubt and confusion. We start to consider a lengthy list of issues unrelated to our original message. If we ever get around to speaking, our words are so measured and so cautious that the message is often lost.



- We keep silent with the intention to avoid forcing our values on others. We write off our opinions as value judgments that blame, demean, or find fault with others.
- We consider ourselves to be outstanding listeners. In fact, we listen so much that we hardly ever speak.
- We say to ourselves *I'm too busy right now to take the time to say what I really think*. Sometimes this is the truth. At other times, it's an excuse. People who are almost always too busy to talk may be choosing a full schedule to avoid communication.
- We avoid speaking in order to avoid our feelings: *If I don't talk about it, I won't have to feel it*. This approach is based on a faulty assumption—that hiding our emotions is the same as dealing with them.
- We remain silent because we don't want to get hurt. The less others know about us, the less ammunition they have to harm us. This line of reasoning assumes that other people are out to get us. Sometimes this is literally true, and then it's wise to avoid speaking. Most of the time, though, this is an unfounded assumption.

Withholding robs us of the chance to contribute

Refusing to speak our minds often cheats others of an opportunity to look at a problem with a fresh pair of eyes. Remember that other people always have the freedom to accept, modify, or even ignore our feedback. If they choose to ignore our ideas, we've still communicated the fact that we care. And if others use what we say to make a positive change in their lives, everyone wins.

Consider a woman who feels threatened and hurt every time her partner talks about his past romantic relationships. Her partner genuinely loves her and would feel terrible if he knew that she felt hurt. By keeping her feelings to herself, she denies her partner the opportunity to change his behavior. She also condemns herself to repeated pain. Instead, she can choose to reveal what she's really thinking and feeling, and break this self-defeating cycle.

More often than not, truthful speaking is useful speaking.

