

**“Say This.  
Not That.”**  
*Go from ‘not the best choice of words’ to ‘tactful and effective’*

Iowa Governor’s Safety & Health Conference  
October 25, 2023: 12:45 – 1:45 pm  
Brenda Clark Hamilton, MA Ed.

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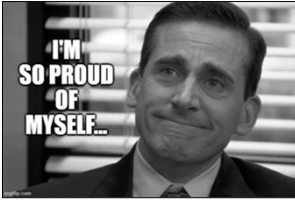
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**Bragging Time!**



Please tell **one thing** that you do well in your work...

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**“Say This.  
Not That.”**

*In your opinion, what does it mean to have ‘tact’?*



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## “Say *This*. Not *That*.”

- I. What Does It Mean to Be ‘Tactful’?
- II. Communicating with Tact and Effectiveness in Everyday Situations
- III. Communicating with Tact and Effectiveness in Tense Situations



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## I. What Does It Mean to Be ‘Tactful’?

**Definition from Merriam-Webster.com:**  
*A keen sense of what to do or say, in order to maintain good relations with others or avoid offense*

- Synonyms from Thesaurus.com**
- Finesse
  - Thoughtfulness
  - Common Sense
  - Discretion
  - Subtlety
  - Prudence
  - Good Manners
  - Diplomacy
  - Savoir-faire



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It's Sunday evening, and you're cooking dinner for your friends. One of your friends is vegan, and the other two are largely meat-eaters. In order to not offend this one friend, you have made half of the portion of the meal vegan, and the other half meat. *(You have used tact in not making a big deal about your friend's eating habits, just making half of the pan with meat, the half without.)*

Your friends are supposed to arrive at 6:00 p.m., but it's 6:30. When they come to the door, you tell them their late arrival was perfect, because you were running late on making dinner anyway. *(Not necessarily true, but it saved feelings. Tact.)*

At the dinner table, you avoid discussing the President, as you know two of your friends are strong Democrats and the other is a Republican. *(You purposely avoided a certain topic to avoid feelings being hurt.)*

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During dinner, one of your friends accidentally knocks his glass over, and spills red wine on your vintage lace tablecloth. Instead of showing your anger, you tell him not to worry, because this shade of white never matched the room anyway. *(Using tactfulness, you did not show outrage at the ruin of your tablecloth by an accidental spill. You saved your friend's feelings and did not humiliate him in front of the others.)*

You have to be up early the next morning, and so does one of your other friends, but in order to not hurt the other two friends' feelings, you suggest ending the evening soon, but planning to meet for coffee sometime during the week. *(By expressing your interest in a follow-up coffee date, you avoided potentially hurting your friends' feelings by them thinking you were cutting the night short because you weren't enjoying your time with them.)*

Tactfulness is a skill in its own, and something you should master to be a mature and successful friend, spouse, parent, coworker, and professional.

—adapted from <https://www.quora.com/What-are-some-examples-of-tactfulness>

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A filter  
is a very  
good  
thing.

General  
Considerations...

## II. Communicating with Tact and Effectiveness in Everyday Situations

- Think before you speak; think of how someone else might feel when hearing your words:  
*Talk After Carefully Thinking*
- Don't assume that just because you don't find something offensive, that others don't either. You have no idea someone's life experience that might make them view things very differently than you do.

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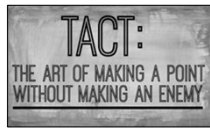
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- And no, saying "I was just joking" or "You're overly sensitive" after you say something offensive, does not make it okay.
- Make it a habit to use 'please,' 'thank you,' 'excuse me,' and 'I'm sorry.'
- Be fully aware of the 93% of your communication.
- Respect others by engaged listening.
- Avoid rambling and/or dominating every conversation.
- Be forgiving of others' mistakes/flaws, knowing that you aren't perfect either.
- Recognize when an apology is needed...and give it sincerely.



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**Words & Phrases to Avoid at Work:  
Which ones have you heard?**

- "That's not my job."
- "He/She does \_\_\_\_\_, too."
- "This place sucks."
- "You need to eat a cheeseburger or something; you're too skinny."
- "I was just doing what I was told."
- "You are WAY too tall!"
- "We've always done it this way."
- "That'll never work."
- "Quit coughing! You got COVID?"
- "It's not my fault; no one told me what to do."
- "I'm not afraid to..."
- "OMG! You're as old as my grandma!"
- "You're so young; what do you know?"
- "I'm bored."
- "Whatever."
- "\*\*\*\*!"
- "When's your baby due?" (*You aren't certain they are pregnant.*)




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- "Wow, you look tired today."
- "No offense, but..."
- "To be honest..."
- "Why are you wearing long sleeves? It's hot out."
- Excessive use of 'like,' 'literally,' and other slang.
- Sexist, Racist, Discriminatory, Homophobic language; Inappropriate jokes
- The 5 B's: Bank account, Booze, Bible, etc.
- Gossip, Rumors, Bragging, Chronic Complaining



**Lack of Tact  
AWARD**

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Before you speak,  
THINK:  
Is it...  
True?  
Helpful?  
Inspiring?  
Necessary?  
Kind?



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### Specific Examples: What's a more tactful way of saying each of these?

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Hey, can I borrow your pen?"</li> <li>2. "I can't talk right now."</li> <li>3. "I need to get through here." <i>(shoving yourself between two people)</i></li> <li>4. "You're all dressed up today! Do you have a job interview or what?"</li> <li>5. "Would you guys just quit talking? I'm trying to work here!"</li> <li>6. "You misunderstood."</li> <li>7. "You're wrong."</li> <li>8. "I thought <u>you</u> were taking care of that."</li> <li>9. "That's a lame idea. It will never work."</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. "Talk louder!" <i>(screamed from the back of the room during a meeting)</i></li> <li>11. Silence! <i>(You know you are going to miss a crucial deadline but say nothing about it)</i></li> <li>12. "Call me tomorrow."</li> <li>13. "Who are you? What was your name?"</li> <li>14. "No, I won't be at your party this weekend."</li> <li>15. Silence! <i>(no response from you after you miss an important meeting)</i></li> <li>16. ????</li> <li>17. "Hey, pick me up a bagel while you're at Casey's!"</li> </ol>
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### Specific Examples of Say *This*, Not *That*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Hey, can I borrow your pen?"</li> <li>• "May I please borrow your pen? Thanks so much."</li> <li>• "I can't talk right now."</li> <li>• "I'm so sorry. I'm meeting a deadline right now. Would it be okay if we talked about this over lunch or sometime this afternoon?"</li> <li>• "I need to get through here." <i>(shoving yourself between two people)</i></li> <li>• "Excuse me, I'm going to have to work my way through here. I'm sorry. Thanks so much."</li> <li>• "You're all dressed up today! Do you have a job interview or what?"</li> <li>• "You look so nice today. I love that jacket."</li> </ul>	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Would you guys just quit talking? I'm trying to work here."</li> <li>• "You guys sound like you are having a great conversation. Unfortunately, I'm someone who has a hard time concentrating when I'm writing these reports. Would you be willing to take your conversation to the conference room? Thank you; I appreciate it!"</li> <li>• "You misunderstood."</li> <li>• "I'm so sorry for the miscommunication. I probably didn't do as good of job explaining this as I should have."</li> <li>• "You're wrong."</li> <li>• "I was thinking it was the <i>other</i> book that we used last year, but I might not be remembering correctly..."</li> <li>• "I thought <u>you</u> were taking care of that."</li> <li>• "I'm so sorry. There must have been a miscommunication. What do you think is the best way to handle it from here?"</li> </ul>	
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- “That’s a lame idea. It will never work.”
- “Tell me more about what you are thinking. I have some concerns about how our customers might respond to \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “Talk louder!” (*screamed from the back of the room during a meeting*)
- “Excuse me...I’m sorry to interrupt...but we’re having a hard time hearing in the back of the room. The acoustics in this room aren’t the best. Thank you.”
- Silence! (*You know you are going to miss a crucial deadline but say nothing about it*)
- “I’m so sorry for the inconvenience. I had told you I could get that report to you by Tuesday, but I had some unexpected fires that I needed to put out. Would you have any flexibility in moving that deadline back a day or two?”
- “Call me tomorrow.”
- “Would it work in your schedule to give me a call sometime tomorrow?”




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- “Who are you? What was your name?”
- “I’m so sorry; I didn’t catch your name.”
- “No, I won’t be at your party this weekend.”
- “I wish I could go to your party on Sat., but unfortunately, we have a lot on our plate right now with the house remodeling. But I hope you guys have a great time.”
- Silence! (*no response from you after you miss an important meeting*)
- “I am so sorry that I missed the meeting this morning. I had it on my calendar, then a client called, and it totally slipped my mind. What can I do to get caught up with the information? I’m sorry for the inconvenience.”
- ??? (*trying to end a conversation at a networking event*)
- “It’s been great to talk with you. I have a few other people here that I need to touch base with, so I’ll catch up with you later.”
- “Hey, pick me up a bagel while you’re at Casey’s.”
- “I heard you are making a Casey’s run. Would you be willing to pick me up a bagel? I didn’t get breakfast, and I’d very much appreciate it. Thanks so much!”

**Tact :**  
the ability to do or say things without offending or upsetting other people

**Other scenarios/examples?**  
(e.g., what to say at a funeral?)

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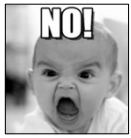
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## Polite Ways to Say ‘No’

- Please note that there are times when a firm ‘no’ is needed!
- That said, if there are times when you want to soften your ‘no’...

1. **Make a statement of regret.**  
*(I’m sorry...; I’d really like to, but...; I appreciate the offer, but...)*
2. **Explain why the answer is no.**  
*(I’m swamped right now; We aren’t available that weekend)*
3. **Offer an alternative, if possible.**  
*(I might be able to help out next week)*



<https://www.businessenglishresources.com/learn-english-for-business/teachers-section/skill-based-lessons/business-english-lessons-politely-saying-no/>

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**Polite ways to say no to a request**

*I'd love to help out, but right now I'm really busy with...*  
*I wish I could, but right now I need to focus on...*  
*Normally I'd be able to, but right now I have to...*

**Polite ways to say no to an offer**

*I appreciate the offer, but...*  
*That would be great, but I'm already working on...*  
*Thank you for the offer, but my schedule is full at the moment.*

**Polite ways to say no to invitations to social events**

*That sounds great, but....*  
*I'm sorry I can't that night. I have to....*  
*I really appreciate the invite, but...*



<https://www.businessenglishresources.com/learn-english-for-business/teachers-section/skill-based-lessons/business-english-lessons-politely-saying-no/>

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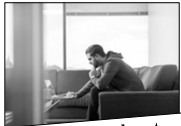
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**A Few Handy Tips**

- If you have to relay unwelcomed news, consider starting with, "Thank you for..."
- If team members have complained that your emails sound abrupt, consider softening them with a friendly greeting ("I hope you are enjoying this beautiful fall weather" or "Thank you for...")
- Consider taking some of the onus on yourself, e.g., "I'm particularly sensitive to colognes and perfumes"
- Be aware of individual preferences; Some people appreciate a friendly greeting; Others prefer getting to the point



PS: A note about Gen Z and Emojis! 😊

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**III. Communicating with Tact and Effectiveness in Tense Situations**

*Think ahead of time what will be the 1<sup>st</sup> words to come out of your mouth...*




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- Think ahead of time about how you will start. Plan to state your intention upfront in a positive way. e.g., “I want you to be successful here” or “I want us to have a great working relationship”
- If things get heated, restate what your intention *is* and *is not*.
- Ask yourself, “Do I want to peacefully and successfully resolve this, or do I just want to be right?”
- Start with facts, not conclusions.
- Avoid language that shuts down conversations: *You always; You never; You’re wrong; Whatever; If you say so; Sure; Fine; etc.*
- Use tentative language to be more persuasive: “We might want to consider...”; “I wonder how our customers would respond to...”; “What do you think would happen if we tried...”




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Additional  
Scenarios for  
Discussion Back  
at the Office...




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Say *This*.  
Not *That*.

What is  
**one point**  
that will stick  
with you from  
this session?



Office Cat Is Always  
Tactful in His Emails...

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## Closing Wisdom...

“Tact is one of the first mental virtues, the absence of which is often fatal to the best of talents.” - *William Gilmore Simms*

“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” - *Maya Angelou*

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☎ 515.295.2379  
✉ frcoffee@ncn.net  
☎ 214 Robinson Drive,  
Algona, IA 50511

[www.BrendaClarkHamilton.com](http://www.BrendaClarkHamilton.com)

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