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What You Say About Others Says More About You

Burnout doesn't just come from tasks. It comes from language — spoken, unspoken, internalized — in both corporate life and personal life. The words we hear, absorb, and even speak ourselves carry weight. They shape how we perceive our worth, how safe we feel in our environments, and how much emotional labor we expend just to exist in them.

Unclear expectations, constant criticism, casual dismissal, or even the tone of our own inner voice — these aren't just stressors. They're burdens that quietly accumulate until exhaustion sets in. Because the words we speak and absorb shape how we see ourselves, how we interpret our value, and how safe or unsafe we feel in any given space. Over time, that weight becomes burnout.

This is the first article in a five-part series I call *Be Careful What You Say (and Hear)* — an exploration of something many feel instinctively but haven't always had words for:

That what someone says — whether to your face or behind your back — reflects far more about them than it ever could about you.

The Mirror Effect

Every word that comes out of someone's mouth (or fingertips) is a window into where they are emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Especially in times of stress.

- When someone gossips about a co-worker's mistake, they're often revealing their own fear of failure.
- When a manager harshly criticizes someone in public, they may be reflecting their own anxiety about how they appear to leadership.
- When a colleague constantly vents about how "no one else is competent," they're showing how threatened they feel about being outshined.

The point isn't to psychoanalyze everyone around us. The point is to recognize the pattern so we stop making everything someone else says (or writes) about us. Because the moment you internalize someone else's harsh words as truth, burnout begins.



Workplace Example: The "Feedback" That Isn't

Picture this: a director tells you in a team meeting, "Your update was too long. You need to get to the point faster."

But there's no clear direction, no support, no explanation of expectations. And depending on their tone of voice, it might have stung, especially in front of everyone else.

What might be going on?

- Maybe the director was interrupted earlier and resented that you had ample time for a longer update.
- Maybe they're under pressure from their own boss and lashing out sideways.
- Maybe they're simply impatient and unaware of how their words land.

Their words might feel like a personal indictment. But the truth is, they were never really about you.

That doesn't mean feedback shouldn't be unpacked — maybe shorter updates *are* helpful. But what it does mean is that you don't have to absorb the emotion underneath it as your own.

Practical Grounding: What You Can Do

- **When someone speaks sharply to you, pause.** Ask: What might this reveal about where *they* are? Not to excuse bad behavior, but to keep it from sticking in your own heart.
- **When you speak about others, check your motive.** Are you venting to process pain, or are you tearing down someone else to feel momentarily superior?
- **Name what's real, but don't carry what isn't yours.** You can receive feedback or acknowledge tension without assuming every sharp edge was meant for your soul.
- **Watch your own patterns.** Notice what stories you repeat, what frustrations you voice, what tone you use. That's your mirror, just as theirs is theirs.

Closing Thought



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Language is more than noise. It's a trail of breadcrumbs leading back to belief, fear, and intention.

What you say — and what others say about you or to you — is never just about the words. It's about who you (and they) are when those words are spoken.

If we can learn to stop, hear, and reflect on what we're really saying — and what we're really hearing — we just might begin to untangle a deeper layer of burnout so many are quietly carrying.