



WHY IS IT  
SO HARD TO  
**SHUT  
UP?**

**18 Ways to Think Before You Speak**

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## Where Did “THINK” Come From?

As much as I would like to take credit for this wonderful acronym, I cannot. A few years ago, a friend posted a photo on her Facebook page that touted the acronym “THINK” – whenever you want to say something, be sure to “think” about it before saying it: are your words True, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary or Kind? Evidently, this acronym has been around in various incarnations for many years, but it was the first time I’d seen it.

Shortly after its appearance on my Facebook feed, the image found its place onto our family’s refrigerator, where it remains to this day. We’ve had many meaningful conversations using the “THINK” model. From spats with siblings to ways to talk to a friend about a difficult subject, this acronym helps quell the urge to blurt something out that may do more harm than good.

## Why is it So Hard to Shut Up?

My blog, The People Equation, offers tips for people to help better lead themselves and others towards career success. One of the most searched-for phrases that leads people to my blog is “how to talk less.” People clearly struggle with zipping their lips, especially in times of stress.

In Western societies we value speaking skills — especially in the business world. (Particularly if one has a leadership role.) Just think of all the courses and articles available on making effective presentations, creative sales training, and being persuasive. It’s no wonder that people rush to fill the quiet space that sometimes occurs in normal work conversation.

## Why Should You “THINK” Before You Speak?

Being the first to speak up has its benefits. You will be seen as able to “think on your feet” or you might be praised for your quick wit. But... can you also relate to the time when you blurted out something you wish you could take back? And, if you hold a leadership role, it’s especially important to hold up on speaking first so that others can contribute.

That's when "THINK" comes in handy. Using the "THINK" model can help you process your thoughts before you speak so that you talk less and listen more. Believe it or not, people will see you as even more intelligent and willing to listen when you take a moment to collect your thoughts.

## How to Use the "THINK" Model for the Workplace

It's always a good idea to marshal your thoughts before you speak, but there are some times when you definitely will want stop and think before you speak:

- If the information you need to convey might hurt others' feelings
- If you aren't positive it's the right time to speak up
- If emotions are running high — yours or someone else's

People who are influential tend to be those who are able to shut up and listen. The 18 questions that follow are powerful questions to reflect upon. They will help you build productive relationships with your boss, peers, colleagues, and customers; in short — anyone with whom you want to have a productive work relationship.

## The "THINK" Model in Action

Whenever you experience one of the previously described situations, take a deep breath and then run through the five questions of "THINK".

Is it **True**?

1. What factual evidence do I have to support my claim?
2. Might there be other versions of the "truth" out there?
3. Do I have the whole story?
4. Even if it is true, will it make a positive difference to speak up?

Is it **Helpful**?

5. Is my true intent to help?
6. Will this person be receptive to my assistance?
7. If I say something right now, might I make things worse instead of better?
8. Is there a better time to offer my help?

**Is it Inspiring?**

9. Does it build up the person to whom I'm speaking?
10. Does my comment paint a picture of a better future, thereby inspiring people to take action?
11. Will my words be perceived as a pep-talk, devoid of true conviction?

**Is it Necessary?**

12. What would happen if I just "let it be" for a few days?
13. Who stands to benefit by me speaking up right now?
14. What will be gained by saying this?
15. Am I trying to give someone a dose of "their own medicine" or "reality"?

**Is it Kind?**

16. Is sparing this person's feelings at this moment the best course of action?
17. Is there an element of payback: "He's never nice to me, so why should I be nice to him?"
18. Can I speak out with true compassion for this person's situation?



## About Jennifer

Jennifer V. Miller researches and writes about the evolving role of leadership in the workplace. Her professional experience includes training manager, leadership development consultant, executive coach and small business owner. She is the co-author of two leadership books and the creator of the award-winning blog The People Equation. Named one of Inc. Magazine's "100 Leadership Thinkers," Jennifer collaborates with organizations, executive coaches and book authors who are on a mission to develop the next generation of leaders.

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