

Say Less

The Art of Purposeful Speech - by Sgt. Steve

This week we are going to cover a Stoic basic, that applies to your job protecting and serving, and everyday life. "Saying less" is a commonly misunderstood Stoic practice, and it's probably responsible for the stereotype of the cold, aloof, unfeeling, and robotic Stoic. Ironically, this practice can make you warmer, improve relationships, and seriously reduce the total amount of regret you experience in your lifetime.

I admit, I struggle with this one. I jokingly call myself the **"Social-Stoic."** I talk A LOT. Am I a bad Stoic? I don't think so. It matters more that you are mindful of *why* you are speaking.

"We have two ears and one mouth, therefore we should listen twice as much as we speak."

"Better to trip with the feet than with the tongue."

- Zeno

Cato is also a great reference for my own difficulties "saying less." One of Cato's professors once demanded that he speak to the class; he was notoriously quiet. Cato replied: *"I begin to speak only when I'm certain what I'll say isn't better left unsaid."*

However, later in life, Cato was credited for inventing the tactic we know as the **filibuster**. Imagine a Stoic, who once refused to speak, inventing the tactic of talking endlessly to delay a vote. I think there is a lesson both in his silence and his endless talking:

"Speak, if you must, but speak with purpose."

Applying It In Everyday Life

ACTIVE LISTENING

Engage in active listening. Practice being fully present in conversations, absorbing the speaker's words without formulating your response while they talk. This approach demonstrates respect.

THOUGHTFUL RESPONSE

Before speaking, pause and reflect. Consider whether your response is necessary, true, beneficial, and in accordance with your values.

AVOIDING GOSSIP

Resist the temptation to partake in gossip or negative discussions about others. Refraining from it contributes to personal integrity and a positive environment.

MINDFUL SILENCE

Embrace silence as a companion to speech. Silence provides space for reflection and conveys thoughtfulness. It can often communicate more powerfully than a multitude of words.

SPEAK TO BENEFIT OTHERS

Speak words that are helpful, constructive, and beneficial. The Stoics believed in the mutual interdependence of humans.

CAREER SURVIVAL NOTE

I think the biggest benefit to saying less is to avoid something that we hear all the time in the street: *“I wish I hadn’t said that.”*

By intentionally saying less and trying to limit your speech as a discipline, you will find yourself in this unfortunate situation a lot less often. **Not to mention, when you have the bodycam recording every word for posterity, it might be a matter of career survival.**

I suggest giving it a try. You can try budgeting yourself to a certain number of words per day, and make a game out of it. Ironically, I look forward to hearing all about your experiences, saying less.

Amor Fati,

Sgt. Steve