



Think About It

By Kathy Schoonover-Shoffner

The Right Thing to Say

Workplace toxicity is a desperately needed topic for nurses to think through and be equipped to face. Read this JCN's feature continuing-education article *Surviving (even Thriving?) in a Toxic Workplace* (pp. 142-149, free online) as a good starting place. You'll probably agree that toxicity crops up everywhere. Each time I encounter it, I am struck by the role messages play in the harmfulness and how much our words matter. What we choose to believe frames toxic situations; what we say or don't say can have deep, lasting impact.

The hard, almost impossible part is knowing the *right* thing to say or think. Time speeds up in noxious situations. Suddenly, I'm racing down a road of intense emotions, thinking negative thoughts, saying words I shouldn't. Maybe you don't say anything, but your emotions rise and your thoughts run rampant. How can we combat this tendency to react and get caught up in the negativity?

Growing up, one of my nicknames was Chatty Kathy (after the popular talking doll of the 1960s; she could say 18 phrases, I could do more!). Being a Chatty Kathy has good and bad sides. As a teen, I realized that as a Christian, I needed to work on enhancing the good and controlling the bad aspects of chattiness. I believed God wanted to help me know what to say or not say, to think

or not think, so I started a collection of Bible verses I named *The Tongue*. These remain some of my favorites (all Amplified version):

- *A soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger* (Proverbs 15:1).
- *A word fitly spoken and in due season is like apples of gold in settings of silver* (Proverbs 25:11).

How can we combat this tendency to react and get caught up in the negativity?

- *What man is he who desires life and longs for many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit* (Psalm 34:12).
- *Set a guard, O LORD, before my mouth; keep watch at the door of my lips* (Psalm 141:3).
- *He who covers and forgives an offense seeks love, but he who repeats or harps on a matter separates even close friends* (Proverbs 17:9).
- *The beginning of strife is as when water first trickles from a crack in a dam; therefore, stop contention before it becomes worse and quarreling breaks out* (Proverbs 17:14).
- *Let no foul or polluting language, nor evil word nor unwholesome or worthless talk ever come out of your mouth, but only such speech as is good and beneficial to the spiritual progress of others, as is fitting to*

the need and the occasion, that it may be a blessing and give grace (Ephesians 4:29).

Over the years I've added other collections like *Temper, Forgiveness, Love One Another, Generosity, Temptation, and Persistence*. I keep the verses in an app on my phone so I can review these critical references regularly. Sadly, implementation is a lot tougher than knowledge. Jesus' brother, James, said it well: "For we all often stumble...in many things. And if anyone does not offend in speech, he is a fully developed character and a perfect man, able to control his whole body and to curb his entire nature" (James 3:2, AMP). I am grateful that "He [God] who began a good work in you [me!] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6, NIV). I keep working on my speech.

I also realize I am Christ's witness to others. My words, attitudes, and actions reflect God's character and should reveal who he is to those around me. The best proof of what we believe as Christians, the *real evidence* of knowing Jesus, is a transformed life. I can either join Christ in his work of making the world right (redemption), or I can slog along against him (Matthew 12:30).

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10). As a Christian nurse, I want to be a part of bringing God's kingdom of grace, peace, joy, respect, and more, to my work. That is what *thriving* in a toxic workplace is all about.



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