

Striding down the good life road, one step at a time.

the **VERBAL VILLAINS**



Blunders You Don't Want to Hear
Coming From Your Own Mouth

A Life Builder Mini from the Center for Bold Action

This Booklet Can Benefit You

It describes ten ways of talking to other people that they are almost sure to find offensive. We don't use them on purpose (we all know how to insult people if we want to), but we slip up when we are on the spot. Sometimes we just don't know how to say the better thing. We would do better if we could but at the moment we don't have those better words.

The first stage when improving a skill is to quit doing things the wrong way. For example, if you want to be a baseball pitcher and you use *both* hands to throw the ball, you must first quit that and learn to throw with one hand. It's the same with skills of talking—you must first quit bad habits so you can learn to communicate better.



This booklet shows ten ways to talk that other people don't like. They may remind you of people you know. Some of them will remind you of you, because we all have two or three old habits that we need to shed.

Each of the Verbal Villains can be useful under certain special conditions, but when meeting a person for the first time they are offensive and reduce conversation.

If you recognize what you need to change, you are on your way to becoming irresistible as a friend.



the **GURU**

I speak the wisdom of the ages, tired words you've heard before, again and again. Pretend with me that they are lofty wisdom just for you. Did I mention that you've heard them again and again?

This Guru talks to a person whose house was just destroyed by a tornado. He says, "Well, you win some and you lose some. Better days are coming. When the going gets tough the tough get going. Hang in there, tomorrow is another day."



It is easy to spout worn out old words. This Guru doesn't care enough to hear what the tornado victim says next. The victim said, "I'd be better off if the storm had carried me off like it did my neighbor. Fact is, I just might do what the storm didn't." He hid his face with his hands as he turned away. The Guru said, "What doesn't kill you will make you stronger. This is the chance of a lifetime to show the world what you're made of. Go for it man!" The tornado victim is thinking of suicide but the Guru, lost in thought about what to say next, completely missed that information.



the **FLORIST**

Happy up, everyone, the Queen of Good Cheer is here, she is, she is! I don't hear any problems because I live in Make Believe World, a place in my mind where everything is rosy as a posie, tee hee, my little poem!

The Florist simply does not see or hear anything that is negative. We want life to be perfect but it isn't even if Florists hide the garbage of life under a pile of flowers. This Florist says to the tornado victim, "Isn't it wonderful how people are helping each other clean up the mess! This could be one of the best things that ever happened in our town! Isn't this a wonderful day to be alive!"



Again, zero connection with the victim, who has intense emotional pain. The victim wants to talk about it, but only to a person who *first* shows respect. All Verbal Villains put their own interests ahead of the needs of others. Thus, they do not hear all that is going on.

This failure to hear what is going on in the other person's life is *especially* harmful if: (1) the person is in distress, (2) it is a family or other close relationship, (3) you are just getting acquainted with a person, or (4) it's a supervisor/subordinate relationship. We need *always* to listen.

the **DETECTIVE**

I bombard you with questions until you talk, or at least squirm. If my prying sends you crying, too bad, it's just the way I am. Speak up and answer quickly, okay? Can't you tell that I'm impatient?



The Detective is after the facts, not the story. Just give me bits and pieces of this and that and I will make something out of it whether it is correct or not. *Opinions* and especially *feelings* are not important to me.

The Detective grills the tornado victim. "Where were you when the storm hit? Why were you asleep in bed at 2:00 in the morning? What did you think when the roof blew off? Why was the dog barking? What do you feed him? How often do you give him table scraps?"



Real law enforcement detectives know what they are doing and why. The Verbal Villain we call Detective does not. The questions begin logically but wander into topics of little concern to anything except the Detective's curiosity. As they pry, the other person builds a wall of defense. If you want table scraps, call the Verbal Villain Detective, but people tell big stuff only to those they trust.



the **DRILL SERGEANT**

We have a job to do here, and don't ever forget that. So, listen up and I will tell you what to do. Keep your mouth shut and your ears open. I'll make it easy as 1, 2, 3 if you can count that high. First . . .

The Drill Sergeant is the ultimate take charge person. For them it is strictly—and they do mean strictly—about doing exactly—and they do mean exactly—what they say. “*Now!* Did you hear me? **NOW!**” The margin for error they give is zero—less than zero error is better.

“Okay, Storm Victim, it is time for you put on your big boy pants and take care of business. Listen up so you will know what to do and do it. You **will** do it. First, call your insurance agent. Two, get a place for your family to stay. Three, pick through the rubble and”



The commands—and they *are* commands—are clear and decisive. Your compliance will be monitored and if you are foolish enough to not fulfill your duties promptly the consequences will be severe. Don't let it happen.

the **SWAMI**

You want to know the future? I see your future right here in front of me. I will tell you exactly what is going to happen. Take my advice or not; it is all up to you. I have given you my warning. Now I'm out of here.



The Swami is stuffed full of confidence—or something. All Swami Villains, both women and men, want their followers to take seriously what they say. Sometimes they stumble on to truth, as in this example, but they give it so early that the listener rejects it. It's wasted.



The Swami speaks to the tornado victim, "You ask what will become of you after this terrible storm. You must do what common sense and civic authorities require of us: stay out of harm's way, pay your taxes, and help your neighbor. If you don't, you're doomed!

If you see someone headed for a stupid mistake you have made and learned from, and you want to help them, you face two problems: (1) You may not have all the facts. (2) They may not want to listen to you. Slow down and listen. Earn the right to talk to them.



the **SIGN PAINTER**

It's how you think. It isn't mind over matter, it is mind over mind. Your label is your future. Change what you call yourself and you will become a new person! It's that simple.

The Sign Painter thinks that if you change what you call yourself it will change you. There is a shred of truth in this but changing the label on a can of beans to caviar doesn't change the beans. Change ain't quick and easy.

The Sign Painter told the storm victim, "Your label is your future. After listening just five minutes to you I knew you were a pessimist. I can see that you agree. Quit that idea. Always call yourself an optimist and you *will* become one. Not overnight, of course, but your label is who you are and what you become."



While we recognize that how we think of ourselves influences how we live, other factors have greater effect. These include: natural ability, environment (especially family of origin), opportunities (or lack thereof), society that is favorable or unfavorable, health, and whether you find comfort and optimism in religious faith.

the HISTORIAN

Your life history should interest you a lot but to other people it is not as interesting. Especially the details. Be sparing with your sharing; wait until you've proved your caring.



The Historian had barely begun his story when the storm victim suddenly remembered an urgent need to be somewhere else and walked away. He ran, actually.



The Historian began with a fancy introduction, as if it was a novel from 1890. He said, "My friend, it is uncanny how much your situation is like a disaster of which I was a part in the early 1990s. Or maybe it

was the late 80s. It seems like it was only yesterday, it was that vivid. . . . Come back! There's more!"

The victim didn't want to go through a tornado of words and did the smart thing; escape while it was possible. Yes, we have learned from the experience of others and we all have some wisdom or special knowledge to pass along to others. The time to do this is when we know them well enough to know what they need and they know us well enough to trust what we say.



the JUDGE

Are you ready to be judged? Okay, I'm always ready to dish up a hot heaping plate full of my opinion! Please don't complain if it is too spicy for your tender innards--you will only get what you deserve!

The Judge Verbal Villain loves the law more than he loves people so his best days are those when a minor violation creates disruption for someone. He loves to bring the hammer down.

This Villain Judge speaks to an offender: "We all understand why you are unhappy but you don't seem to, so I'll explain it. You created this mess of things and you don't like the results. Tough cookies, sir. It's your own fault. You made your bed; now you get to lie in it."



We all know how much fun it can be to judge others. It gives us a sense of being better than they are. When we are on the defensivesside of judgement we shout, "It isn't right and I won't put up with it! Don't call me two-faced or a hypocrite! Hey, I *know* my judgement is always right!" This is called arrogance. We all do are arrogant more often that we realize.

the **FAKE LEADER**

The Fake Leader is supposed to guide the person in distress but he or she is uncomfortable with discomfort, even another person's. The Fake Leader gets the person busy, which helps only the Fake Leader's need to avoid leadership.



The Fake Leader wants you busy because by getting you busy the Fake Leader won't have to be busy and it will keep you out of the way. We don't know what the Fake Leader is thinking or even *if* the Fake Leader is thinking, but his main goal is to hide his inadequacies.



"Mr. Victim, you're just wandering around in your own mind so it is no wonder that you are miserable with self-pity. You need to take a load off your brain with some diversion. Then you and I will both be relaxed, you playing video games or whatever." (He thinks: And me doing my thing without my having to help you in any significant way.)

When Fake the Flake hits a hard situation, instead of learning how to do the things that he can't do well, he plays the "nice pal" card. This stalls progress and the team remains less productive than it could be.



the **MAGICIAN**

I believe that my words will make things change for you. Problems will disappear, everything will be amazing. I'll do it, just wait and see. Then you can leave and never bother me again.

The Magician is the closing act in our list of ten Verbal Villains. That's fine. Magicians just want to perform, hear the applause, and be done with the audience. It is all performance without personal connection, except that you are expected, get that—*expected*, to whoop and holler in awe of their incredible performance.

Magician says to the victim, "Don't worry about it. Things will work out. They always do, sooner or later. Things may look bad now but they aren't as bad as they seem. Do what you need to do, forget it, and move on."



Several problems here: the remark is so quick that it is insulting, it does nothing to build trust or relationship, it shows no compassion or understanding, it is arrogant. It is the same as saying "This is how I see things; therefore that is how they are. I have spoken, now do what I said."

Brenda Talks With Arnold

Brenda is a new resident in an upscale retirement center. She talks with Arnold, who has been there three years. Identify Arnold's Verbal Villains. Answers on p15.

1B: This is a fancy place and all, but I hate it.

A: _____ You better get used to it or you'll hate it more and more.

2B: They tell us what to do all the time. I can't stand that!

A: _____ You have told me you picked this place over three others, so it's your fault if you don't like it.

3B: I picked it but they have taken my freedom. It's like jail!

A: _____ Oh, come on! You are making friends quickly, people like you, you are smart and mature.

4B: My car is gone!

A: _____ Who took your car? Was it stolen? By someone who lives here? Or one of their family?

5B: My daughter took it. Actually, she owns it.

A: _____ Oh. Don't make a mountain out of a mole hill. Keep your chin up. Better days are coming.

6B: But I feel like I'm stuck. I don't have any choices.

A: _____ You haven't been here long enough to know. Let my experience teach you. When I came three years ago I pledged to myself that . . .

7B: Excuse me, but I want to talk about my depression.

A: _____ You're a hypochondriac!

8B: No I'm not! I was a nurse for 30 years and I know!

A: _____ Then take a pill and don't worry about it.

9B: You are as pushy as some of those staff. I don't think you have anything *constructive* to say.

A: _____ Ah, dear lady, but I do. I can tell you what to do so you get used to it. First, make up your mind that you will like it here, no matter what. Second, meet one new person each day. Three, attend all of the activities whether you think you'll enjoy them or not. Soon you'll love it here.

10B: That would be nice, but I'm skeptical.

A: _____ Let me show some friendly hospitality. Can we go to the coffee shop and change the subject?

B: Sure, some day in the distant future.

Carl Talks With Brenda

1B: This is a fancy place and all, but I hate it.

C: Moving here, or anywhere, is a huge adjustment.

2B: Yes. I *want* to like it but I don't.

C: That's good news; that you *want* to like it here. It takes time for everyone.

3B: I suppose it does. I looked at three other facilities and thought this would be best. ... But I feel trapped.

C: Feeling trapped is painful, even if it's in a good place.

4B: Well, I lost my car.

C: What do you mean by that?

5B: It belongs to my daughter and she needs it, she really does, plus she thinks I shouldn't be driving. She doesn't want me to get hurt.

C: Sure, but having no car limits your options even more.

6B: I miss my granddaughters so-o-o much.

C: It sounds like there is a huge amount of love in your family.

7B: Oh my yes! And I'm so lucky that both my kids live nearby. My son was in the Air Force for eight years, which he enjoyed, but he couldn't wait to get back here.

C: What a privilege for all of you!

8B: It is. Thanks for letting me tell you. I really don't have any reason to complain. I have much to be thankful for.

C: Me too. I'm glad you are here. You'll like it soon. The coffee shop is open. Could we go? My treat.

9B: Lead the way.

Many of Carl's comments were in the form of "mirroring," a skill that helped him stay on track and proved that he had listened and understood, outcomes we all prefer. A short video is at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQsr70FjrQk&t=39s>

Essential Keepers

Keep these truths: ■ Verbal Villains disdain or dominate
■ mirroring listens and affirms ■ respect is always the better choice ■ what you do is up to you ■ you can get along without others only if you settle for a tiny, drab life
■ God helps those who ask for help ■ people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care

See More About Verbal Villains Online

Visit our private You Tube library to see the video *Attack of the Verbal Villains*. To access it, copy and paste this URL into the browser window: <https://youtu.be/5MWAquBTvh0>

Answers to Arnold's Verbal Villains

1. Swami
2. Judge
3. Florist
4. Detective
5. Guru
6. Historian
7. Sign Painter
8. Magician
9. Drill Sergeant
10. Fake Leader

How This Booklet Can Help You

Unless you are different from the rest of us, you sometimes say things that are, for the listener, meaningless or “off the wall.” You don’t want them to be, but that’s how it turns out.

It’s easy to say the wrong thing, or to say something the wrong way, or even to say the right thing at the wrong time. Everyone has had occasions of trying to be glib and smooth but finding that, instead, the words came out as prickly as cactus.

You can fix that. Before you learn a new skill, you must unlearn any bad habits and trust me, we’ve all got ‘em. You’ll mostly read about the sticky blunders and then see an example of a better way.



This was developed by the nonprofit Center for Bold Action,
teaching life-changing truth to transform living.

Visit www.centerforboldaction.org