

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1765 When You Say Something Unintended and the Aftermath

It was an innocent slip of the tongue, I assure you. No really, nothing was meant by it. I don't know how and why it was said...the words just came out. We were having a conversation about the project we're working together on, and the call was ending, and then the words, those words, were spoken, just before the call ended. I'm sure both of us sat in silence, one asking themselves, "Did I just say that?", and the other asking, "Did they just say that?" I'm Jerry Roberts, and maybe the same thing has happened to you. Are you curious? We'll tell you what it's all about, next on The Extra Point.

Sheila, a highly professional sales rep, was on the phone with Ron, her client of many years. Ron's company represented about a fourth of Sheila's revenue, and they usually were on the phone weekly for 20-30 minutes. They would share ideas on how to grow Ron's business.

Today's call would end like no other ever had. They were wrapping up, agreeing on what the next steps would be for each before the next call. Ron said, "Okay, I'll update you by email. Have a good one" Sheila responded with, "Okay, love you, bye."

The call was over. Sheila's eyes got big and her jaw dropped. She asked herself: "Did I just tell my biggest client that I loved him?"

Then she wondered what Ron was thinking. Maybe he didn't hear it. But what if he did. What would he think of her?

The thoughts wouldn't stop as she sank deeper into despair. "I'm married, he's married...does he think I want...oh, why did I do that?"

I'm going to leave Sheila right there for a moment. Let's dig down. A lot of seemingly inappropriate and certainly unintended words are spoken in workplaces throughout Guam and everywhere else for that matter, every day.

They just slip out. Sometimes, we correct ourselves, and sometimes we don't or can't.

Let's focus on the "love you" slip, because this happens more than you might think and we end up in Sheila's place.

That moment when "love you" escapes your lips at the end of a client call is a special kind of weird. People who research such things say it's a collision of our personal and professional worlds, sort of a verbal train wreck fueled by ingrained habits and sleep-deprived brains. Even if the "sleep-deprived" aspect isn't the case, it's a pretty good excuse to fall back on.

What follows is the desperate hope that the client or business associate didn't notice, as well as all of the things that were running through Sheila's head.

If you break it down, the phrase "Love you" or "I love you" was once reserved for intimate relationships. Over time, the guardrails on that have come down and it has become much more common to hear it outside of intimacy.

We say it to our family members every day, Often several times a day. We do the same with close friends, and even coworkers. Some of us say "love you" literally thousands of times each year.

Enter social media and the heart emojis, and we scatter those all over the place.

That being said, is it appropriate in a business setting such as the one Sheila is in? I think most people would say that that it's not. Yet, with all this love floating around, is it any wonder that those two words might just pop out of our mouth without warning, and at the wrong time...with the wrong person?

Let's talk about best-case and worst-case scenarios. If it's a client you say it to, the best-case is they'll understand it as a slip of the tongue and brush it off. If they don't return calls for a while, you might safely assume they didn't take it that way and you might have the worst-case, and have some work to do to figure things out. (Con't.)

What if this involves a coworker, and they see it as inappropriate behavior? Now, HR may be involved and that could be uncomfortable.

Let's get back to Sheila. To her relief, Ron took it as totally innocent. He responded with what we call emotional intelligence, letting her know in an email that he recognized it as a slip-up. Further, Ron admitted that he'd done the same thing himself.

Then he wrote what Sheila would always remember. "I'm glad you have enough love in your life that that response comes naturally. If anything, you should be proud of that."

He then transitioned back to business, asking to schedule a followup call on the project.

Humanity and understanding can cover for a lot of our mistakes and short-comings.

So, has this kind of thing ever happened to you?

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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