

‘The most powerful and courageous people I know are the ones who bite their tongues when justification, validation, temptation, or vengeance would have them strike with truthful, hurtful words.’

—Richelle E. Goodrich

Speaking of Zingers ...

Hitting a thumb with a hammer or dropping a weight on a foot, watching a late inning collapse in the last game of the World Series, can bring out some colorful utterances that remind us of

Charitably Speaking



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the language expected from a longshoreman – not many of those in the Rockford Diocese – or cartoon captions with anger symbols. We give those a pass. But deliberate insults, however artfully crafted, can usually be avoided. How many times do we have to just get

something off our chest, irrespective of the harm inflicted? (See Father Ken Wasilewski’s column of Aug. 10, 2018.) How many public hearings do we attend planning an attack with verbal weapons to deploy against opponents?

Unprofessional conversations or disrespectful discussions are never mandated. Words that veritably drip with sarcasm impede issue-oriented debates and can cause actual, physical stress. Not that politeness need be shallow. As Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor said, “Being polite should not be mistaken for being afraid.” We can always agree to disagree during policy debates, but “little said is easily mended” is still profound and accurate.

In the honorable quest for civility, we would do well to monitor our own phrasing and determine the subliminal messages we send, whether or not intended. Some common phrases carry subtle but insulting implications. For example:

With all due respect ...	Said usually when respect is neither given nor due.
Do you follow me?	Thanks for asking if I’m stupid.
No offense but ...	Prepare to be insulted. (Best used with #1 above.)
Really and truthfully ... To tell you the truth ... In all honesty ... Frankly ...	Effectively implies that the speaker is not usually to be believed
Fairly (or really) unique	But unique is unique.
Gave 110% effort	Can’t be done.
Regardless — irregardless	“Regardless” and “irrespective” are real words, synonyms; “irregardless” is not. But, if someone needs to negate “irrespective,” or “regardless,” a friend suggests the non-word: “disirregardless.”
I literally ...	Fill in the blank: died laughing; could eat a horse; lost my mind. In all honesty, some ugly scenes get conjured up, none of which could literally be true, even with 110% effort, and disirregardless of how really unique the situation is. With all due respect, follow me?

With election campaigns recently passed but seemingly always upon us, we may not be able to control political invective, but we can resolve to engage in policy-centered, substantive debates that cast more light than heat on issues. In our haste to cleverly lash out at those with whom we disagree, a slight pause, a deep breath, and disengaging the attack mode may be difficult.

But we are called to be better than that. We can be civil. We can be kind.

Sure feels good to get all that off my chest.