



## 5 ways to tactfully speak your mind

Got something to say? *Real Simple* asked a few distinguished and outspoken experts—including a former secretary of state and a reality-show judge—for their best tips on how to gracefully make your opinions known.

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## GAIL SIMMONS **Be empathetic.**

Speaking your mind is useless if you're just tearing someone down. To have a productive conversation, you should empathize with the person you're speaking to so you can connect with him and he can appreciate and take to heart what you're saying. When I'm judging *Top Chef*, I always start off by focusing on something positive, even if it won't be shown on TV. I try to get at the reasons behind a chef's actions by asking questions. *Did you mean to use that spice? Did you want the meat cooked to that temperature?* Sometimes I don't understand the reason until it's explained to me. Plus, when I ask questions, that can lead a chef to critique himself, which can be easier for him than hearing those words from someone else.

GAIL SIMMONS is a judge on Bravo's *Top Chef*, the host of *Top Chef Just Desserts*, and the author of *Talking With My Mouth Full*.

## KIMBERLY DAVIS **Stay calm.**

My grandmother used to tell me that it's not what you say but how you say it. There's truth to that statement. Take a deep breath and walk into the room with confidence, knowing that you've earned the right to be there. Speak with great intention, even though you know that not everybody is going to like what you say. And that's OK. When people are prickly in meetings, for example, you can't take it personally. Instead of getting defensive when someone yells at me, I let her present her side of the situation. There's a real power in being the calmest voice.

KIMBERLY DAVIS is the president of the New York City-based JPMorgan Chase Foundation, which gave more than \$150 million to nonprofit organizations worldwide in 2011.

## MADELEINE ALBRIGHT **Don't wait.**

Early in my career, I went to numerous meetings where I was the only woman present. I would want to contribute to the conversation but would think, If I say that, everybody will think it's really stupid. And then a man would say exactly what I had in mind and the other participants would find it brilliant. I learned that you shouldn't wait to speak. I started listening actively, knowing that I was going to comment on something and having it in my mind that I would interrupt at the right moment. It's both polite and useful to say, "Well, before we proceed to the next subject, I would like to add the following." If you wait to be called on, often the discussion will move on so far that whatever you're talking about will not be germane.

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT was the first female U.S. secretary of state. She is currently the chair of Albright Stonebridge Group, a global consulting firm in Washington, D.C., and the author of *Prague Winter*.

## HENRY ALFORD **Confront people who interrupt.**

Being able to express yourself fully means not worrying that someone is going to talk over you before you've finished. But that often happens in animated conversations when people don't even realize that they're cutting off the other person. If you're speaking with someone who keeps interrupting, you have to point it out to her. To keep the mood light, make a joke of it—and implicate yourself. Say, "Do I talk really slowly? Because every time you interrupt me, I worry that I sound like I'm narrating a five-hour-long documentary about soil erosion."

HENRY ALFORD is the author of the manners book *Would It Kill You to Stop Doing That?*

## KATIE COURIC **Be concise.**

Women tend to be apologetic or to preface things with "I'm really sorry, but..." There's no reason for that. When I was in my 20s and a local news reporter in Washington, D.C., I was asked to do a series called "No Time for Sex," about busy women with children. The assignment felt sexist to me, so I told my news director that it made me uncomfortable and that I wasn't going to do it. I didn't stomp my feet; I just kept it short and direct. I think if you talk extensively about something—out of nerves or wanting to explain yourself—you end up saying too much. An old interview trick I've learned is not to chatter just to fill the dead air. Speak your piece, then stop and listen.

KATIE COURIC is a special correspondent for ABC News and will launch the daytime talk show *Katie* in September.