

I Swear!

Growing up, one of the expressions I frequently heard my mother use was “I swear!” Usually accompanied by the use of both my first and middle names, these words were rarely spoken in a calm tone. Instead, they were often uttered in sheer exasperation at another of my mindless adventures or missteps. But the amazing thing is that my mother never did actually swear; she just threatened to do so by using that phrase, as I suspect lots of other parents of her generation did.

In today’s world things seem to be different. Nowadays lots of people swear, even for the smallest reasons. Maybe they choose to swear because they don’t know what else to say. Perhaps they have a limited vocabulary or feel a stronger point is made by swearing. But apparently that’s not all bad.

According to a recent article in Fast Company magazine, two-thirds of spoken curse words are the result of stress. I’m sure owners and managers of small businesses are no exception. Perhaps some can’t control it or maybe they get so stressed that swear words just come flying out when they open their mouths. Often times as someone releases their vulgar volley, you can almost see their blood pressure drop right along with it. And although the people around them might be mortified at the undisciplined display, the person doing the swearing frequently feels much better. Those of us who are uncomfortable in this situation might actually do ourselves a favor by thinking of it as the equivalent of taking a Prozac. Instead of being appalled, we could congratulate the offender on using vocabulary to manage his stress rather than using pharmaceuticals.

The article in Fast Company went on to state that swearing accounts for 80 of the 15,000 words typically spoken per person each day. That’s a lot of swearing by a lot of people, although I actually know many people who don’t swear at all, no matter how stressed they may be. I’d wager

they wouldn't say #%\$! if their life depended on it!

Some people don't seem to have any trouble spewing a mouth full of obscenities at the smallest provocation. It makes you question whether they're actually more stressed than the people who don't swear, or just less disciplined. Regardless, in an effort to calm the nerves of those who are forced to hear other people swear, and to reduce the stress level of swearers everywhere, let me offer a few alternative word choices.

The first is "piffle". This word has its origins in England and it's a great choice to use in a variety of situations: hitting your thumb with a hammer; slamming a door on a body part; or just general frustration with a situation. Piffle! Not only will you relieve your own stress, but you'll have people around you wondering just what it is you said.

Another great choice is "Oh my!" popularized by the distinguished sports commentator, Dick Enberg. This option is easy on the ears and generally leaves the speaker looking much more professional.

The next time you find yourself in the company of someone who happens to be a prolific potty mouth, remember to take comfort in knowing they may actually be reducing their stress levels and prolonging their lives by swearing. Even better, you might trump their expletives with your own booming "I swear!"