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Communicating intent the right way

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A king once asked a fortune-teller how long he would live. The fortune-teller said to the king, "You will die after many in your family have passed away." The king was annoyed at the insensitive manner in which the fortune-teller had predicted his death, so he ordered that the fortune-teller be banished from his kingdom.

He then sought out another fortune-teller and asked him the same question. The new man, who had been informed about the fate of his predecessor, told the king that he "would outlive his relatives". The king was greatly pleased with this prediction and granted him a large purse.

The messages were the same, yet they were communicated differently.

Recently, while attempting to congratulate a friend on his losing weight, I without thought said to him, "You must be dieting; you are much slimmer than you were." My friend took umbrage to this and said, "I do not know if you are complimenting me or ridiculing me."

I realised that instead of saying to him that he looked healthy, I had perhaps touched a raw spot by telling him that he looked slimmer.

Often, I flounder when I miscommunicate intent, and in so doing, leave the recipient confused and, sometimes, even angry. Retrieval becomes difficult and I always end up apologising for what I have said unintentionally.

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