



***It's a time to clear out gardens and garages; to sort through debris and clutter. Have you thought about applying the same logic to your life and your relationships?***

**S**pring is a time to clear things up and make a fresh start. You could use this change of season to clear some of the clutter from your personal life, too.

Think of the people who have been driving you crazy this past year. They might be depressive friends, colleagues, or next-door neighbours whose endless recounting of their problems with family or partners drains the energy from the air. It may be the bully at work, your toxic boss, or friends who take advantage of your good nature to help them manage their lives and their children.

When you don't speak up, people like these don't go away. They just carry on driving you crazy, mostly unaware of how you feel. You may make an occasional humorous or sarcastic remark, or perhaps you've tried dropping hints, but you've probably discovered that few people are sensitive to hints.

For a while the easy way out is to use everyday busyness as an excuse to

keep to yourself, but inside, your emotions come to the boil. For some of us it happens quickly, for others it might be over a lifetime, but inevitably one day you will be unable to hold the emotion in any longer and you will explode.

You blame and accuse: there might be tears and tantrums: then you apologise and make up. It eases things for a while but so long as you have no calm conversation that clears the air, gets to the bottom of the problem and agrees on different behaviour, in a short time the cycle will start over.

When you don't speak up and don't talk straight at work, poor performance and bad behaviour are the result. Productivity, team spirit and creativity disappear. In personal relationships, you may tacitly agree to live in silence. Problems have to be huge before you even try to discuss them. You replace openness and intimacy with avoidance and tension.

As you potter around your garden in the spring sunshine, plan how you could speak to someone to clear the air. If you have reason to apologise for the way you have behaved, then do so. A sincere apology is very disarming. Sometimes you just need to apologise for not speaking up sooner.

Think through the facts or events that have got you to where you are now and plan how you can describe them in simple, factual terms enough to give a basis for your feelings or concerns. Then describe how you see or feel about the situation and ask the other person for his viewpoint. When you've both put your version of events on the table and both of you feel that you've been properly heard, it's often not so difficult to negotiate an agreement or a solution.

When you don't speak up about things that upset or frustrate you, they get in the way of good relationships. It's not unlike the effect that weeds have in your garden.

**Maureen Collins has a B Sc degree in Psychology from Edinburgh University. Maureen's passion is for showing people how to improve the quality of their conversations even under the most difficult conditions**  
[www.straight-talk.co.za](http://www.straight-talk.co.za)