



**Life in English Podcast**

**Transcript**

**&**

**Key Vocabulary**

**lifeinenglish.net**

## Life in English Podcast | Episode #164 - Knee-jerk Reactions

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### Episode #164 - Knee-jerk Reactions

Dec 14, 2022

[00:00:00] What's up, my friend? You already know this is the Life in English podcast. I am your host, Tony Kaizen, and man, I was just sitting here **reflecting**<sup>1</sup> on a conversation I had not too long ago, and it made me think about something that we call "**knee-jerk reactions**<sup>2</sup>". A knee-jerk reaction is something that...it's like this type of reaction that you have **instinctively**<sup>3</sup>; you don't even think about it. So if somebody says something to you or does something to you or you see something or whatever, just boom! Instantly, without thinking about it, you react in some kind of way.

[00:00:31] Maybe you immediately say something or do something, you know, reacting to whatever has happened or whatever was said to you. And I'm not sure exactly where this comes from, but when I hear it, it makes me think of when you go to the doctor and you sit on the uh...the bed, I guess you would call it, and the doctor tests your **reflexes**<sup>4</sup>, right? That little silicone hammer that they use, and they'll start testing all your reflexes and they'll \*bam\*...hit you on the kneecap or right under your kneecap, I guess, and your leg will \*whoosh\*...just instinctively

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<sup>1</sup> to think carefully, especially about possibilities and opinions

<sup>2</sup> a quick reaction that does not allow you time to consider something carefully

<sup>3</sup> in a way that is not thought about, planned, or developed by training

<sup>4</sup> a physical reaction to something that you cannot control

## Life in English Podcast | Episode #164 - Knee-jerk Reactions

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move. It reacts without you having to do anything. It does it **involuntarily**<sup>5</sup>, just \*bam\*, your knee **jerks**<sup>6</sup>. It makes a jerking motion, a very swift change of position or location. Hopefully you get the idea of what I'm trying to say. That's a knee-jerk react or that's like knee...That's when your knee is jerking what I just describe it at the doctor's office.

[00:01:24] So when you think about that in the term of um...when you think about that in the case of life or situations, it's just those moments when somebody hits the right button or says the right thing or just does something that makes you \*tsss\*, immediately just react without thinking about it. That's a knee-jerk reaction. Now, the reason I explained all that is because sometimes we have knee-jerk reactions during conversations. You might be talking to somebody and a lot of people who are really excited to talk or share what they think or they're so deeply involved with what they think and feel and their opinions, even when they're not the ones that are speaking but they have a **tendency**<sup>7</sup> to do is listen only with the intention of responding.

[00:02:04] And as soon as a response pops into their mind, they feel **compelled**<sup>8</sup> to say it. It doesn't matter if the other person is still speaking. It doesn't matter if the other person has made their point clear yet or anything like that. It's just the listener in this case who's so excited to talk just wants to share what they have to

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<sup>5</sup> in a way that is not willing, intentional, or by choice

<sup>6</sup> to make a short sudden movement, or to cause someone or something to do this

<sup>7</sup> if someone has a tendency to do or like something, they will probably do it or like it

<sup>8</sup> to produce a strong feeling or reaction

## Life in English Podcast | Episode #164 - Knee-jerk Reactions

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say. The thought **bubbles up**<sup>9</sup> into their mind and bam! "I have to say it, I have to say it!" It's this knee-jerk reaction, just instinctively. You see what I'm saying? It's almost as if some people, when they're listening, we all do this from time to time; you'll be listening to somebody and it's like they say this certain thing in a certain way or whatever it is, and immediately you've already **made your mind up**<sup>10</sup>.

[00:02:42] In other words, you've already decided what it is you think, what it is you're going to say or what it is you're going to do. The person hasn't even finished making their point yet, but you've already made up your mind. So you just start talking and you let them know you've made your mind up and you disagree or...or you totally agree and you can relate, and you've been through that too. You just have to **voice**<sup>11</sup> your opinions and thoughts, right? It's a knee-jerk reaction. And in the past, I used to think people were just like **assholes**<sup>12</sup>, or ignorant or rude or disrespectful for **cutting me off**<sup>13</sup> and talking over me and, you know, not giving me the time and space to express myself.

[00:03:16] But what I found is in a lot of cases, man, people are not doing it because they want to be rude or don't like, value what you had to say. It's just they're so much more **in tune with**<sup>14</sup> what they have to say than they are with what you're

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<sup>9</sup> to rise to the surface or become obvious

<sup>10</sup> to decide

<sup>11</sup> to say what you think about a particular subject, especially to express a doubt, complaint, etc. that you have about it

<sup>12</sup> an unpleasant or stupid person

<sup>13</sup> to suddenly interrupt someone who is speaking

<sup>14</sup> if a person or organization is in tune with people or ideas, they are able to understand them

## Life in English Podcast | Episode #164 - Knee-jerk Reactions

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trying to say. And that doesn't make them a bad person or rude or an asshole or nothing like that. They're just not aware of this knee-jerk reaction that they have to talk over people to get their word, and to express themselves, when maybe it would be better if they just like, learn how to listen a little bit more, or bring somebody else into the conversation, you know, to...to kind of like be involved in the true dance that is communication or a conversation, you know what I mean? And it's just something to be aware of because you might do this all the time and maybe nobody's ever brought it to your attention, you know?

[00:04:00] It can really, really, really **serve**<sup>15</sup> you well when you slow down a little bit and choose to wait until the other person has finished speaking, or at least wait until they've truly made their point, then think about what they said and then respond. It'll serve you in so many ways, man, because you'll find that when you listen more attentively and you stop **interrupting**<sup>16</sup> people, especially when they're telling personal stories or answering questions that only they have the answer to, you don't want to interrupt their thought process. There are times when you can do that skillfully, but that's like a higher level of communication skill.

[00:04:33] So I think when you start at the basic level, you just have to learn to listen attentively because people will start to tell you things that you need to know or tell you things that make what they're saying more interesting or give you more data to process, and then take the conversation in a different direction or learn more about them or understand what they're truly trying to communicate. Because another

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<sup>15</sup> to help achieve something or to be useful as something

<sup>16</sup> to stop a person from speaking for a short period by something you say or do

## Life in English Podcast | Episode #164 - Knee-jerk Reactions

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thing you have to remember is a lot of people are so lazy with their word choice. They just find the basic, simplest way to say things in very **vague**<sup>17</sup>, you know, in very vague terms. And sometimes it's consciously, other times it's...it's an unconscious thing that we do. And so sometimes you have to, like, be the person that's going to **go the extra mile**<sup>18</sup> and put in the extra effort to pull information out of somebody.

[00:05:17] And you don't do that by asking them a million questions. You do that by listening and looking for things like the...the key points of what they're saying, to then take the conversation in the direction you want it to go or to...to encourage them to share the information you really want from them. And I know this might be confusing or might make it might not make any sense out of context, because I'm just speaking **off the cuff**<sup>19</sup> at this moment, and I'm not giving you too many clear examples, but I'm hoping that I'm **getting my point across**<sup>20</sup> to you. Do not **underestimate**<sup>21</sup> the power of listening. Do not underestimate the advantage of letting somebody finish their thought before you jump in to contribute yours.

[00:05:55] You can share your thought. You can say whatever it is you have to say. Just wait your fucking **turn**<sup>22</sup>, you know what I'm saying? And like I said, there are

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<sup>17</sup> not clearly expressed, known, described, or decided

<sup>18</sup> to make more effort than is expected of you

<sup>19</sup> if you speak off the cuff, you say something without having prepared or thought about your words first

<sup>20</sup> to manage to make someone understand or believe something

<sup>21</sup> to think that something is less or lower than it really is, or that someone is less strong or less effective

<sup>22</sup> an opportunity or a duty to do something at a particular time or in a particular order, before or after other people

## Life in English Podcast | Episode #164 - Knee-jerk Reactions

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times it's natural, man. In a conversation, people talk over each other. They cut each other off. They want to show that they understand and they're connecting and they're **engaged**<sup>23</sup>. I get it, bro. This is not me trying to **talk shit**<sup>24</sup> and say you're a **piece of shit**<sup>25</sup> for not listening or you're a piece of shit for having this knee-jerk reaction because I have it too. My point is, like, you need to be aware of it and then maybe you'll realize, "I can choose a different reaction in those moments." Just..."I can **resist**<sup>26</sup> the urge to jump in and cut this other person off and shut them down. I can **humble myself**<sup>27</sup> and realize, like, listening is just as important as speaking. What they have to say is just as important as what I have to say. Because if it weren't, then why the fuck would I be having a conversation with this person?" Right?

[00:06:44] So don't always allow that knee-jerk reaction to **dictate**<sup>28</sup> what you do. And not just in conversation, but just in life. You need to be aware of what some people call "**triggers**<sup>29</sup>", and you need to be aware of the knee-jerk reactions you have when you get triggered. And when I say "triggered" in this case, it's not even just negative stuff because like I said, it could be a conversation about something positive. Just resist that need, that knee-jerk reaction to cut people off, to share

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<sup>23</sup> to cause someone to become interested or involved in an activity, or to attract someone's interest

<sup>24</sup> to say unkind things

<sup>25</sup> a derisive term for something that one considers utterly worthless or inferior

<sup>26</sup> to stop yourself from doing something that you want to do

<sup>27</sup> to do or say something which shows that one knows one has been wrong, has behaved with too much pride, etc.

<sup>28</sup> to influence something or make it necessary

<sup>29</sup> an event or situation, etc. that causes something to start

## Life in English Podcast | Episode #164 - Knee-jerk Reactions

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everything that you're thinking and feeling, you know what I mean? And have a little bit more patience and self-control to listen to the person that you're speaking with. You see what I'm saying? And of course, you also don't want to get in a situation where you're just listening the entire time or letting this other person go on and on and on and on.

[00:07:28] There's many **tactics**<sup>30</sup> and strategies or things you can say or do when communicating with people, you know, to **maneuver**<sup>31</sup> these situations you find yourself in...in conversation, right? So I don't even know if I'm making much sense to you, man, sometimes, like, the way I think about things is hard to explain with words. And that's why I typically like to write podcast episodes before I record them, because it helps me, like, organize my thoughts and explain what it is I believe I understand in a **concise**<sup>32</sup>, easy to **digest**<sup>33</sup> way, but when I'm just **spitballing**<sup>34</sup> like this, I'm like, "Man, if somebody's going to be following me here..." I hope so. If you're still with me, obviously you're following me. So, yeah, man, I just wanted to, like, put that on your mind today because it's super, super, super, super common when communicating with people.

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<sup>30</sup> a planned way of doing something

<sup>31</sup> to handle and move something carefully or with difficulty

<sup>32</sup> short and clear, expressing what needs to be said without unnecessary words

<sup>33</sup> to read or hear new information and take the necessary time to understand it

<sup>34</sup> to quickly suggest ideas to be discussed without thinking about them carefully

## Life in English Podcast | Episode #164 - Knee-jerk Reactions

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[00:08:15] Some people are just **on autopilot**<sup>35</sup> or they have low levels of self-awareness. Nobody ever brought it to their attention that they're poor listeners or that they cut people off too much or they're too involved with what they have to say. I mean, all these things don't even make you a bad person or communicator, but it's just communication is a skill and sometimes we don't actively try to assess and then improve our own skills. A lot of times there's... I did this in the past, man, for...I spent so much...I wasted so much time, like, **criticizing**<sup>36</sup> other people's way of communication instead of improving my own, because I find it very, very, very fucking **irritating**<sup>37</sup> when somebody is constantly cutting me off or they're not truly listening to what I have to say. They're not showing actual interest. But they said they were interested in talking with me. All these things that just irritate me personally.

[00:09:04] But so what? That...I mean, they irritate me. That doesn't mean that the world needs to change the way they communicate just so that I feel more appreciated in a conversation. That's not how shit works. I had to improve my communication skills and show more **empathy**<sup>38</sup> and just understand if somebody is cutting me off, it doesn't mean that they don't care what I have to say or they're not interested or...or whatever, they just have a different communication style, a different level of skill, different set of values, or are focused on different things in

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<sup>35</sup> happening automatically or doing something automatically, without having to think about what you are doing

<sup>36</sup> to express disapproval of someone or something

<sup>37</sup> making you feel annoyed

<sup>38</sup> the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation

## Life in English Podcast | Episode #164 - Knee-jerk Reactions

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the conversation and that's fine, right? So I had to control, like, or I had to control my...my decision-making, for lack of a better term, I had to, like, be aware of my knee-jerk reaction when I come across somebody I see as a poor communicator because I'm not a fucking expert communicator either. I'm sure there's a lot of shit that I say or do that could be improved or stopped altogether, you know what I mean? So um, anyway, man, the point is, like I said...like I say, from time to time, I'm learning a...new stuff about communication all the time.

[00:10:04] So whenever I can share it with you, give you something to think about, I think that's **valuable**<sup>39</sup>, man. So give this...this idea some thought. **Analyze**<sup>40</sup>, like, take a look at yourself in your conversations, your life, the conversations around you and just see if you can start to notice what I'm talking about in yourself or in other people, and then maybe you can kind of develop some way to overcome those knee-jerk reactions and really take control of your decision making so that you can have more productive conversations, make deeper connections with people who understand people better, because those kinds of things lead to everything you want in life, whether it's more money, more relationships, more travels, more success, a better job, whatever it is, it's communication, bro. It is communication.

[00:10:47] It is the difference between getting that job and not getting that job. It is the difference between making that salary and not making that salary, getting access to this place or not getting access. Getting her phone number or not getting

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<sup>39</sup> valuable information, advice, etc. is very helpful or important

<sup>40</sup> to study or examine something in detail in order to discover or understand more about it

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it. You understand what I'm saying? Communication, bro. Communication. You and I are going to develop our communication skills one day at a time. Alright? But that's it for now, my friend. Hopefully you enjoyed this episode of the Life in English podcast. I am your sensei, Tony Kaizen, and I'll talk to you soon. Peace!

[END OF EPISODE]

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### Key vocabulary

**Reflecting:** to think carefully, especially about possibilities and opinions

**Knee-jerk reactions:** a quick reaction that does not allow you time to consider something carefully

**Instinctively:** in a way that is not thought about, planned, or developed by training

**Reflexes:** a physical reaction to something that you cannot control

**Involuntarily:** in a way that is not willing, intentional, or by choice

**Jerks:** to make a short sudden movement, or to cause someone or something to do this

**Tendency:** if someone has a tendency to do or like something, they will probably do it or like it

**Compelled:** to produce a strong feeling or reaction

**Bubbles up:** to rise to the surface or become obvious

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**Made your mind up:** to decide

**Voice:** to say what you think about a particular subject, especially to express a doubt, complaint, etc. that you have about it

**Assholes:** an unpleasant or stupid person

**Cutting me off:** to suddenly interrupt someone who is speaking

**In tune with:** if a person or organization is in tune with people or ideas, they are able to understand them

**Serve:** to help achieve something or to be useful as something

**Interrupting:** to stop a person from speaking for a short period by something you say or do

**Vague:** not clearly expressed, known, described, or decided

**Go the extra mile:** to make more effort than is expected of you

**Off the cuff:** if you speak off the cuff, you say something without having prepared or thought about your words first

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**Getting my point across:** to manage to make someone understand or believe something

**Underestimate:** to think that something is less or lower than it really is, or that someone is less strong or less effective

**Turn:** an opportunity or a duty to do something at a particular time or in a particular order, before or after other people

**Engaged:** to cause someone to become interested or involved in an activity, or to attract someone's interest

**Talk shit:** to say unkind things

**Piece of shit:** a derisive term for something that one considers utterly worthless or inferior

**Resist:** to stop yourself from doing something that you want to do

**Humble myself:** to do or say something which shows that one knows one has been wrong, has behaved with too much pride, etc.

**Dictate:** to influence something or make it necessary

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**Triggers:** an event or situation, etc. that causes something to start

**Tactics:** a planned way of doing something

**Maneuver:** to handle and move something carefully or with difficulty

**Concise:** short and clear, expressing what needs to be said without unnecessary words

**Digest:** to read or hear new information and take the necessary time to understand it

**Spitballing:** to quickly suggest ideas to be discussed without thinking about them carefully

**On autopilot:** happening automatically or doing something automatically, without having to think about what you are doing

**Criticizing:** to express disapproval of someone or something

**Irritating:** making you feel annoyed

**Empathy:** the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation

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**Valuable:** valuable information, advice, etc. is very helpful or important

**Analyze:** to study or examine something in detail in order to discover or understand more about it