
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Do as I say, not as I do



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ENGLISH

NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Alice

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Alice...

Rob

And I'm Rob...

Alice

Did I see you arriving in a huge red pick-up truck this morning?

Rob

Yes – it's great, isn't it?

Alice

It's very big... and red. But Rob, aren't you a supporter of the movement to preserve the environment?

Rob

Erm... Yes.

Alice

A gas-guzzling car for an environmentalist, Rob? Isn't that a contradiction – aren't you being a hypocrite?

Rob

Well, it's very fuel-efficient, Alice. It's quite eco-friendly actually.

Alice

That's ridiculous and you know it. Hypocrisy is the subject of today's show, and maybe we should start by exploring the meaning of hypocrite. Can you tell me what did the Ancient Greek word 'hypocrite' originally mean? Was it...

a) actor

b) politician

Or c) horse

Rob

OK, that's easy. I think it's b) politician.

Alice

Well, we'll find out whether you got the answer right or not later in the show. Now, these days the meaning has changed, and a **hypocrite** means somebody who says one thing and does another.

Rob

Like you telling me not to bite my nails because it's a disgusting habit... and then I see you doing it later the same day.

Alice

Hmm. Well, sometimes it's hard to be consistent. I do think nail biting is disgusting – but then when I'm a bit nervous I do it without thinking.

Rob

We're often inconsistent in what we say or do, though, aren't we? **Inconsistent** means changeable.

Alice

There is an explanation for us sometimes saying one thing and behaving in a very different way. Let's listen to Professor Clancy Martin at the University of Missouri in the US. He teaches Philosophy so he knows a thing or two about the way we think.

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Clancy Martin, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Missouri in Kansas City, US

So while you might be enormously compassionate in your role as a teacher or a parent, you might find yourself being quite harsh and direct when it comes to your role as a brother or a sister. So then you see that - now wait a second if I've got all these inconsistencies all over the place in my character can I really say that I'm a sincere and authentic individual? Or am I just kind of blowing with whichever way my relationship winds kind of incline me?

Rob

Professor Clancy Martin. So we play different roles in life and these roles may seem contradictory but they're just part of being the same person. Sometimes you're a bit harsh and direct with me, Alice, aren't you? Do you see yourself as my sister? She used to pick on me.

Alice

Harsh means stern and unkind. I don't mean to be unkind to you, Rob. Maybe I could try and be more **compassionate** towards you – it means show a bit of sympathy and concern now and then.

Rob

Offer me good words. At least promise you'll be nice to me. That you'll bring me tea and biscuits...

Alice

That's what politicians do. They promise they will do what people want and ... often they don't. And it's a big problem for them. Let's talk about politicians and hypocrisy.

Rob

They have to express opinions about so many things that it's easy to catch them out being hypocritical... – and then we, the public, get morally indignant about it.

Alice

Yes. To **catch somebody out** means to discover they have made a mistake. And **morally indignant** means being angry about something, according to principles of right and wrong. Let's listen to Professor Martin again talking about the difficulties of being a politician.

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Clancy Martin, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Missouri in Kansas City, US

I think in our contemporary democracy it's become obvious to most of us that the views that we expect from our politicians and the kinds of views that get our politicians elected are... may be completely incongruous with the way they lead their personal lives and what they personally believe. And this is how it can become very morally pernicious... very morally dangerous.

Alice

OK, so we elect politicians based on their views – for example on the environment, on education, on foreign policy. But their public views may be **incongruous** – or not in agreement with – their personal views.

Rob

And the difference between their public and personal views can be **pernicious** - it means deadly or destructive.

Alice

Politicians are under scrutiny all the time – their personal lives, their public statements... Now with social media, a thoughtless comment **goes viral** – or spreads very quickly via the internet.

Rob

That's true. And actually... I posted a photo of my red pick-up truck earlier.

Alice

Has it gone viral, Rob?

Rob

No, but there is a negative comment from the local conservationists...

Alice

Oh dear. Well, Rob, I think it's time I told you the answer to today's quiz question. I asked: What did the Ancient Greek word 'hypocrite' originally describe? Was it... a) actor, b) politician or c) horse?

Rob

And I said b) politician.

Alice

And you were wrong, I'm afraid! *Hypokrites* was a technical term for a stage actor and was not considered an appropriate role for a public figure. In Athens in the 4th century BC, the great orator Demosthenes ridiculed a rival politician, who had been a successful actor. Well, we're running out of time so can we hear the words we learned today?

Rob

They are:
hypocrite
inconsistent
harsh
compassionate
catch somebody out
morally indignant
incongruous
pernicious
go viral

Alice

Well, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Don't forget to join us again soon!

Both

Bye.

Vocabulary

hypocrite

somebody who says one thing and does another

inconsistent

changeable

harsh

stern and unkind

compassionate

showing sympathy and concern

catch somebody out

discover somebody has made a mistake

morally indignant

being angry about something according to principles of right and wrong

incongruous

not in agreement with

pernicious

deadly or destructive

go viral

spread very quickly (via the internet)