

UNITED WISDOM

Omission and Deception: The Listener's Expectations

Freedom and Action

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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Epigraph

> *It is one thing to conceal … not to reveal is quite a different thing.*

Cicero, De Officiis III.52, Diogenes' reply in the reported dispute with Antipater; Walter Miller translation. The two clauses are joined with an ellipsis. This is one side of the discussion, not Cicero's final conclusion.

What this article is about

Rita invites friends to hold a workshop at her home on Saturday. She writes that the room is quiet in the morning, has a large table and enough seats. The workshop is planned for the afternoon. Rita knows that her neighbour will spend several hours drilling then. She says nothing because the friends would otherwise choose somewhere else. When the meeting fails, she defends the message: every word was true and nobody asked about renovation.

Our scene concerns an ordinary meeting between adults. In this hypothetical scene, silence works alongside selected truthful information. The question is not a duty to reveal an entire life, but the understanding Rita knowingly sustained for people making a decision. We examine when an expectation is justified, how the speaker's role creates it, and why a personal boundary differs from a hidden significant condition. Neither every omission nor every absence of a direct lie determines honesty. Restore the conversation's subject, time, recipients and opportunity to clarify significant information before people begin relying on the proposed picture.

I. Silence gains meaning within a conversation

The room is quiet in the morning; that observation is true. In a conversation about an afternoon workshop, its function changes. It is offered as a ground for selecting the venue although Rita knows that the relevant time differs from the quiet time. Someone may utter no false proposition while intentionally arranging a mistaken understanding. Assess the decision for which a sentence was spoken, rather than the isolated sentence. Remove time and purpose and a reliable statement appears complete, although the listener received information about a different situation.

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

The form of the proposal creates an expectation too. Rita acts as host and organiser, lists suitable conditions and invites confirmation. Friends do not ask about drilling because the room is presented as suitable. This does not require her to predict every possible sound. She knows a particular obstacle at the planned time and chooses not to mention it to gain agreement. An unknown event differs from a known exception to the offered picture: the first may be bad luck, while the second concerns how a decision was secured in advance.

Silence's meaning depends on the shared task. In casual conversation about a favourite room, Rita can discuss morning quiet without forecasting the whole weekend. In an afternoon-workshop proposal, noise changes whether people can hear each other. The same fact becomes significant for a particular decision. Requiring everyone to tell everything, or permitting silence about everything until a precise question is asked, both lose the conversation. Ask which information is being presented as suitable for choice, and which exception the speaker knows while leaving it hidden.

Human speech is inevitably incomplete. Nobody can enumerate an apartment's entire arrangement, neighbours' histories and every possibility on Saturday. Responsibility for omission is not an infinite encyclopaedia. It concerns a noticeable significant condition and our contribution to a mistaken picture. Rita can describe the extent of knowledge honestly: work was announced after lunch; its exact end is unknown; the workshop could move to morning or another room. This incompleteness leaves a real understanding of the limit instead of offering a known part as sufficient for a decision it does not address.

II. Not every expectation becomes our obligation

Suppose one friend expects lunch to be provided. Rita promised no food, mentioned none, and previous meetings varied. The expectation may be sincere, without sincerity making it justified. Establish where it came from. If nobody created that understanding, absence of lunch is not deception. If Rita said the day would be arranged like last time, when she fed everyone, the question changes. An expectation has a history worth checking before responsibility is distributed according to the intensity of disappointment.

Justification may rest on explicit agreement, repeated practice, a role in the shared task or an answer to a specific question. None operates indefinitely. A customary lunch can be cancelled if the change is communicated in time. Being host does not mean accepting every guest's personal need. But inviting people to rely on certain conditions makes a known significant difference more than their private guess. Distinguish what someone assumed independently from what the speaker helped them reasonably accept as a basis.

When uncertain, ask what action the listener will take on the message's grounds. Friends set aside time, bring materials and expect to converse. Their understanding of the room's

suitability has a subject. An additional expectation that Rita pays their travel requires another ground. We need not silently accept every expense arising in somebody's imagination. But an unjustified expectation of payment differs from a justified expectation of being told a known obstacle. Rejecting the former does not permit hiding the latter under a general appeal to boundaries and guests' independence.

Friends contribute to clarification too. If the workshop requires exceptional quiet for recording, say so beforehand. Rita may know of renovation without knowing the recording requirements. Both sides then need to make relevant matters visible. Shared responsibility does not mean equal error in every case. It means the decision depends on both parties' available knowledge. Rita supplies information about the venue, participants about the task; nobody must guess everything. This leaves less room for a retrospective complaint about a condition the other person genuinely could not have known.

III. Refusal differs from a useful half-truth

A personal boundary can be clear: Rita declines to discuss ownership of the apartment, its cost or why she lives alone. Guests may be interested without needing these facts for the workshop. She can state the refusal directly while providing sufficient meeting information. This differs from an answer deliberately creating an impression of no noise. A boundary tells listeners that particular access is not granted; a half-truth encourages them to think a significant question is settled. Both answers may be brief, while their relationship to another's decision differs.

Even a question significant to another person can be declined. An honest understanding must then remain: no answer has been supplied, so it cannot be relied upon. If a friend asks whether the room is available all day and Rita will not promise, she says so. The friend decides whether uncertainty works. She need not provide a condition she cannot guarantee. But she should not obtain agreement to a full day through a statement about a free morning. Uncertainty can be named without disclosing the whole private history behind it.

A half-truth is tempting because it retains a formal defence. Later the speaker points to each accurate word and declares every inference the listener's own. Rita specifically relies on an inference about quiet at the needed time. If friends understood the message literally as information only about morning and selected another venue for the afternoon, her plan would fail. That dependence reveals the action: agreement useful to her depends on an expected mistake rather than accurate understanding. Calling it merely a private omission is insufficient.

The familiar claim that the other person should have asked requires caution. It fits when a private requirement was unknown and did not follow from the task. It weakens when the speaker knows an obstacle, presents conditions as suitable and avoids exactly the clarification

that would remove agreement. Responsibility is not determined only by a question mark. Contribution to the picture and knowledge of its significant incompleteness matter. Otherwise conversation becomes a contest to enumerate exclusions beforehand, making joint decisions almost impossible even among attentive people.

IV. A source presents a dispute, not one convenient formula

In De Officiis Book III, Cicero reports a disagreement between Diogenes and Antipater about a seller's information, then gives his own decision. In III.52, Diogenes distinguishes concealment from simply not revealing. In III.57, Cicero connects concealment with keeping people uninformed for one's advantage when knowing matters to them. This selected ancient dispute concerns a transaction's morality, rather than contemporary consumer law. Our limited comparison concerns the move from silence in general to sustaining ignorance of a significant matter; differences between the positions remain visible.

Rita sells no goods but wants the workshop to remain at her home. Having an interest is permissible in itself. The problem begins with how agreement is secured. She knows a circumstance her friends would probably consider and expects them not to consider it because they will not learn it in time. Name the interest without accusing her of general greed: she wants to host and retain the plan. Assessment concerns the particular link between desire, knowledge and sustained misunderstanding, rather than a need to establish her bad character first.

Augustine's distinction between error and deliberate deception in On Lying §3 likewise prevents every unknown noise from becoming concealment. If Rita knew nothing of renovation and described available information, later noise would not itself prove lying. In the selected neighbouring discussion, Augustine examines complexities of statement and intention. We use a limited distinction, retain its Christian context and claim no contemporary definition of every omission. Our editorial question concerns Rita's knowledge of a significant exception and the understanding she expected listeners to form.

Proverbs 12:23 places restraint of knowledge alongside assessment of speech and truthfulness. We do not turn it into permission to conceal significant conditions for advantage. Historical wisdom about restraint recalls that completeness is no independent virtue in every circumstance. The comparison retains a difference: unnecessary information can remain private while information needed for an accepted proposal becomes visible. Kant's lying-promise example is not turned into a law against every pause either. It directs attention to the grounds of agreement we knowingly create for another person.

V. Significance is determined by the decision, not our advantage

Rita may regard noise as minor because she is accustomed to working with it. For a workshop built on conversation, it matters. Another person's need does not become compulsory in every extent, but its known connection to the proposal deserves consideration. Ask not how irritating the condition is to the speaker, but whether it can reasonably change participation, timing or venue. If so, advantageous omission removes comparison of real options, even when the host thinks people could simply endure it and preserve a pleasant gathering.

Missing confirmation can matter too: Rita has not checked whether the room is usable in the evening. She need not disclose every unchecked condition in every invitation. If she confirms evening availability, however, uncertainty directly concerns her answer. Naming the lack of confirmation supplies a different basis for decision. It may produce refusal, which is precisely why it should not be dismissed as irrelevant detail. Honesty about knowledge's boundary matters where the speaker invites reliance on certainty she does not possess.

A criterion can also be too broad: disclose everything that could interest somebody else. That makes responsibility an impossible duty to guess every preference. Friends may care about a tablecloth's colour without Rita needing to treat it as significant when nobody connects it to the task. If the workshop concerns photographing a white object and background colour affects the work, context changes. Significance requires a specific connection rather than an infinite possibility of interest. Clearer discussion helps distinguish participation conditions from merely interesting details of another's household.

Ask what timely alternative knowledge would allow: could people reasonably choose differently if they knew? In the original scene they could move the meeting to morning, find another room or change the format. This does not prove they would certainly decline. Clarification requires no certainty of refusal. Notice a significant choice affected by the circumstance and one's role in the proposal. Preserving that choice does not remove Rita's wish to host; it stops making other people's ignorance the way of realising her wish.

VI. Clarification should arrive while action can still change

Rita can reveal the drilling once guests arrive. Information becomes truthful and complete while the earlier opportunity to change plans has disappeared. Timing belongs to the moral question. Delay does not always prove intention: she may have learned late or forgotten to warn people. Distinguish cause and correction. But if she deliberately waited until leaving became awkward, eventual disclosure does not cancel how participation was obtained. Completeness after an irreversible step differs from honest grounds beforehand, and the lost choice deserves discussion.

A timely clarification can be short. The room is quiet in the morning; renovation is expected after lunch with an unknown end; conversation would work better at another time or venue. Rita need not recount a neighbour's dispute or promise to influence the work. She names a condition and her uncertainty, then offers options within her capacity. This is no speech about her moral perfection. It allows participants to compare information with the task and answer for themselves, retaining their time, materials and willingness to alter the preliminary plan.

Clarification needs a noticeable place. If the principal message confidently promises a quiet workshop while an exception is buried in a long exchange about tea, formal presence does not guarantee intelligibility. We create no universal formatting standard. We ask whether the speaker actually helps people notice a condition they will rely upon. Connect a significant exception directly to the proposal. This matters especially when an earlier confident description is already circulating and participants forward it to people who have not seen the update and are preparing independently.

If the condition changes again, update the previous answer. A cancelled renovation can be reported without promising no future sound. If work moves to morning, the previous morning option is no longer confirmed. This does not require controlling the world. It concerns a known change to a significant condition the organiser already described. The duty has a subject and end: make the available picture current for this decision. It does not make the host a permanent observer of every possibility, but prevents a convenient old message continuing after she learns it is unsuitable.

VII. When an incomplete picture has already secured participation

The workshop failed and Rita receives a complaint. A useful first action is specific acknowledgement: she knew about afternoon renovation, reported morning quiet and failed to state the difference for the scheduled time. This separates choice from result. If she did not know, acknowledgement should differ; inventing an intention to secure reconciliation is unnecessary. If she knew, absence of a question does not explain her contribution. It directs attention to the friends' gap while leaving unanswered what she knowingly did with a significant condition of her own proposal.

Name available consequences next. People travelled, prepared materials and postponed other activities. Rita cannot return all their time or promise that another meeting fully compensates. She can offer a suitable room on another day, return a contribution she collected if applicable, or help move materials. We do not determine legal compensation. We connect acknowledgement with action: apology should not replace discussion of actual costs, and a corrective offer should not oblige guests to accept again conditions they no longer trust.

Friends may decline another meeting at her home. This need not be punishment or evidence that the apology lacked elegance. They assess available grounds for further participation. Rita can supply accurate new information and leave room for checking, without demanding restored trust by a deadline. Correction makes choice more honest; it does not control the answer. If refusal provokes a wish to conceal a weak condition in the new proposal, notice the repetition: avoiding an unwelcome outcome is again seeking advantage through limited understanding.

Change the invitation procedure afterwards. Time, conversational requirements, availability and known obstacles can be clarified beforehand. A friendship meeting needs no lengthy contract. Name conditions capable of changing the decision and what remains unknown. The procedure's benefit appears in the next invitation: Rita reports significant information before confirmation, friends identify special requirements, and a change is not hidden among minor details. Responsibility remains specific and shared instead of becoming endless scrutiny of every word against every conceivable future disappointment.

VIII. Leave a real understanding of the limit

Honest conversation requires no perfect understanding. People read differently, forget information and sometimes hear what they want. We can answer for accessible clarity about significant matters and our contribution to a mistaken picture, while retaining a limit. If Rita directly reports afternoon noise and a friend reads only the morning sentence, investigate understanding; disappointment alone does not turn the message into deception. If she deliberately arranged the text so the condition would be missed, pointing formally to what was written does not settle her participation.

Checking understanding helps when a condition especially matters and confusion is reasonably expected. Ask for confirmation that the workshop is now in the morning because the room is unsuitable after lunch. This neither controls another's independence nor requires repeating every sentence. It concerns a specific change and further action. Sometimes a clear new message suffices; sometimes circulation of the old address and time needs stopping. Proportionality comes from the real risk of mistaken participation, rather than maximising confirmations or insuring against every possible complaint.

A personal boundary remains intact. Rita communicates noise and timing without disclosing a financial dispute with the neighbour, family circumstances or why she chose the apartment. Friends need the venue's suitability rather than access to her entire private life. Honesty can mark that difference. State that details remain private while the known condition is such-and-such. With a visible boundary, others decide on a real basis. Hidden inside confident description of an absent condition, it instead supplies a picture useful chiefly to the speaker, and the lost opportunity to choose cannot later be restored.

In the original scene, the available next step is acknowledging the afternoon exception and offering a genuinely suitable option without pressure. The broader skill checks an expectation: where it came from, which fact can change a decision and what our message encourages people to treat as known. Silence does not become deception through one outward sign, but absence of a false sentence does not make every influence honest. Between unlimited disclosure and a convenient half-truth lies specific human work: communicate significant information in time, name knowledge's boundary and leave another person able to agree, clarify or decline what is actually offered.

What this means in practice

Choose an ordinary proposal someone will rely upon: a meeting, shared task or use of your room. Do not use the exercise for professional disclosure duties, a legal dispute or a dangerous situation. Record the recipient's decision and three conditions capable of changing it significantly. Identify what is known, unchecked and changed since the last message. Do not list your entire life: the task and what you present as suitable define extent.

Reconstruct the expectation. What was stated directly? What follows from an accepted role, previous practice or answer? What does the listener assume without an available ground? Distinguish these before assessing fault. Place a known significant exception alongside the principal proposal. If you cannot confirm a condition, state uncertainty. Do not use information about one time as an answer concerning another while relying on people missing the difference and agreeing because of it.

Check a personal boundary separately. An unnecessary biographical detail can remain private while a proposal's suitability is clear. Refusal should leave absence of an answer understandable, rather than create apparent confirmation. Ask whether honest agreement remains possible if the recipient understands the words accurately together with their limit. If the message's benefit depends on misunderstanding, consider clarification, altered conditions, another time or withdrawing a proposal you cannot yet represent adequately.

Communicate significant clarification before action and, where needed, check understanding of one changed condition. If participation already relied on an incomplete picture, name your contribution and available correction while retaining the other person's ability to reject a new option. Afterwards check one factual change: is timing updated, circulation of the old message stopped or a suitable room confirmed? This United Wisdom practice has no claimed research-established efficacy and determines no legal permissibility. It makes visible the boundary of a message underlying a particular shared choice.

Key quotation

> *merely holding one's peace about a thing does not constitute concealment*

Cicero, De Officiis III.57, Walter Miller translation; a clause excerpt. The following explanation connects concealment with keeping people uninformed for one's profit when knowing matters to them; the clause should not be detached from that condition.

Connections between traditions

Source	Context	Limited comparison	Difference preserved
Cicero III.50–57	Seller-information dispute and the author's decision	Silence differs from advantageous concealment of significant facts	Ancient discussion establishes no contemporary disclosure law
Augustine §§3–4	Statement, belief and intention	Unknown circumstances differ from a knowingly sustained mistake	Theology is not a complete contemporary omission classification
Proverbs 12:17–23	Truthfulness and restraint	Incompleteness is not automatically deception	No permission for advantageous concealment is inferred
Kant, Groundwork I	Grounds of agreement in a lying-promise example	Attend to what another is invited to rely upon	A promise example is not a prohibition on every pause
United Wisdom	Hypothetical workshop and editorial practice	Expectation, significance, timing and knowledge limits	The editorial procedure is not attributed to sources

Sources

• Cicero. De Officiis, Walter Miller translation, 1913, Project Gutenberg 47001. Selected III.50–60 context was read; the article uses III.50–57. The epigraph is Diogenes' reported reply in III.52, and key quotation a clause of Cicero's decision in III.57. Worldwide rights in the historical edition are not declared established.

• Augustine. On Lying, H. Browne translation, New Advent edition. Previously read selected §§3–4 context concerning statement and the speaker's position is used. No literal quotation appears here; reading of the entire treatise is not claimed.

• Proverbs, King James Version, Wikisource. Previously read 12:17–23 context, particularly 12:23, is used without literal quotation. Restraint is not declared permission for advantageous concealment of conditions.

• Immanuel Kant. Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals, Thomas Kingsmill Abbott translation, Project Gutenberg 5682. The previously read section I lying-promise context is used; this example is not attributed a complete theory of omission.

Tags

omission, deception, incompleteness, half-truth, expectation, significance, knowledge, uncertainty, disclosure, personal boundary, consent, proposal, time, role, agreement, clarification, attention, participation, correction, trust, advantage, privacy, responsibility, Cicero, Diogenes, Antipater, Augustine, Proverbs, Kant

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.