

Relationship help: What to Do When You Call Your Partner by an Ex's Name

By Dr. Richard Nicastro, Ph.D.

Most relationship help and marriage advice articles overlook this very common and important issue. Let's take a humorous look at what to do, or not do, when you accidentally call the love of your life by your ex's name.

The setting:

You're head-over-heels in love with **Steven** and the last eleven months have felt like a dream. You have so much in common and you're starting to feel certain that he's "the one" for you.

Steven arrives early Friday evening to help you prepare a romantic dinner. He's yet to spend the night and you're hoping that tonight will be different. He's chopping away at the celery when you lovingly ask, "**Jim**, would you like another glass of wine?"

Deafening silence.

Your head spins as the reality of what just happened hits you. Waves of panic follow.

Grasping for a thread of hope, you start to rationalize: "His favorite Beatles song is playing, so maybe he was distracted...he's a little tipsy from the wine, so he probably didn't even hear me."

But can you be sure? What should you do?

Fact: You just called the new love of your life by someone else's name.

Fact: There's a 98.3% chance that s/he heard what you just said.

Fact: Things are going to get really uncomfortable really quickly.

Fact: You need a plan.

The Name Blunder

No matter how confident or in love you are, you're not immune to calling your partner by the name of a past lover. The name blunder is most likely to occur when you least expect it, and there doesn't have to be some deep-seated reason for this slip of the tongue. (It doesn't mean you subconsciously want your ex back!)

Sheer repetition in saying someone else's name for so long accounts for most of the name blunders that occur.

But old habits dying hard probably won't comfort the person on the receiving end of the name blunder. There's no way around it: being called "Jim" (when your name doesn't even start with a "J") is probably going to put a damper on your plans for a romantic evening. You don't want marriage or relationship problems taking over because of a little mistake.

Relationship help is on the way: How to fix the name blunder

Each solution below is based upon the premise that you need a convincing way to create a mind-numbing, disorienting diversion—you must *cover up* your mistake. Yes, my friend, I am suggesting you take the cowardly way out.

1. The Distraction Technique (aka sleight-of-hand)

In our opening example, the woman who called her new boyfriend (**Steve**) by her ex-husband's name (**Jim**) had several good options available to her. Remember, Steve was looking down at the celery when he was called Jim—being out of Steve's visual field gave his girlfriend a big advantage she should have jumped on.

Here is what she could have done:

a) Quickly grab a blunt object and throw it through a nearby window. Since the goal is to *distract* and *disorient* the victim of the name blunder (in order to save face), she could have also yelled, "Oh my God! Someone's trying to break in!"

Convincing follow-up is very important: You would then need to act frightened and needy for the next several days (acting startled and tearing up at the smallest sounds).

b) She could have set something on fire—something small, of course. (This method is *only* recommended for trained firefighters.) It's most effective to let the victim of the name blunder put out the fire. After the fire is extinguished, you will need to act overwhelmed for the rest of the day or evening, and for about a week act as though you had a spiritual awakening.

In our example above, whenever Steve tried to broach the name blunder issue, his girlfriend should quickly cut him off and emphatically declare her gratitude for life: "Aren't we lucky to be alive? I am so grateful for every second we spend together! Life is just so tenuous--I see that now!"

c) This one requires ketchup or Tabasco or red food coloring, and a wad of tissue. Since the woman discussed above was in her kitchen, she could have easily pretended to cut herself *immediately* after calling her boyfriend "Jim."

Director's suggestion: pour red substance on hand, cover with tissue, pour more red substance on tissue; scream; partially hide red-covered hand and tissue with "good" hand; keep moving "injured" hand so your partner only gets a glimpse of the "injury"; run into the bathroom and stay there for a minimum of thirty minutes.

Director's suggestion part 2: While in the bathroom, keep mumbling, "Why won't it stop bleeding?" In a shaky voice, assure concerned partner through the locked door that you'll be fine. Heavily bandage hand and when reunited with your lover, ask to lie down and to be held. For the next couple of days complain that the wound still "throbs" and that your doctor told you that "stress of any kind can adversely affect the healing process."

2. The Faint.

While you have to be pretty shameless for this one, it is effective in covering up the name blunder. It's best if your partner is looking directly at you.

After the last syllable leaves your mouth, act as though you're light-headed and have to sit down. The effectiveness of this method rests on making your partner feel concerned for you, so give it your best Robert DeNiro or Meryl Streep.

Your partner will make attempts to find out if you're okay and will try to comfort you. Remain "unresponsive" for about a minute and stare blankly at your partner. After some time has passed, repeat the following: "What just happened? Where am I? When did you get here?"

3. The Name Twister.

The Name Twister is better suited for you cerebral types who prefer words over physicality.

Working with multi-syllabic names. In many instances you'll immediately become aware of your name blunder before the second syllable even leaves your mouth. For example, you're saying goodnight to **Michael** after a fabulous date. You're both walking to his car and you utter, "I really had a great time tonight **An (thony)**." Good save! You only let the first syllable of your old boyfriend's name slip.

Now for the cover-up: You must quickly think of words that begin with "An." Don't worry if your statement with the new word makes sense. Worst case scenario is that you'll come off looking quirky (quirky = artsy in many circles, and at this stage of the relationship, this will be perceived as endearing).

Here are a few examples of The Name Twister in action:

"I really had a great time tonight An...thropology is really interesting. I'm thinking of taking a class."

"I really had a great time tonight An...thrax...that's some powerful stuff. What's it supposed to be used for?"

"I really had a great time tonight An...tarctica...Have you ever gone? I heard it gets pretty cold."

You get the picture.

Working with mono-syllabic names. The cover-up with mono-syllabic names is a little more challenging, but the basic premise is the same. You need to find multi-syllabic words that have the same first syllable as the name of your ex. For example, Pat can be changed into patrol or patriarch; Sue becomes super or tsunami; Tim becomes timid and so on.

To increase your chances of success with The Name Twister, it is recommended that you look through a dictionary and make up alternative name-words beforehand. While this might take days or even weeks of your time, the strategic advantage this gives you is well worth the time.

Conclusion:

There you have it, full-proof methods to help you avoid the upsetting fallout of a common relationship dilemma. I realize that you may be the type of person who feels uncomfortable with the idea of using deceptive cover-up methods that may upset your partner.

If you're someone who prefers a marriage or relationship built on integrity rather than tacky cover-up tactics, it's important to remember that while being called by an ex's name is unpleasant, it's a common faux pas that occurs because of sheer repetition. If your partner has dated a guy named "Larry" for six years before you came into her life, her brain is very used to saying "L-a-r-r-y." Try not to make a big deal out of it.

What Steve's girlfriend could have done: Give Steve a heart-felt apology, assure him that she doesn't have her ex-partner on her mind, and tell him how important he is to her.

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Author Bio

Over the past fifteen years Richard Nicastro, Ph.D. has helped couples build stronger, more fulfilling marriages and relationships. Dr. Nicastro has lectured at several universities and now conducts workshops for couples on a wide range of issues. His relationship advice has appeared on television, radio and in national magazines. A member of the International Coach Federation, Dr. Nicastro is passionate about coaching and believes that healthy relationships can add meaning and fulfillment to our lives. His goal is to guide individuals and couples as they implement the skills that will allow their relationships to flourish.

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