

Chatterbox #312 – Gaslighting

AD-FREE

Episode description

Have you ever heard the term “gaslighting”? The verb “to gaslight” has become a very popular word over the past several years. Gaslighting is a manipulation tactic where someone makes another person doubt their own experiences and memories. In this episode, Andrew and Anna have a thought-provoking discussion about this concept. They introduce the definition of the term, its history, and their personal thoughts and experiences with gaslighting in their own lives. It’s a great episode for Culips listeners who are interested in psychology!

Fun fact

The word has become so popular that online dictionary Merriam-Webster announced that “gaslighting” was its word of the year in 2022! According to its search data, searches for the term “gaslighting” increased 1,740% from the year before.

Expressions included in the study guide

- A dark place
- To take credit for [something]
- More than [adjective] to
- To go back on [something]
- To second-guess oneself
- To butter [somebody] up



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Chatterbox number 312, "Gaslighting." Featuring, Andrew and Anna. Today, I'm happy to be joined by my cohost, Anna. Anna, could you please do the honors and introduce what our topic is for this episode?

Anna: In today's episode, we're going to explore the concept of gaslighting. This is a thought provoking but also concerning psychological phenomenon. And we're going to share our thoughts and opinions about this manipulation tactic and the impact that it can have on people.

Andrew: Yeah, so a kind of deep topic today. But I think this is really important to talk about because we just hear about it everywhere these days. I can't avoid hearing conversations about gaslighting. And so, I think probably a lot of our listeners have maybe heard this expression, but don't really know what it means or don't really know how to use it when they're talking about these kinds of relationships because I think gaslighting has a lot to do with how we handle our relationships in our lives. So, a very important topic. And listeners, I wanted to break this episode down into a couple of different main parts, just so that we can clearly understand exactly what gaslighting is. So, we'll start with the basic definition. And then Anna and I are going to give some examples. And then finally, we're going to have a discussion about gaslighting. So, you could consider this episode to be a three parter. And we'll segment it that way just so that the conversation is easy to follow along with. And so yeah, we'll begin with our definition, gaslighting. So gaslighting is, as you mentioned earlier at the top of the show, Anna, it's a psychological manipulation tactic. And manipulation is when you try to change somebody else's mind, right? And maybe you do that in a dishonest way. Right? We can manipulate people in a good way or a bad way. But usually, I think manipulation is considered to be something that's bad. So, when we do this kind of manipulation to try and change somebody's opinion, or what they think of

themselves, or what they think about a situation, well, we can call that gaslighting and it can have a really big impact on our mental health and our emotional well-being

Anna: That's right, Andrew, and gaslighting is known as being a really subtle kind of emotional abuse that involves making somebody doubt their own perceptions, memories, and even their own sanity. So, they start kind of feeling like, "Am I going crazy? Like is that what happened?" And it can really occur in various different types of relationships, romantic, but also family relationships, and even actually in the workplace as well.

Andrew: Yeah, I think it's actually really common in the workplace, maybe more than we think because it can be really subtle, and it can take place over a long period of time. So, gaslighting typically involves different kind of tactics or strategies that the abuser, who is the person who is doing the gaslighting, uses to try and deceive someone or to confuse someone or to control someone. And so I wanted to break down some of these fundamental components of gaslighting. And there are many, but I thought, well, let's just talk about four, some of the main four fundamentals of gaslighting. And the first up is denial, denial. And denial occurs when the gaslighter denies that certain events or conversations took place. So, in this kind of context then, the gaslighter might say something like, "I never said that" or "You're making that up." And I think probably everybody that's listening to this right now, and Anna probably you can agree with me as well, that you've had this kind of situation, right, where you're in an argument with someone, maybe it could be a coworker, or friend or a romantic partner, and yeah you get into an argument and they try and manipulate you, right? Change your thinking by denying that something ever took place.

Anna: Absolutely. And if we move on to the next one then, trivialization, which is where gaslighters often minimize the victim's feelings or concerns. So, they might say something like, "You're too sensitive, you're being too sensitive" or "You're overreacting, I think you're reacting too much." These are kind of those typical things that people will say and like you said before, Andrew, maybe you've heard somebody say that to you before and when you

really don't feel like you're overreacting and so what they're saying doesn't really match with how you feel.

Andrew: Right. So, in this kind of situation that gaslighter is not appreciating the depth of your feelings and is writing them off and saying, like, just calm down, settle down. It's not a big deal. You're too sensitive. You're overreacting to this kind of situation. Yeah, exactly. OK, so the next one then is projection, projection. And projection occurs when the gaslighter places the negative qualities or behaviors on to the victim. So, they're doing something bad themselves, but they actually blame the victim of doing those things. For instance, if the gaslighter was a liar, and was being dishonest, then they might accuse the victim of being a liar and saying, "Hey, you're lying to me." So, it's this kind of projection of the gaslighter's behaviors on to the victim's behaviors.

Anna: And then the fourth thing is withholding. And this is about when the gaslighter would withhold affection, attention, or approval, and that ultimately makes the person feel unworthy, inadequate, unloved. So, that's the fourth kind of main thing that is involved, or one of the main ways that gaslighting transpires in day-to-day relationships.

Andrew: And probably, you know, a long term gaslighter, who is gaslighting and manipulating their victim to a big extent, they're going to be doing all of these things at the same time, right? It's not like that you're only doing one, I would imagine that really severe gaslighters are doing all of these things at the same time. And gaslighting is particularly damaging, because slowly over time, it can erode or destroy the victim's self-esteem and cause them to question their own reality. And this can lead to anxiety or depression, or a sense of powerlessness, right? Just imagine if all of these things were happening to you. Somebody was calling you a liar, saying that your emotions are not valid, not giving you any praise. I mean, all of these things are going to have a huge impact on your mental health. And yeah, it can lead to **a really dark place.**

Anna: Absolutely. And gaslighting can happen gradually and slowly over a period of time, making it even more difficult to recognize it when it actually happens. And often people don't even realize that they're being gaslit or that somebody is gaslighting them, because it kind of just becomes the routine behavior that always happened. It's what they always know about that relationship with that person. Sometimes it can be quite difficult to see it when it's actually going on.

Andrew: Absolutely. All right. So Anna, at this point, I want to get into some examples. And we've prepared two scenarios, two kind of, well, they're fictional, but they illustrate how gaslighting could work in our everyday lives. So, why don't we walk through a couple of these scenarios, Anna, I'll introduce the first one. And this is for a personal relationship. So, kind of romantic relationship. And imagine that your partner constantly makes you feel like you're crazy. They frequently accuse you of overreacting or being overly emotional. For instance, when you express concern about something, then your partner would just dismiss it by saying, "Oh, you're too sensitive" or "It's all in your head." In this situation, the gaslighter is just making something trivial, right, and denying that the emotions of their partner are valid. And so this is a classic form of gaslighting.

Anna: Right. And maybe let's take a look at another example in a different context, this time at the workplace. Let's imagine you're in a meeting and you're sharing ideas, and your colleague **takes credit for your ideas**. And then later when you confront them about it, they're like, "Well, you misunderstood the situation. It's not my fault." And they never really acknowledged your contribution. This is an instance of denial and projection, one of those areas that we talked about before, where they're reflecting their actions onto you. And again, this is a form of gaslighting that you might find in the workplace.

Andrew: Anna, I'm curious, do you know where this expression comes from, like the etymology or the origin, gaslighting? Have you heard about it before?

Anna: Well, this is really interesting because I don't know about you Andrew, and you out there listeners, because when I first heard this term, I thought it was about people becoming angry, because the gaslighting thing, I thought it was about having the light and then kind of forcing somebody to be angry. But actually, it's got a really interesting background. And the term gaslighting actually has its roots in a play from 1938, which is called *Gaslight* and it's by a British playwright called Patrick Hamilton. And in this play, basically what happens is a husband manipulates his wife into believing that she's losing her mind by dimming the gas lights in their home. And then basically denying any changes when she points them out. She said, "Oh, you've dimmed the lights." And he's like, "No, I haven't what are you talking about? No, I haven't." With the intention of making her kind of go crazy. And this psychological torment, which is central to the plot of this play, illustrates the essence of gaslighting. So, that's where the term comes from because I don't know about you guys, but for me the term's a little bit confusing. I didn't really understand what it meant. But that's where it comes from. It comes from that film and that psychological torment that the husband was inflicting on his wife.

Andrew: Yeah, Anna, it started as a play and then there were some films that were released with the same name a little bit later in the 40s, I think. But it wasn't until the 1960s, many years after the play was first released, that psychologist adapted this term and started to use it as a verb, to talk about the act of manipulation in relationships. So, I thought that was interesting. And at this point, now, Anna, why don't we jump into our discussion about gaslighting? Because this transitions nicely to the main discussion part of the episode. And I wanted to ask you about this, about when you first started to hear the expression used in your everyday life by family and friends and in the media.

Anna: I guess it's like you said in the intro, it's really a term that's been bounced around a lot recently. And you see a lot of articles about it. And now that it's much more open in terms of talking about things to do with mental health and relationships, it seems to be a term that's come up quite a lot. But I think the first thing honestly, I'd like to say about this is that of course there's gaslighting that goes on and that's when somebody's trying to be

manipulative, but there's also, are times when, like, for example, I'm thinking about my partner and he'll say, "Well I never said that." And he's not gaslighting me, he actually believes he never said that, right? So, there's times when people say these things, but they're not gaslighting. It's that they genuinely say "Well, I don't remember that. I'm not sure if that happened." And there are times when people genuinely overreact and you're like, I think you are overreacting. So, I think the one thing I would say in this is that of course gaslighting happens when people are trying to manipulate the situation. But there are also times when we will say, "Oh, I don't think I said that actually." When they genuinely think they really didn't actually say that, do you know what I mean? So, I think you're not if somebody says that it's not an immediate gaslight, I guess is what I would say. Because I think there's a danger that everyone thinks, oh, well, every time somebody says they don't remember, it means they're gaslighting me. I think, you know, you kind of get a sense of when somebody is trying to manipulate the situation. What about you, Andrew? When did you start to hear about it and the concept of it and what it means?

Andrew: Yeah, it was not too long ago, maybe within the last five years or so it really started to become popular. And actually, Anna, this is one of those things that I didn't really know what it meant either. It just sort of came out of nowhere. And it was like, you know, it's kind of a heavy topic. It's not just some basic thing. And because there's not really a connection with the expression and the meaning, unless you had seen that play, then maybe you would have understood. But I was a little bit confused too like what exactly is gaslighting? Like what's going on? And it did take me a little while to understand what it was about exactly. And I think you raised a good point, Anna. Is that, you know, a lot of the behaviors that we talked about earlier, doesn't necessarily mean that if you're doing one of those things, that you are an abusive person, or you are a gaslighter. I mean, I've probably done a lot of those things myself, just in very subtle ways. And I'm not trying to like abuse or manipulate the people that I'm dealing with on a daily level. But yeah, sometimes we forget that we say some things. I know that happens to me sometimes. And I'm not usually aggressive in that situation. I'm not like, "I never said that. You're crazy!" But I might say something like, "Oh, did I say that? I don't really remember saying that."

And that could, I guess, maybe have the same effect. And perhaps somebody might think that I'm trying to gaslight them. But in that kind of situation, maybe it's more like I actually didn't remember that I had promised something or said something. So yeah, I think that's an important distinction. Some of these behaviors could just be normal human behavior, but then sometimes, you know, definitely people could be out there to psychologically manipulate others as well.

Anna: Absolutely. Yeah. It's all about the intention, right? Like what's the intention? And I'm going to use a personal example which I'm **more than happy to share** which is related back to relationships. And you know, I remember once when you know, I was in a relationship in the past, not my current one, by the way. And I remember somebody sort of saying, you know, when you've had a conversation with somebody, and this is that typical one where they're like, "I didn't say that!" And I remember we agreed on something. And then like a month down the line, they kind of **went back on what they'd said**. And I said, "But we agreed there." So, I don't know whether you guys out there have ever had that situation where you're like, we spoke about this. And then the reaction later down the line is like, "I never said that. I never agreed to that." And I really felt there that that wasn't like one of these situations where it's just, they've forgot and whatever. And this is the thing that they knew that they had agreed to it. But they now decided that for whatever reason that they didn't want to or whatever. And it goes back to like, it's just how it makes that person feel. Because then you do kind of think, well, am I going crazy? I'm like overreacting, am I? Did they agree to that? So, you kind of just sort of doubt yourself and kind of **second-guess yourself**, but deep down, you know that they did, you know, that they agreed to that. So, it just kind of just makes you feel off. And so, it really is about that kind of intention, right? These things can happen. And it's, I forgot, I don't think I ever said that. Or, you know, sometimes people do overreact. Like that is a fact, like sometimes people overreact in a situation. But it's when you kind of both know that deep down. They're not overreacting. But like you said, they're doing it to manipulate the situation in

some way to make you feel bad when actually, I think it's often about shifting the blame as well.

Andrew: Yeah, I think intention is so key, Anna. I'll share a story from my personal life because you did as well. And I think sometimes my wife will get more stressed out about things than I do, because that's just my personality. And I'm, like very easygoing, and I don't get as stressed out about some things as she does, perhaps. And also, we live in South Korea, which is like a very, very, very, very safe country, one of the safest countries in the world. And I come from Canada, which is also statistically a very safe country, but not quite as safe as South Korea. And so, in Canada, these days, I think you probably wouldn't want to leave your door unlocked, like of your car, or your front door, probably a good idea to always lock it up. Although when I was a kid, we never used to do that. It's a little bit sad, the country has changed a little bit, but now you want to lock things up. But here in Korea, you know, like break ins into houses and break ins into cars very, very low. It's like a very safe country in that regard. You could go to a cafe, you can have your MacBook out doing some work and you need to go to the washroom, you could just leave your MacBook on the table in a busy cafe and go to the washroom you come back, it'll be there, nobody's gonna take it. So, it's a very safe country in that regard. And I remember the other day, my wife and I were going for a walk and I didn't lock the front door to the house. And she was like, "Oh, you gotta go back and lock it." I'm like, "It's super safe. Nobody's gonna break into our house. It's OK." Like, I was kind of just lazy and I didn't want to walk back to lock the house because like, we're going to be back in 20 minutes anyways, just don't worry about it. And so now it seems like I was not appreciating her emotion, maybe. And I did go back and lock the door in the end. Like, I guess I'm not a gaslighter in the end. But sometimes that is my initial reaction because I'm so easygoing, it's just like, calm down, don't worry about it. It's fine. You know, it's not a big deal. But maybe that is just, you know, my perspective. And what I'm learning from talking about this topic right now is that we really have to appreciate that our reality is different than other people's realities and trying to understand other people's viewpoints can, you know, help us to not gaslight in the future.

Anna: Yeah, wow, that's incredible that you can feel comfortable leaving your door open, or like sitting in a coffee shop, and just leaving the laptop there, like, wow, I wish, in Madrid that will be gone in about five seconds, can't leave anything anywhere, different culture, I guess, and also living in the city center. But it's interesting. And I think you touched on something as well earlier, which was a lot of these things can kind of be combined, and people exhibit all different types of these behaviors at different times, sometimes. I guess that fits in a wider thing of, you know, some relationships are really toxic, and they have this toxic element to them and gaslighting can be part of that. And it yeah, it's a really interesting topic, but there's just so much involved in it. So many kinds of behaviors that can be under this umbrella of gaslighting, but I guess the key thing to take away is it's about the intention, it's about the manipulation, which I think I can see is kind of the common thread between all of these different types of behavior, like withholding or these types of things. You know, it's all about that manipulation.

Andrew: Now, if you were to take a look at the perspective of things from a gaslighter, why do you think somebody would do this? Why would someone gaslight somebody else? What do they have to gain? What's going on there do you think?

Anna: I think it's often about control because if you make the other person feel worse, then that maybe makes them feel better. I think it's mainly to do with control. Because if you can make somebody feel bad and second guess themselves, then maybe you are in some way, having more of a control over them or more of a control over how they feel. Or maybe it's like deflection, you know, you've done something wrong, but you kind of just want to push the blame on somebody else. And then that makes you feel better, or I'm not sure. What do you think, Andrew from a gaslighter's perspective? I think people will do it without even realizing as well. I think that's also a point to say is that even though it's intentional, I think some people will do it, and they won't necessarily realize that they do it, perhaps.

Andrew: Definitely, there are some people who are just, you know, very emotionally and psychologically immature, and they don't even realize what they're doing. They're not even aware of their actions, right? So, you know, we use this language earlier, like victim and abuser. And I think those terms are correct. Like, we could say that, you know, somebody who is gaslighting somebody and manipulating them and emotionally tormenting somebody else, they are an abuser. But I don't think in all cases, everybody is always aware of their actions, like it does take some self-reflection, and you need to think about your actions, right? And if you don't do that, then maybe you're just doing it subconsciously, perhaps. So, I'm not a psychologist, so I don't want to spew off too much. But I do think sometimes it could be unintentional. But I was going through my mind to try and find some examples of gaslighting behavior that I've seen maybe in some different workplaces that I've been in. And none really came to mind, like this kind of manipulation, where you're maybe withholding affection, remember, we talked about that earlier? And of course, in a workplace, it's not appropriate to be affectionate, usually. But we can give compliments, right? Like, "Oh, that's an amazing presentation!" Or "Nice job in the meeting." And I could imagine in that kind of workplace situation, that maybe you know, a boss or coworkers wouldn't give those kinds of compliments to try and make somebody feel like they're starved for that kind of recognition in their job. But I've actually seen the opposite, a different kind of manipulation, which is doing the opposite, where you're like, "Oh, wow, you did such a great job at this week's presentation that you should do it again, at next week's presentation." You know, like where they're **buttering somebody up**, to try and get them to do extra work. And I've definitely noticed that in some past offices that I've worked in, so it's like kind of the opposite, but still, it has the manipulation at its core, that's something that it has in common. So, I guess there's a lot of different ways that we can manipulate people but personally, I can't really think of any office examples of gaslighting, although I have been witness to the opposite kind of buttering people up.

Anna: Interesting. Me neither, I mean, for the office for me, I can't think of any examples. I think they can happen in the office. But from the research that I was looking at, it's mainly a term that's used to talk about relationships and very, very common in relationships, like

romantic relationships, but also, with family members, as well. But yeah, the examples I can think of mainly are in relationships and more toxic types of relationships, that maybe one person is being more manipulative for whatever reason, who knows, there could be a variety of different reasons why that person is like that. But yeah, it's a really interesting topic and something that's really trendy and I'm sure guys that you're gonna see after this episode, maybe see more things about it, but it's really a trend or a terminology that's really thrown around a lot at the moment.

Andrew: OK, Culips members, Anna and I are going to keep the conversation going here just for a couple more minutes to say thank you for your support, of course, we love our members. And Anna, OK, rapid fire questions. I've got three of them prepared here for us so let's get to the first one. I'm just curious in general, you know, today's episode about gaslighting, this is what we call pop psychology. You know, like we said, we're not psychologists, but we're talking about this psychological topic just because it's out there in the popular conversation discourse in society. So, in general, are you interested in topics like this and pop psychology?

Anna: Yeah, definitely. I think it's really, really interesting and all these different terms that have come up recently. I mean, they are basically new ways to describe things that have been going on for a while and I think there is a psychological specific term to describe gaslighting. I think I read something like coercive control or so these terms are kind of been made popular, but they describe things that have been looked at I guess throughout time really? It does interest me. And I wonder, Andrew, do you think you're good at reading people?

Andrew: Yeah, I think I can notice when people are trying to be a little bit manipulative, I actually had, well, I won't share the story here. But maybe I'll share it with you later Anna, just about, you know, some guy that I think was trying to manipulate me in a business kind of way. And it's funny when you can see through people's actions, and you know about what their intentions are. And it's just really weird to see how those people act and you're

like, I know your end goal here, what you're trying to do. And so yeah, I'm not like, I think I'm not a perfect people reader. But yeah, it's something that I'm becoming more tuned into. And it is interesting, when you can take a step back and just see how people are acting when they are trying to be manipulative.

Anna: I guess they would say that the best manipulators, you would never notice, that's the point. So, people who are good at manipulation, you would never know that you're actually being manipulated, because they're just so good at it. There's a really great book as well called *The 48 Laws of Power*, which is by an author called Robert Greene. And he details in there about lots of different types of manipulation, which is really interesting. And he puts it into a historical context. So, if you guys are interested in that it's a really good book, and it's been translated into many different languages as well. And on the topic of language Andrew, I wonder, one of the next rapid-fire question: Has the term gaslighting made its way into the Korean language?

Andrew: Yeah, I hear people talking about gaslighting in Korean. It's like they use the exact same term. So, it's now been borrowed into Korean as well. Yeah. What about in Spanish? Do they have a different expression? Or do they say gaslighting as that kind of set phrase?

Anna: As far as I know, I'm not sure, I'm not an expert on that. I would imagine that people will have heard of it. But I'm not sure if it's made its way in just yet. But I'm sure that it will with time, definitely. There's a lot of anglicisms that are picked up in the Spanish language too.

Andrew: Well, Spanish listeners, let us know if it's been borrowed into the Spanish language or not. OK, rapid fire question number three. And Anna, I think you already gave us a little hint toward your answer here. But do you like reading self-help books or listening to self-help podcasts that can help you to recognize different kinds of human behavior?

Anna: Yeah, I'm really into all of that stuff. I love different types of books, looking at these things. And there's lots of famous authors that have released books about this and podcast. And I really like listening to different podcasts with people, interviews with people that have gone through different things. And you can see how they've managed to do those things and what it took psychologically in order to do those, so yeah, I really love that sort of area of self-help and that type of area. I don't like the title because I think self-help has gotten bad connotation over the years, but I really do. What about you?

Andrew: Yeah, I mean, I do find it fascinating, like human behavior is really interesting. But I guess I just don't spend too much time with that genre of book or podcast. But I do, maybe spend a little bit more time on self-improvement. So instead of, you know, like, focusing on other people's behaviors, and getting to notice other people and how they behave and act, I maybe spend more time thinking about how I act and how I behave and how I can, you know, do that, in a better way. Be a better person in general. So, things like meditation, or mindfulness, and listening and reading some content about that. So yeah, I think it is interesting, but you know, there's just only so many hours in the day. We can't be experts about everything, right? So. Well, anyways, listeners and Culips members, I think we will wrap things up here. So, thank you for listening to us again today. And we'll talk to you next time. Bye bye!

Anna: See you next time.

Andrew: That brings us to the end of this lesson. Talk to you next time. Bye!

Detailed Explanations

A dark place

Noun

Andrew and Anna go through the four key components of gaslighting, which is a kind of emotional abuse that happens when someone makes you doubt what you see or feel. Gaslighting can include denying your experiences, making your feelings seem unimportant (trivialization), saying bad things about you (projecting), or not showing love (withholding affection). Andrew explains that being treated this way can make you feel very sad or depressed and can lead you to a really **dark place**.

Being in 'a dark place' means experiencing significant emotional and psychological pain. The term 'dark' typically refers to the absence of light or the color black, but in this context, it implies something gloomy, evil, or depressing.

For instance, situations like losing a loved one or moving to a new city alone and struggling to make friends are examples that could lead you to 'a dark place.' This expression accurately describes emotional problems without mentioning specific details. You might say to a friend, "Hey, I've been in a dark place lately. Could we get together soon? I'm feeling really lonely."

On the other hand, when you are happy and feel good, you can say you are in "a good place" or "a great place." Like, you might say, "I've been in a great place since I left my old job and started my own business."

Here are a few more examples with **a dark place**:

Terry: What's wrong with Lauren? She's been ignoring my texts recently.

Rebecca: She's been going through a tough time. She and John are in the process of breaking up.

Terry: Oh no. They've been together for like six years, haven't they?

Rebecca: Exactly. Lauren's in **a pretty dark place** right now, so we should just be patient and support her when she's ready to see us.

George: Grandma seems to have been in **a dark place** ever since Grandpa died. I think we should go visit her this weekend.

Julie: Good idea. We can bring her a homemade treat, too.

To take credit for [something]

Verb

Anna provides an example scenario of gaslighting in the workplace. If you share ideas with a colleague and then that colleague **takes credit for** your ideas during a meeting but later denies that they were your ideas in the first place, that is a form of gaslighting.

'To take credit for [something]' means to accept praise and recognition for something you did or didn't do. This phrase is often used when someone dishonestly claims they did something.

For example, if Ben pretends he cooked an entire Thanksgiving meal by himself, when his wife actually did most of it, Ben is taking credit for her work. Similarly, if Jessica says, "My boss is always trying to take credit for my work," she means her boss is trying to get praise for work he didn't actually do.

Another phrase, 'to give credit where credit is due,' means to acknowledge someone's hard work when they deserve it. For example, a manager might say, "I have to give credit where credit is due. Without the efforts of my marketing team, this project would never have succeeded."

Here are a few more examples with **to take credit for**:

Mark: That landscape photo you posted on Instagram is beautiful. Where did you take it?

Fiona: Oh, I didn't take it. My sister's husband took it on their trip to Iceland. He's a great photographer, isn't he?

Mark: Really? You might want to add a photo credit in the caption. Otherwise, it seems like you're **taking credit for his photography**. I thought you took the picture yourself.

Fiona: I didn't think of that. OK, I'll add it right now.

Josie: Congratulations on winning your soccer game! You played incredibly well today. They would have lost if it weren't for you!

Lee: Thanks, but **I can't take all the credit for the win**. Without our goalie's amazing saves, we would have been doomed.

Josie: You're too humble. Let's go celebrate and get some ice cream.

Lee: Sounds great!

More than [adjective] to Expression

Anna mentions an example of gaslighting from her own life. Although it is a personal anecdote about an ex, she tells Andrew that she is **more than happy to** share it with him and the listeners.

More than [adjective] is a fantastic way to emphasize an adjective. We usually use this with positive-sounding adjectives like happy, eager, willing, or ready. You might see it on its own, as in, “Are you ready to depart?” “I’m **more than ready!**” You may also see it followed by a verb in its infinitive with “to” – for instance, “Don’t hesitate to ask me any questions. I’m **more than happy to** offer my assistance.”

In Anna’s case, she could have simply said, “I’m happy to share this story.” However, she chose to emphasize this sentiment and say “I’m **more than happy to** share this story” because she wanted to reassure Andrew and the listeners that she is completely comfortable sharing a story about her private life.

Since **more than [adjective]** is used to emphasize the adjective, be careful not to use this when you feel neutral or reserved about something.

Here are a few more examples with **more than [adjective] to**:

Derek: Hey, Linda. I hate to ask, but...

Linda: What is it?

Derek: Could you help me move next weekend? None of my family is available and I don’t think I can do it alone in one day.

Linda: Oh! I would be **more than happy to help**. I have no plans. When should I come over?

Tony: It’s great to have you on the team, Isabella.

Isabella: Thank you! I’m excited to get started in my new role. I’ve been trying to switch from sales to marketing for a while now.

Tony: I’m sure you’ll do a great job. Now, if you ever have any questions or concerns, please drop by my office anytime. I’m **more than willing to assist you**.

Isabella: That’s great to know. Thanks again.

To go back on [something]

Phrasal verb

In Anna's story, she describes an experience of being gaslit in a past relationship. She recalls that she and her partner had reached an important agreement. However, a month later, her partner completely denied ever making such an agreement and went back on his word. This breach of trust left Anna feeling hurt and questioning whether her reaction was an overreaction.

The expression **to go back on [something]** means to break a promise or an agreement. It is a transitive phrasal verb, which requires a direct object to complete its meaning. So, a sentence like "He went back on" is incomplete. You must mention the object. For example, "He went back on his promise" or "He went back on the agreement."

The opposite of 'to go back on' is 'to follow through on.' For example, "I would never **go back on** my word. I always follow through on my commitments, even when it isn't easy."

Here are a few more examples with **to go back on**:

Jennifer: Frank, where are you? I tried calling you over and over!

Frank: Sorry, Jennifer. I'm not going to be able to help you move today after all.

Jennifer: Are you serious? I can't believe you're **going back on your promise** again. You always do this!

Frank: I'm really sorry. I know, I screwed up.

Howard: Hey, what's wrong? You look down.

Monica: I found out today that I'm not getting promoted after all.

Howard: What? But your boss promised that you would get the promotion by the end of the year! What happened?

Monica: I don't know. She gave me some vague excuses, but it's clear that it's not going to happen.

Howard: Wow. I'm sorry, Monica. It's really horrible of her **to go back on her word** like that.

Monica: Yeah. I definitely can't trust what she says anymore.

To second-guess oneself

Verb

Anna recounts how she felt awful after her ex went back on his word. She began to second-guess herself and her memory of the agreement she thought they had made the month before.

The expression **second-guess yourself** refers to doubting a decision that you have already made. It involves feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about whether you chose correctly. For instance, imagine accepting a job promotion. Initially, you might feel thrilled about the new title and salary increase. However, soon you might start worrying whether the additional responsibilities will be overwhelming. These doubts and concerns about whether you made the right choice are second-guessing yourself.

Although everyone second-guesses themselves now and then, doing it constantly can be harmful. As Anna and Andrew discuss, consistently making someone else second-guess themselves, especially intentionally, is a form of gaslighting.

Here are a few more examples with **to second-guess oneself**:

Marcus: Are you ready to go yet?

Emily: I think so. Is this dress too flashy? I bought it specifically for the wedding, but now I'm **second-guessing myself**.

Marcus: No, it looks great. It's bright but modest. Don't worry, it's appropriate for the reception.

Emily: Alright. I guess you're right. Let's go!

Dominic: So, it turns out I got a C on my history exam.

Natalia: Only a C? I thought you studied really hard for that one and were feeling confident.

Dominic: I felt confident when I sat for the test, but when I checked it over before handing it in, I began to **second-guess myself** on the multiple choice questions and I changed some of the answers. I should have stuck with my instincts.

Natalia: That's too bad. I guess you learned your lesson.

To butter [somebody] up

Phrasal verb

Andrew shares an observation with Anna about workplace dynamics. He says that he hasn't seen instances of gaslighting through the withholding of compliments or praise, but he has observed a different form of manipulation. Specifically, he mentions bosses who excessively praise employees as a way to 'butter them up' and encourage them to do additional work.

The phrasal verb **to butter [someone] up** is an idiom and, contrary to what the words might suggest, has nothing to do with cooking! It means to flatter or praise someone excessively, often with the goal of gaining something from them. For example, if you're hoping for a favor from a friend, you might compliment their appearance, laugh more at their jokes, or invite them out for a meal. By 'buttering them up' in this way, your friend may become more likely to say yes to your request.

This expression is believed to originate from an ancient Indian tradition where people would throw clarified butter (ghee) at statues of gods to seek favors. In a sense, they were literally 'buttering up' the statues!

While there are many synonyms for this phrase, such as 'brown-nosing', 'sucking up', and 'bootlicking', these terms often carry a more judgmental and negative connotation. On the other hand, 'to butter [someone] up' is a good expression for describing excessive flattery with a neutral to moderately negative tone. Here are a couple more examples with **to butter [somebody] up**:

Drew: Wow, Wanda made another sale today? She's a pro!

Bonnie: Her trick is **buttering up the customers**. She's very good at flattering them and getting on their good side without seeming insincere.

Drew: I wish I was half as good a salesperson as her!

Julian: Hey, do you think Jill will give me a raise if I ask her?

Christie: She might, but you'd better make sure she's in a good mood before you ask.

Julian: That's true. I wonder if I should try **to butter her up** a little bit first.

Christie: If you offer to tidy up the break room and help her organize her files, I bet she'll say yes to anything you ask for.

Julian: OK, I'll do exactly that then. Wish me luck!

Quiz

1. What does it mean to go back on one's word?

- a) To fulfill a promise
- b) To break a promise
- c) To not make any promises
- d) To slightly change a promise

2. Which of the following is a good example of 'second-guessing yourself'?

- a) Taking a job offer without hesitation
- b) Spending some time deciding between outfits and then choosing one
- c) Ordering an entrée at a restaurant and then worrying that it was the wrong choice
- d) Letting your spouse make a decision for you

3. Which of the following means the same as 'to butter up'?

- a) To flatter
- b) To insult
- c) To interrogate
- d) To prepare for cooking

4. Your friend apologizes for not talking with you much lately and says that she has been in a dark place. What does she mean?

- a) She has been without electricity for a while
- b) She has been very busy
- c) She has been struggling with emotion or mental health issues
- d) She has been very bored with her life

5. Your coworker says, "I can't believe Tracy took credit for my idea." In other words, what did Tracy do?

- a) She disagreed with your coworker's idea
- b) She expanded and improved upon your coworker's idea
- c) She insulted your coworker's idea
- d) She claimed that it was her own idea

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever witnessed or experienced gaslighting in your life? Please explain.
2. Do you tend **to second-guess yourself**, or are you usually confident in your decisions?
3. What advice would you give someone who is in **a dark place**?
4. Do you think you would be able to notice if someone were trying **to butter you up**? Has it ever happened before? Have you ever tried **to butter someone else up**? Please explain.
5. In your opinion, is it ever OK **to go back on** a promise? In what scenario would it be excusable, if any? Please explain.

Quiz Answers

1.b 2.c 3.a 4.c 5.d

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