REFLECTION SHEET

I Didn’t Mean It That Way

Usually true. Almost never the point.

Two ordinary biases guarantee the gap. The actor–observer bias means I explain my own behavior by my circumstances and yours by your character. The illusion of transparency means I badly overestimate how clearly you can read what I meant — I know my short reply was a joke so vividly that it feels broadcast. It is not broadcast. Intention is a fact about me. Impact is a fact about you. The error is offering the first as though it settled the second.

A Practice to Begin

Bring to mind something you said recently that landed wrong. Do not rehearse your explanation. Write only what the other person received — the words, the tone, the silence — with your intention left out of the account entirely.

Reflection Questions

1. What did you intend?
2. What landed? Say it without the word “but” anywhere in the sentence.
3. What did you want to remain true about yourself, that made the impact hard to hear?
4. Where do you use a sharpened instrument — sarcasm, speed, precision — and tell yourself you use it well?
5. What would it cost you to ask “tell me more about how that hit you,” and then stay in it longer than is comfortable?
6. What would help, and have you asked?

An Invitation for the Week

One repair this week. Own your part with no “but” anywhere in the sentence, and then ask what would help.

Centering impact means giving up the story in which I am the good guy.

— Intent Versus Impact and Its Causes