

# Mike Ehrmantraut and The Profound Power of Silence

We find a case of polar opposites in *Better Call Saul*, where two characters have sharply contrasting speaking styles. The character of Saul Goodman (Bob Odenkirk) is a chatterbox. The way the writers get Jimmy's personality to pop and stand out is to put him in a room with somebody who doesn't use words. In this example, that's Mike Ehrmantraut (Jonathan Banks), a man of such few words that he speaks only when absolutely necessary. He doesn't even have a lot of facial expressions or body language; instead he is a blank slate and we have no idea what he's thinking. He's completely poker faced and plays everything straight. And then, when he does take an action, it's decisive. He doesn't equivocate or waffle. In fact, he's the opposite of Jimmy in just about every possible way.

It was ingenious of Vince Gilligan and Peter Gould to give Mike a prominent role in *Better Call Saul* and Jimmy's backstory, because we have the opportunity to learn a lot more about this laconic character. In this particular scene, Mike is called in and arrested. Two cops, one playing good cop, the other bad,

interrogate him. They try to work Mike and get him to crack, but in the entire scene, all Mike says is one word.

INT. POLICE STATION — INTERVIEW ROOM — PRESENT DAY

PRESENT-DAY MIKE in answering profile, dressed as he was at the end of episode 105.

ABBASI (O.S.)  
Don't know why we had to do it this way...

NEW ANGLE: Seated Mike coolly faces the cops from Philly, DETECTIVES KARIM ABBASI and GREG SANDERS, across an interview table. As per APD regulations, there is also an ALBUQUERQUE DETECTIVE sitting in on this session. He hangs back, arms folded. His job is simply to observe that these visiting cops play by the rules.

Abbasi, the younger of the two, takes a small NOTEPAD from his jacket -- spiral bound across the top, easy to pocket. He flips it open. Ready to write down what Mike has to say.

ABBASI  
Coulda been friendly and talked at your house. You really want the formal treatment?

Mike simply stares into space, impassive. A stone.

MIKE  
Lawyer.

SANDERS  
Come on, Mike. We got a couple questions, is all. Ain't nothin' but a thing.

MIKE  
Lawyer.

ABBASI  
You're not under arrest. Anyone here

say "arrest?" No. You wanna walk,  
walk... But I gotta say, I expected  
more cooperation from you on this.  
Cop to cop.

The appeal to the Thin Blue Line. Mike isn't impressed.  
Once more:

MIKE

Lawyer.

Leaning against the wall in the B.G., the Albuquerque  
detective shifts his weight a little. It's a subtle  
message: *Get this guy his lawyer.*

Abbasi and Sanders grudgingly relent. So be it. The hard  
way, it is. Abbasi tucks his notepad back in his jacket.

ABBASI

Fine. What lawyer?

Mike reaches into his pocket and slides a familiar blue  
business card across the table. It lands in a nice CLOSE UP  
on our hero's new catchphrase: "Need a will? Call McGill!"

END ACT ONE

Unlike Jimmy McGill, it's the power of Mike's character to be laconic. His  
economy of words speaks louder than if he had said a thousand things.

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## Episode Cited

"Five-O," *Better Call Saul*, written by Gordon Smith; Sony Pictures Television/AMC.