Sometimes people say things that are different than what they mean. This article is about one of those phrases.

This is Joe. He is talking to Alex. Alex is worried that he may lose his new job. If Joe says…

“Don’t burn bridges”

or

*Alex has a good job. If he loses his job, he may wish that*

*he had it back.*

he may have ideas to help Alex keep his job. Joe may be trying to give Alex *advice.*

Joe may be thinking that…

“Don’t burn bridges” does not refer in any way to fire or any foot, rail, or highway suspension. A bridge makes a connection and “don’t burn bridges” means to be careful to keep connections (usually with other people) friendly and safe. For Alex, it means that being reliable to others may help things go better for him at work and save his job.

Many times, “Don’t burn bridges” is used with a comfortable voice by a friend or a family member. An example of this is when Joe used the phrase to give his friend, Alex some *friendly* advice.

Sometimes “Don’t burn *your* bridges” is used by a co-worker or boss at work. The word ‘your’ in the phrase may mean this is more of a warning than it is friendly advice, especially if it is accompanied by a serious voice. In this case, “Don’t burn your bridges” means that it’s important to work on more effective responses soon. Of course, the phrase may be used in many other situations, too.

Noticing where the conversation takes place, who is talking, and the tone of voice can help to determine what is meant by the phrase, “Don’t burn bridges.”

*I want Alex to be happy and keep his job.*

or

*It’s important for Alex*

*To cooperate with his boss.*