

The POWER of LANGUAGE

By CAT THOMPSON

LANGUAGE. IT'S THE PREFERRED METHOD OF COMMUNICATION in our culture — the fuel we use to empower our desires, to direct and align our energy. Language has immense power, but its impact depends entirely on how we wield it.

Because words are so often used automatically and unconsciously, we have learned to treat them lightly. In daily conversation, we speak the majority of our words from habit, convenience and social obligation rather than from clear intent.

If we realized the potential that language has to create and transform our lives, we would pay a great deal more attention to our utterances. We'd be as determined to get our language "in shape" as we are to master and hone our bodies.

Whether or not we realize it, we are constantly using language to evolve our ideas and beliefs into concrete reality. By becoming more aware of the impact and power of language, we can make more conscious, insightful choices about how we express ourselves, and how we interpret others. Consider, for example ...

THE POWER OF "I"

"I" is a super-charged word. When you say, "I am," the words that follow speak volumes — to yourself and others — about how you define yourself.

"I have, I choose, I love, I enjoy, I can, I will" are also words of strong intent. When we feel powerful, we naturally employ these kinds of "I" statements. When we feel less powerful or fear that our power will create conflict, we tend to water down our words, either by avoiding "I", by saying "I don't know" or "I am not sure" or by following "I" with other ambivalent, unclear statements.

WHAT IF EVERY WORD YOU UTTERED CAME TRUE INSTANTLY? WHAT IF YOU WERE REQUIRED TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON EVERYTHING YOU SAID? HOW WOULD YOUR LANGUAGE CHANGE? WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO TALK AT ALL?

"I think I can," for example, doesn't have much power compared to "I know I can" or "I can" or "I will." Neither does "I guess so" — a red flag to your listener that even if you agree to something, your heart will not be in it. "I can't" is a strong statement of victimization, implying that circumstances outside of your control are running things and you have no power to change them.

Another common phrase — "I want" — tends to distance us from the things we yearn for rather than bringing them closer. "Want" means "to desire without having." So by establishing ourselves in a state of "want," we set ourselves up to forever pine for something we accept as out of reach.

Substituting "I have" for "I want" is a good way of projecting ourselves mentally into the realm of having, and can also make us aware of all the unconscious reasons why we do not yet have the thing we are wanting. Practice using "I have" or "I choose" instead of "want" and see what kinds of reactions you observe in yourself.

MANIPULATION AND COERCION

So much of the way we present our ideas has to do with what we expect in return. If we are afraid our idea or request will be rejected, we may use language that is confusing and indirect. In this way, we have a chance of "snaring" someone into agreeing to something they don't quite understand.

For example, rather than say "I would like some help organizing my studio on Saturday — would you be willing to help me?," we might say, "What are you doing on Saturday?" After finding out our listener isn't busy, we might sigh, "I just feel so overwhelmed by my life these days. I

have so much to do and no time to do it and I am just sick of struggling to do everything by myself."

Eager to stop this flow of despair, our friends may "offer" to help, yet some part of them may be resentful that they were not presented a clear request and the opportunity to make a straightforward choice.

Using language to manipulate is costly in terms of energy. Using direct and honest language frees up that energy to be more playful and present with those you love. Practice asking for what you need in a more direct manner. You may be surprised at the level of fun and enthusiasm that returns to your relationships.

VAGUENESS AND AMBIVALENCE

When we utter committed and direct statements, we know we will be expected to follow through on them. So we sometimes devise very subtle ways of sending messages about whether we are really willing to do what we say, or if our listener can expect us to bail out of our agreements.

"I'll try" is a perfect example. If I tell someone "I'll try," I may be subtly sending the message that I have given myself a choice about completion, or that it won't be my fault if I don't get it done. Essentially, this phrase tells your listener that you are giving yourself permission to fail. It may also be a covert way of guilt-tripping your listener into accepting a less-than-wholehearted commitment or an eventual refusal.

"I'll try" can also be designed to let someone know you have the power to either withhold your consent or "graciously" bestow it. "I'll try" may come out when we are looking for recognition that we are consenting to sharing our precious energy and time, and that our effort is worthy of appreciation. It may also signal that we are overwhelmed but still willing to make room for the request.

On the other hand, in some cases, "I'll try" is fair warning that a person will NOT try. So how can we tell what someone means when they say "I'll try" or "I guess" (or that mother of all ambivalences: "whatever")? Words and phrases mean

different things to different people. Depending upon our own filters and the circumstances, we may hear any of these words as eager, open, resentful or downright hostile, and in fact their intent can vary enormously from speaker to speaker.

When in doubt, your best option is to ask for clarification. You can also try the "active listening method," in which you play back to the speaker what you've interpreted from their communication, even if that understanding is vague. "So what I hear you saying is that you may not make it on Monday." Whether they correct or confirm your impression, you have a better idea of where they stand.

If you find yourself speaking with vague and general language, take a moment to ask yourself how you can get your message across simply, directly, and with conviction. If you are afraid of offending someone or appearing hard or challenging, you may be unconsciously diffusing your words to be more acceptable to others. Do some soul searching to assess whether your need to be accepted is overriding your ability to own your ideas and assert your own power.

VERBAL RUNOFF

Generally, the more words you use to say something, the less power those words have. Feel the difference between a 12-word sentence and a five-word sentence. Practice using as few words as possible to get your message across. People who ramble, or who just like to hear themselves speak, get boring very quickly. If you find yourself in a conversational lull, or realize you have nothing to say, graciously accept the silence, simply listening to it and to whatever comes next.

As you become more comfortable with silence, more comfortable being powerful and more conscious of your word choices, your language will reflect your increased conviction and commitment. When you no longer waste words by using them as "filler," the words you do speak will have more power behind them. Be willing to speak your desired outcomes and state what is true for you. You will quickly discover what a powerful and transformative ally language can be. ☺

CONSCIOUS LANGUAGE

ACCORDING TO BOB STEVENS, president of Mastery Systems and the creator of a personal development method called Conscious Language, our choice of language can either hamper or enhance our ability to create the experiences of our choosing.

"Language is our fundamental software," explains Stevens. "It is the operating system that supports our thoughts and actions — but most of us don't realize how much of our life is run by our personal language 'program.' Nor do we realize the power that choosing our language more consciously has to reprogram our lives."

Stevens asserts that by "upgrading" our language choices, we can upgrade our attitudes, belief systems and life patterns. So how does one perform such an upgrade? For those who desire guidance and coaching, Stevens offers a series of workshops and audiotapes that teach the principles of

Conscious Language. For starters, Stevens advocates consistently adjusting one's vocabulary and mindset in several key ways:

REMEMBER THAT SPEAKING is self-fulfilling prophecy. Where your words lead, your mind and body will follow, so speak and think only that which you choose to have come into reality, now and continuously.

KEEP YOUR LANGUAGE first-person personal. Talk from your own experience and don't say "you" when you really mean "I."

SPEAK ABOUT THE PRESENT MOMENT whenever possible. Rather than recount stories about what happened before and how you felt then, focus on and say what you are experiencing now.

BE SPECIFIC AND DIRECT. Don't pollute your language by talking in circles, using conditionals (would, could, so that), tacking on vague modifiers (sort of, in a way), or saying things you don't really mean.

SPEAK POWERFULLY AND POSITIVELY. Forego the language of limitation (I can't, I don't, I won't, I want, I need) for the language of empowerment and choice (I can, I am, I will, I choose, I have, I love, I create, I enjoy).

WHENEVER YOU SAY THE WORDS "I AM," the words that follow are a declaration and are experienced by your subconscious self as a direct order. So statements like "I am broke," "I'm confused," or "I'm so fat" only tend to reinforce those states. Instead, directly express how you *feel* about your current reality (sad, scared, hopeless?), and then declare what you choose to be and do instead.

RESOURCES

Cat Thompson: www.emotionaltechnologies.com

Bob Stevens: www.masterysystems.com

