

Member's Quarterly

Summer 2025 Edition

Feature

Conscious Communication

The power of words



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Words and thoughts have a profound impact on well-being. Whether in upper management or a new employee, communicating skillfully is essential to further career goals. Being conscious of and responsible for your choice of words and phrases can make a huge difference in how colleagues perceive you and each other. Do they feel engaged or pushed away?

"Your Body Believes Every Word You Say" is a book by psychologist Barbara Huberman Levine.

In related research, testing of a subject's physical strength (kinesiology or muscle testing) identified dramatic shifts in physical energy, based on choices of words. Physical strength significantly weakened with negative language and increased with positive. In addition to testing words, testing negative and positive thoughts also affected strength.

Many English language phrases express violence and antagonism. For examples, saying "that's a killer dress you're wearing" or "fighting the war against cancer" or "I would die for chocolate" or "break a leg" are all violent phrases.

Two powerful words in the English language: I AM

The words I AM can declare negative or positive identities. For example, "I am angry" expresses your identity as being an angry person. A better way would be to say, "I'm feeling angry right now." This implies that your anger is temporary and does not define you.

Another example "I am afraid" implies that your basic nature is fear. Instead, you could say "I am feeling fearful right now and I choose to learn what I need to know."

BUT negates what is said before and TRY is a weakening word

When, as a manager, you're giving feedback to one of your team members, it's vital to express what you really intend to say. If you say, "Susan, you are such a wonderful team member BUT there's still room for improvement," Susan feels dismayed as she waits to hear what will follow the BUT. Much better and empowering for Susan is to use the word AND. "Susan, you are such a wonderful team member AND there's still some room for improvement." Susan will readily accept your feedback and feel validated.

Trying is NOT doing. Trying indicates a weak commitment, or even no commitment. If you say, "I'll try to meet you for lunch tomorrow," this leaves your friend wondering, unsure. If you want to make plan, commit and say, "I'll meet you for lunch tomorrow at noon."

When we say BUT, we can immediately self-correct with the word AND. This correction reduces anxiety. Instead of saying "I will TRY," be sure you can make a commitment and say, "I will."

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It's important to practice catching yourself when you use negative phrases. One effective tool is to put money in a jar each time you use a negative phrase. This can reward you. For example, each month you could then donate the funds to a charity, or you and your colleagues could pool your money and go out for a festive meal.

Communication includes active listening

With conscious communication, words are not just spoken. Words are also heard. Listening improves professional relationships. When someone is speaking, it's important to be in receptive mode, to really hear what they're saying. For active listening, stay present instead of thinking of your own reply. Then you are really listening. When a person feels heard, a positive connection is made.

The goal of conscious communication is to take responsibility for our spoken words and ultimately, our thoughts. Self-correction works very well as we certainly don't need to be perfect. Practicing sharpens our skills and enhances our 'being present' to ourselves and with others.

Words and thoughts can harm or heal. Language is a key to identifying the core beliefs that run our lives. These beliefs and assumptions may be preventing you from functioning in productive ways. Especially now, when we live in such stressful times, our use of positive words and thoughts can make a difference. Your colleagues, friends and family will be encouraged, making life better.

Eleanor Kibrick is a certified coach and group facilitator who works with individuals, business teams and other groups to work effectively using clearer communications. She can be reached via email at eleanor@eleanorkibrick.com.