

A Word to the Wise

The following question was asked of Milton Erickson:

“Are you aware of the way in which you use your words?” He replied:

“I certainly am, and I want to emphasize the importance of that awareness in all of you. In any work, you are going to use words to influence the psychological life of an individual today; you are going to use words to influence his organic life today; you are going to also influence his psychological and organic life twenty years from now. So you had better know what you are saying. You had better be willing to reflect upon the words you use, to wonder what their meanings are, and to seek out and understand their many associations.”

Our thinking leads to our words leads to our actions. The following are three different ways our thinking leads to the results we get in our lives:

1. How specific and well-thought out are our outcomes and goals
2. What we think comes across in what we say to people and what we say to people affects them and what they think, say and do
3. What we think affects what we say to ourselves and that affects our results as well as our health and well-being.

1. Positively stated Outcomes

A well-formed outcome is an internal map of physical senses of specifically what you want. It meets the specific criteria of positive language form, sensory based (see, hear, feel), self-initiated and maintained, an appropriate, achievable chunk size, congruently desirable, specifies evidence procedure (a demonstration of it), and specifies resources.

What is important about well-formed outcomes? They must be stated in positive language patterns. *“I want to feel comfortable in front of groups.” Or I want to make \$250,000 this year.* They give direction to thinking and action, address the plausibility and the ecology of the outcome, reduce communication mishaps and conflict within you and between you and the other person or the organization, sharpen thinking and brings into focus, make communicating our outcomes, from major goals to small tasks, easier and more understandable, and allow for smoother acceptance. Stating outcomes in negative language, “I don’t want a red car”, actually brings about what we don’t want. Our brain has no way of processing the word, “don’t.”

Whatever you are doing, get in the habit of outcome thinking (see, hear, feel). Decide what you want, how much money you want to make, who you want to be in a relationship with, who you want to do business with, where you want to travel. Plan outcomes of conversations with service people, family members, employees, friends, patients, customers, customer service agents. Focus on building your business or practice or expanding your customer base as a goal which will give you a feeling a accomplishment. Paying down debt is not a goal, it is a task. When finishing a task, you get a feeling of relief.

When you decide what you want and so state it, the vibration of the words begins the process of setting your congruency. It aligns your physical, mental and spiritual body with the goal and begins the process of manifestation.

2. What do you say to or about others

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin in his book, *Words that Hurt, Words that Heal*, says, *“That words are powerful may seem obvious, but the fact is that most of us, most of the time, use them lightly. We choose our clothes more carefully than we choose our words, though what we say about and to others can define them indelibly. That is why ethical speech—speaking fairly of others, honestly about ourselves and carefully to everyone—is so important. If we keep the power of words in the foreground of our consciousness, we will handle them as carefully as we would a loaded gun.”* When we speak ill of others we alienate ourselves from them. It has even been noted that because of the way that the brain is set up to delete, distort and generalize through our

five physical senses, we actually only see those favorable and unfavorable characteristics in others because they are in ourselves. We are only hurting ourselves when we speak ill of others.

It is in times of crisis or anger, depression or emotional upset that the words of our unconscious spill out into the words and come alive. Using words such as “never” or “always” in sentences like *“You’ll always have this problem”* or *“You’ll never overcome this problem”* installs the problem in a person’s mind at a deeper more generalized level. Doctors and nurses say things like *“This won’t hurt too much, you must feel terrible, there is nothing I can do”*. Instead of saying things like *“Feel safe. You are being cared for. This will be over before you know it. Quick and easy. This will heal quickly”*. The most successful people not only have the technical skills for what they do, they also have the people skills. They use words to empower people rather than discourage them. A brilliant “technician” with mediocre people skills will have fewer customers than someone with average ability with great people skills. The most successful people take the time to build relationships with people. Make it an outcome to use words to empower people and leave them with a better feeling about themselves than they had before they talked to you.

3. What do you say to yourself?

Then it comes down to what do we say to ourselves, our self-talk. Ever call yourself stupid for doing something or think you are not good enough? Sometimes we say terrible things to ourselves that we would never say to another human or even our dogs (or cats). Before you can build trust with others, you must first build it with yourself.

Words fire different neurons in the brain and body. What you think of yourself and tell yourself comes across in your actions, your facial expressions and your voice tones. Do you get up every morning thinking that life is fun, challenging, exciting and full of new experiences or do you drag yourself out of bed for just another grim same-old day? (Taking into the account that some of us are night owls). Do you have the Defeatist attitude or the Rocky attitude. The Defeatist says *“it won’t work, why try”, “they’ll never buy” (and then wonders why the prospect never buys), “no one loves me”*. The Rocky-ist says *“I can do this”, “life gets easier and easier”, “Thank you, God for the abundance in my life”*. Ever hear the expression, *“I feel like I have a black cloud over my head”*. ? I said that to a mentor one day because that’s how I felt (cloudy, depressed, gray) and she said, *“Change the black clouds to blue skies with occasional white clouds.”* The feeling went away almost instantly. Sometimes you can almost see the black clouds over someone else. That is the vibration of their mood and thinking coming across in their energy and body language.

How you think about what you do – is it a job, a career or a mission? A research study was done on a group of 300 hospital maintenance workers in Massachusetts. They were all hired for the same job (take out trash), at the same salary, at the same location. The people with jobs said, *“Anyone can do this, no training, no control, no freedom, I cannot wait for the weekends”*. The workers who look at their position as a career said, *“I am on my way up, This is just a stepping stone, I cannot wait for the weekend.”* This attitude cause people to not enjoy where they are at the moment. The third group looked at what they did as a mission or a calling and said, *“Lots of training and expertise, lots of control and freedom, this is my mission in life.”* These people took the time to learn all of the names of the patients and changed pictures in rooms. When I changed how I thought of what I do for a living from career to mission, many things changed for me. Once purpose is discovered, everything we do has meaning, even the menial tasks.

Dr. Laura King, Associate Professor of Psychology at SMU says, *“While most of us might think of reality and experience as coming into the brain, it makes sense to think of the brain as CREATING experience and, therefore, making changes in ITSELF. Our thoughts, expectations, emotions and memories activate patterns of “remembered” neural activation in the brain, literally changing its biological function and structure. Our internalized scripts, stories, and images are physically materialized in our brains. Physical cause of psychological events are not “more basic” than psychological causes of physical events. When you change the way you think, you literally*

CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK.” Because thinking and words are so intertwined, changing one will change the other. How are you use using your words?

Exercises:

1. Set an outcome in see, hear, feel terms and state it in the positive and notice the results
2. Set your 5, 10, 20 year and lifetime goals
3. Spend an hour, day or week sincerely complimenting strangers you meet in the course of your day. Of course, you can do this with people you know also
4. Go around for a couple of days and tell yourself “*I’m depressed.*” Then change that and tell yourself “*life is great!*”. Notice how quickly your state can change regardless of what is going on in your life.
5. Change how you think and speak about something or someone and notice what happens.