

WORDS SHAPE REALITY

Communication and language are more than just the words people speak. While the words are important, there's another whole world happening behind them.

The impact of our words and what's happening around those words don't just shape how we see ourselves; they also shape how we see others and how other people see us. The language we use can change our lives for better or for worse; it can also alter the actions and lives of others. **The words we speak, questions we ponder, and language we listen to shape our total perception of the world** — both in the immediate moment and over the course of our lifetime.

— *Joel Kimmel*

LANGUAGE & LEADERSHIP

Most of us think Language lives outside of us and speak about it as a “thing” that we do rather than the phenomenon that generates who we are.

Our language shapes every interpretation we have and therefore affects how we speak about life.

How we speak about life determines the way our world occurs in the moment. With a deep understanding of this, we can engage in our world with the intent to make sense out of what is occurring, to think, listen and speak from your internal wisdom to manifest our desires and, if we are lucky, allow others to join in our game.

Leadership is a competency that can be learned. **Effective leaders are competent at crafting narratives that allow others to see how their “Identity” fits into the leader’s narrative;** those individuals are then willing to follow the narrative offered. True leaders are intentionally aware of this aspect of leadership and speak with that background “listening”. They are aware of what is at risk, the intricacies of the work dynamic, and are willing to dance with that awareness, knowing another’s intention and vision of the future is waiting to manifest in the language they speak.

Distiction: BACKGROUND of OBVIOUSNESS

We are born into an existing conversation which was generated from our ancestors and their traditions and understanding, and from our own experiences. These background conversations impact the way we listen and can offer us a false sense that our own thinking and the other's are the same.

Breakdowns occur when we are thinking the person we are speaking with has the same background of obviousness as we do. A good practice is to confirm that the other's Conditions of Satisfaction (CoS), their needs and wants, are the same as yours, rather than assuming that you share a common background of obviousness. The more clarity you have surrounding the CoS, the more powerful the request and promise will be.

Before taking any action, make sure you're clear on who the customer and the performer are, and what the Conditions of Satisfaction are.

Distinction: ASSESSMENTS & ASSERTIONS

Assertions – measurable, objective, proved with use of evidence, shared, agreed-upon standards by community, true or false.

Assessments – opinions, subjective, judgments, interpretations, they are relative, never true or false.

Problems occur when Assessments are spoken as “the truth” and are experienced as Assertions.

We make up Assessments all the time about ourselves and others. Then we live in them as if they were true and label others with the way we think they are. This action diminishes one’s ability to show up authentically with others. If we can stop or catch the automatic need to make up stories about ourselves and others, it allows us to show up more authentically in our lives.

*You can **ground** a person’s Assessment by getting the story about it from the source. Ask questions for clarity and grounding, not to argue for or against, but so that you can discover what others care about, what concerns they have. Once you gain that understanding, you can then establish openness around your interpretation and perspective.*

When offering an Assessment to another person, open the conversation intentionally, with something like: "My assessment of xyz is abc....", so the listener gets that this is not about being true or false or right or wrong but rather your interpretation of the circumstance.

Our ASSESSMENTS of OTHERS:

When we begin to form assessments of those around us, we then look for evidence to prove that our assessments are valid. We hear comments like, "See, I told you so", "I knew you were going to say that", "They always do that". This is a good indicator that we have fallen into this mode of thinking. *The way people exist for us is held in the Assessments we have about them.*

To perceive other people differently we need to begin the practice of grounding our assessments and looking at others for what, in fact, their actions are rather than what we think they are. *We interact with and see people through our assessments of them. To discover their greatness, look newly.* By simply saying, "Bob is X," he becomes that in your eyes and stays that way until you shift that assessment.

LANGUAGE FOR ACTION:

Speech Acts: There are six distinct types of sentences we speak that generate Actions:

Request - *speaker asks someone else to take action*

"Will you please take out the trash?" vs. "The trash is full." (ask, questions, please, direct or indirect)

Promise - *speaker commits to fulfill action requested*

Varies from strong to weak: "I will definitely be there at 7:30," to, "I might be able to try and come at some point but can't really say when, or if I will at all."

Declaration - *made by speaker and changes the future*

To make something so; "By the authority vested in me...."

Assessment - *speaker makes an interpretation or a judgment*

- Opens and closes the future, may be grounded (valid) or ungrounded (invalid)
- Opinions, judgments, interpretations, conclusions – most often neither true nor false

Assertion - *speaker can commit to provide a witness for what is claimed*

- Is observable, can only take place in the present or the past
- "This is so." Fact, information; can be true or false)

Offer - *speaker commits to take action if accepted by listener*

- "I offer to do x if you accept or do Y."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO A REQUEST:

Clarify the specifics – what is wanted, by when, for whom, and why, etc.

Then, after clarifying the request, we still need to make a promise:

Accept the request – promise to fulfill.

Decline – promise not to fulfill.

Counter-offer – conditional promise to fulfill something else: “ I decline to do what you have requested by Tuesday, and I promise to do it by Wednesday at 5:00 pm.”

Commit-to-commit – promise to respond at some specific time in the future.

**Each of these conversational moves help the person requesting in some way.*

There is one other potential way to respond that avoids commitment and doesn't help the person making the request:

Noise – saying anything to avoid making a commitment

MEETINGS THAT PRODUCE RESULTS:

Leverage the Agenda

The meeting agenda can be more than just a statement of what you want to accomplish. It can be: An invitation to participate in a conversation that accomplishes a specific result, in a defined time frame. The management of these conversations will determine the effectiveness of the meeting — not only the outcome, but also the time it will take to produce the needed result. Begin with a declaration of the **mood** of the meeting:

- Ambition for a planning meeting
- Focused Attention for a decision-making meeting

Maintain the Meeting Focus

Do not try to address everything at once in the meeting. “Multi-tasking” can be counterproductive, because focus will be scattered over several priorities. When planning a meeting: Clearly *define the focus* and for what period of time — then stick to that plan.

If other issues/topics/priorities are identified, make a note of these, put them in the “Parking Lot” and address them once you have completed what you or the team has declared as the current priority.

There is much higher return of time and energy when we stay focused on just one thing at a time.

MEETINGS THAT PRODUCE RESULTS:

*Manage all conversations so they stay focused in **one domain** at a time.*

It is very common for a meeting/conversation to start out as a business meeting, and before you know it, someone is talking about their personal feelings. "I don't like that, I think that it has always been this way and I want it to stay that way, etc....." *What started as a business conversation has turned into a personal/emotional conversation, and the two conflict with each other.* Slow things down, put the personal concern in the Parking Lot and proceed with the Business Conversation. Once the Business Conversation is complete, then go to the Parking Lot list and take the next most relevant conversation and begin that one anew.

One important Action: *remember, you can always call a "time out", slow things down and go back to where everyone was in alignment and then begin the conversation again from there.*

MANAGE the FEELING of BEING OVERWHELMED

To manage the accumulated action items from meetings, keep an **Action List**.

1. *Review* it weekly, checking off completed action items and removing items that are no longer relevant.
2. *Delegate* items that are still relevant to another person who is more involved in that project.
3. *Prioritize* remaining action items in "A," "B," or "C" categories – then create a new Action List.
 - Work on the "A" items during your "Productivity Zone", the time of day you are most effective.
 - Work on the "B" items on each side of your "Productivity Zone"
 - Work on the "C" items when the "A's" and "B's" are completed or you need a break from the "A" and "B" actions.

When possible, schedule back-to-back meetings for 45 minutes rather than one hour – use the 15 minutes to take a breath, prepare for the next meeting, or just enjoy yourself.

When you have accomplished a meaningful task/result, take time to acknowledge the accomplishment.

Using your name or the other's name when you are acknowledging an accomplishment adds meaning to the acknowledgement.

BEST PRACTICES for Working Smarter, NOT Harder:

Asking questions that generate clarity.

What is the purpose of the project?

What is the intended outcome, and what will it look like when it is complete? (Conditions of Satisfaction)

What role would you like me to play in the project, and what outcomes are you expecting me to generate?

What information do you think I should know that would allow me to make the biggest impact?

1. Taking Actions during the course of the project.

What are the major changes that have occurred since our last conversation, and what impact will these have on the intended outcomes?

What impact will they have on the ongoing progress?

What actions are being taken to maintain the focus of the project? Any anticipated “breakdowns” that I should know now? What actions should we be taking to address them?

2. Reviewing and Declaring the completion of the project.

What are the major changes that have occurred since our last conversation?

What impact will they have on the intended outcomes? Are all the Conditions of Satisfaction complete?

What worked well and what could we have done differently?

What would you/team like to be acknowledged for, and what are you/team most proud of during this project?

Declare your level of satisfaction, then Declare the project is complete

During your next meeting check in and see what you are discovering about working together by asking these types of questions.

VISION STATEMENTS and MANAGEMENT of CONVERSATIONS:

Most actions people take are drawn from their past and used in the present moment to manage their desires. These actions are usually unconscious and establish a pattern that has them believe "that is the way things are" and "life is/will always be this way". This automatic tendency of action is called our "Automaticity". We all fall into this pattern of thinking. One of the ways to shift others from "Automaticity" is to see the situation newly by asking "Vision Questions".

One such "Vision Question" might be, "What would it look like for you if everything turned out to your satisfaction?" "What do you see as the most important issue to address/resolve...?" *These types of questions call for the other to look into the future, which then leaves the past behind. If someone slips into the past, acknowledge what you are hearing and ask, "If we were starting from a clean slate, what would that look like?"*

Using Vision Statements and/or Vision Questions allows people to share their visions/ideas in the listening of "everything is possible," and "nothing is written in stone". Once there are enough visions/possibilities present and people show an attraction to one or two of these, you're ready to move the conversation to, "What do we see as the best way to begin to establish a structure the will take advantage of this ...?"

When you ask a "thinking question" it calls the person's awareness into the past. They then see what past experience is similar to this one, which may allow them to make sense of the present moment. "Thinking questions" are not wrong, they just generate an answer that is driven from the past. This is compared to a Vision Question that is generated from the possibility of a future that can be seen in the present moment.

THE POWER OF VISION QUESTIONS:

There's power in using Vision Questions when interacting with others. When one is asked: "What would it look like to you...?", the person has to shift from the thinking side of their brain to the visual, creative side.

Instead of trying to figure it out, they have to step back and look to see what it will look like.

This action in turn allows them to share their "interpretation" of the situation with you from a new angle. **This new "interpretation" will determine what action they see themselves taking to accomplish that task or vision.** When that transition occurs, then your mutual conversation is about managing their "interpretation" rather than whether they are doing it the way you think they should.

When people are given the opportunity to share their "vision/interpretation" of the situation, they experience their ideas as possible because they see themselves in that situation. This can open the doorway of partnership in the task.

It is about listening first to their "vision" of how they see themselves accomplishing the project and then moving to more detailed vision questions, such as: "This is great. How do you see this aspect of the project taking place?"

If there is an area that you would like them to do differently, you might consider making a suggestion, such as "Could you see yourself doing this aspect of the project this new way?"

VISION QUESTION EXERCISE:

The purpose of this exercise is to become more familiar with the distinction between using “thinking” and “visioning” questions.

1. Pick a real time situation you are dealing with that you would like to resolve or fix in some way.
2. Find a partner

Thinking Focus

3. Begin by asking your partner about their situation:
“What do you think you should do?”
Their response: “I think I should.....”
4. Ask further, “What else do you think you should do?”
Their response: “I think I should.....”

Visioning Focus

5. Have your partner state the situation
6. You ask them; “If this could fall into a place where it could work out, what would that look like?”
Their response: “It would look like.....”
7. Ask further, “What else could it look like...?”
Their response: “It could look like.....”
8. Ask “What action do you see you could take that would allow this to happen?”

**Manage other’s Visions by asking what actions they can you see yourself taking next.....*

MOOD: LIVING IN LANGUAGE

Moods are different than emotions. **Emotions** are caused by some unexpected outcome and last for a short period of time — from moments to a few hours. **Moods** are a long term way of being. Moods set the tone of our daily life. We wake up in a mood and we see the day through the filters that the mood generates. If we are in a mood of ambition, then everything looks like a possibility. If we wake up in a mood of resignation, then nothing looks like a positive possibility.

Moods also affect the way another person listens to your speaking. If you are in a positive mood and have a serious conversation with another, there is a good chance that the conversation will turn out as intended. But if you are in a negative mood, chances are that the conversation will worsen, and the result will fall far short of what you desire.

We have a saying that is good to keep in mind: *“The right conversation in the wrong mood is the wrong conversation”*. If you see the mood going sour, stop, breathe and shift the body to create a different mood. If that is not possible, call time out and reschedule the meeting for another date in the future.

Hot Tip: *Do not keep going on a conversation when the mood continues to sour.*

PROBLEM vs. BREAKDOWN

Problems and Breakdowns are similar in nature. They both are declaring the fact that something that had been intended to happen was interrupted by some event and the outcome is in jeopardy. As we step back and take a look, we can see that both a Problem and Breakdown begin the same way, and that is the sudden realization that the goal is at risk.

*With a **Problem** there always seems to be an element of blame, fault, excuses, trying to hide the problem, and pretense.* The person who is telling the world that there is a problem spends more time avoiding being blamed than fixing what has happened.

In the case of declaring a *Breakdown*, while it starts out the same as a problem, there is a very different intention behind the declaration of the Breakdown. *With a **Breakdown**, the intention is one of workability, resolve, collaboration, and a commitment to correct the breakdown rather than find blame or fault.* The first move in declaring a breakdown is to be accountable for our role in the matter and determine what commitments have been broken and then apologize for the interruption.

Once the breakdown has been declared, we can then move to *Speculation* and *Resolution*, then to *Future Action* to accomplish the goal.

10 LINGUISTIC BREAKDOWNS:

1. Not making requests
2. Making unclear requests
3. Not observing the mood of your requests
4. Living with uncommunicated expectations
5. Promising when you are not certain what was requested
6. Not declining requests
7. Breaking promises without taking care of the incompleteness
8. Treating assessments as fact
9. Making assessments without grounding for evidence
10. Making "Fantasy" affirmations and declarations

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

The power of actually acknowledging ourselves and others expands the ability to recognize, intentionally communicate and celebrate the accomplishments of teams, each individual and ourselves. This action creates enthusiasm and space to move forward with positive momentum.

The Three Domains of Acknowledgement are:

Recognition: For the work and effort the individual has put into this project.

*This action settles the Mind

Definition of Recognition: "Thanking the person for work or effort they have put into the project."

Acknowledgement: For the contribution it has made to the team, the client, and your company.

*This action settles the Being

Definition of Acknowledgement: "The action of expressing or displaying gratitude or appreciation for something."

Celebration: For the joy it is to work together and the opportunities that are yet to come. Includes a small action that takes you away from the current environment (a cake, a beer, a walk, golf, or a lunch)

*This action settles the physical body

Definition of Celebration: "The action of marking one's pleasure at an important event or occasion by engaging in enjoyable, often social, activity."