

The Power of WORDS

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Your Internal Programming

It never ceases to amaze me how managers - and people in general - fail to fully appreciate the importance of the words they have rattling around in their heads.

The meanings we attach to words determine the ways in which we perceive various situations that arise on a day-to-day basis. Your frame of mind, your interpretation of a situation, your mood – and more – are all powerful predictors of how you will approach and deal with a situation. If you start off on the wrong foot you will generally continue that way right to the end.

I first touched upon this subject in: *If You Cannot Manage Yourself You Cannot Manage Others* – the first book in the “Just Manage It!” series.¹

The Dangerous Power of “But”

Far too many managers try to soften the blow of criticism by starting off conversations with praise and appreciation. Then comes the “But” that acts as the divider between the good stuff and the *real* intention behind the conversation.

You have to realize – and you will have noticed you do this yourself – that as soon as “but” pops up it negates everything that went before it. When you hear “but”, your internal dialogue

immediately kicks in – and it kicks in on high alert, in defensive mode.

The “Right” Way to do Something and the “Wrong” Way

To declare something as the “wrong” way to act must surely mean that it is always wrong. The word “wrong” introduces permanency to our thinking. So too does the word “right”. Both words suggest an ignorance of context: what is right or wrong today in today’s circumstances may not necessarily be so tomorrow. We see this in a lot companies borrowing the strategies of others without assessing the situation, the market, the economy – the context.²

The way to get around this problem of right and wrong is to switch to “suitable” and “unsuitable”. The “right” way to do something can be “unsuitable” today in today’s context. What was “wrong” yesterday may actually be “suitable” today. Suitable and unsuitable are what I term “context sensitive”: there is no permanency to them and therefore “right” or “wrong” have no need to surface.

Beware the “Successful” Manager

To declare a CEO “successful” can be a very dangerous thing since

¹ Go to www.ColmMcCormack.com for further details, to download FREE chapters and to order your copy.

² Context and moving toward creating what I term “Context Intelligent Managers” features as a main chapter in *If You Cannot Manage Yourself You Cannot Manage Others*.

success is often measured by a narrow set of criteria: shareholder value, increased revenue and margins, reduced costs, etc. But an “effective” manager is something else: a person who is effective on the people front, on change, on commitment, buy-in, trust, communication, knowledgeable about and aware of context, and more.

You can be successful without being very effective. You can stumble across success, fluke it, fake it, and more. But when you’re ineffective it’s plain for all to see.

Is That Person a “Friend” or are They Just Being “Friendly”?

Very often, we race into new jobs and try to be friends with everyone. We fall into the aim of being liked. The trick of course is to focus upon being *friendly* as opposed to being friends.

The safer option is to be “friendly” first and then whatever transpires later can be determined in time.

“Confrontation” is Not “Conflict”

Far too many people refuse to “confront” their work colleagues simply because they don’t want to start a fight or spoil the atmosphere. But this instantly points to a lack of understanding on their part of the true meaning of “confrontation” in organizational life.

Confronting someone simply means bringing something up. The aim should always be to deal with an important issue *without* damaging the relationship and *without* attacking the person of the colleague being confronted.

Obviously, a manager should study the art of meaningful and effective confrontation in order to benefit himself, his organization, and the people around him. Confrontation is crucial in any business if true effectiveness, suitable behavior, and key synergies are to be realized.

“Conflict”, on the other hand, often refers to the “fighting” interpretation most people assign to it. But this is *not* to say that conflict is always bad. Research has shown numerous times that the most effective groups are those that can both confront members effectively and entertain conflict in a meaningful way: both confrontation *and* conflict are key features of effective and cohesive groups.

Very often, in order to resolve a conflict, a manager must confront the party or parties involved. A constructive and meaningful confrontation can bring about the positives of conflict.

Management is Full of “Problems” and Often Involves “Failure”

I always encourage managers – and people in general – to deal with their interpretation of “problems” and “failure” *before* they turn to managing their people and their business.

Most of us associate the word “problem” with “bad”. But in a world full of problems – the world of management – walking around with this interpretation in our heads is simply setting ourselves up for a constant nightmare.

The same can be said of “failure”. The simple truth is this: as a manager and/or business owner you *will* fail – it’s a guaranteed certainty. There is no

escaping problems or failure. You may certainly limit them in size and frequency but you can never eradicate them entirely.

This is why I encourage people to reframe: to view the same things from a different and more positive angle. Until a person creates and internalizes more meaningful definitions of the words “problem” and “failure” they will simply spend a lot of time getting in their own way.

I Asked For the “Reason”, Not an “Excuse”

You would not believe how often gifted and intelligent business owners have given me “reasons” that, when examined closely, turned out to be nothing more than “excuses” – and poor ones at that.

Long periods of time immersed in our organizations can see stale perspective, old habits, and denial or delusion set in. This is why my book, *If You Cannot Manage Yourself You Cannot Manage Others*, encourages managers and would-be managers to constantly reassess and reflect upon their own behaviors, their perspective, their mood, where they are getting their information from, and more.

A “Reason” is justifiable and understandable: an “Excuse” is never so.

And the List Goes On

This list of words and how we interpret them is longer than the few I have detailed in this article. The second book in the “Just Manage It” series – **Just Manage THEM!** *Effective People Management for Today’s Manager* – returns to this topic of words, their impact, and how a manager can use them to his benefit and the benefit of those around him. But we need more than a simple awareness of the words and our faulty perspective on their true meaning and effects: we must also reflect, reframe, practice, and then teach those around us.

The best way to manage others is to first ensure you can manage yourself. One of the key steps along the road to managing yourself is to unearth your interpretation of key words in your own head. Then, and only then, can you get out of your own way and move toward more effective and suitable management.



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