



LANGUAGE AND LEARNING: WORDS ARE PACKAGES OF IDEAS

Learning and development (L&D) is dependent on clear and compelling language to get through to learners. If a picture is worth a thousand words, two or three absorbing and instructive words strung together in a thoughtful and intentional sequence might well be worth a whole lot more than that.

Let's take a look at three examples:

1. Crucial Conversations® — Kerry Patterson is a co-author of this communication classic that has sold millions of copies around the world. Given its ongoing popularity, Kerry has found himself in countless conversations with random people throughout the years who introduce themselves by saying they “loved the book.”

When he has time to do so, Kerry thanks them and politely asks what their favorite chapter was. More often than not, whomever he is speaking with can't remember. So, he asks a well-intended follow-up question or two in an effort to get a general sense of the content that resonated.

What he has uncovered is that, in a significant number of these unplanned discussions, the person who initiated them really hasn't even cracked the cover of the book! They may have bought it but had never actually gotten around to reading it ... or they simply saw the title the last time they were in a bookstore or scrolling through a list of recommendations.

Uncomfortable though it may seem, Kerry presses on and typically

winds up in a meaningful exchange grounded by the intuitive reality that some conversations are defined by unescapable anxiety, conflict and tension. And sometimes just seeing the word crucial right next to the word conversation is enough to get people to prepare for, and execute, those discussions differently!

2. Situational Leadership® — Along the same lines, we would offer that anyone who has ever attended a Situational Leadership® training program over the last 50 years knew exactly what they were getting into long before the training ever started:

- There is no one best way to lead people ... it depends!
- Every style of leadership works ... and doesn't! It depends!
- Effectively leading people is a function of the leader adapting to ever-emerging circumstances, as opposed to hoping those circumstances will consistently align with the leader's strengths and preferences.

Again, two words, placed side by side, immediately morph into something distinctive when it comes time to develop leaders.

3. Stakeholder-Centered Coaching® — For decades, executive coaching was almost exclusively defined by a confidential contract between the person being coached and the person doing the coaching. And since they were the only people who really knew what was going on, they were the only

people who could speak to any impact that was being made.

When you put stakeholder-centered in front of the word coaching, you describe a process that is altogether different. It is a process that is governed (from start to finish) by the people in the best possible position to define what the person being coached needs to work on and how that progress will be measured. And those people are the peers and associates of the person being coached!

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Words are packages of ideas. We believe this to be true for authors, program designers and trainers alike. Our community of learning and development is unquestionably dependent upon thought-provoking language and it always has been. Because words create or evoke imagery. And imagery has the potential to both induce and ignite emotion. And emotion fuels intent. And intent (especially if it receives periodic reinforcement) can direct profound changes in both behavior ... and outcomes! ☺

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