

## **Double-Speak – Tame the Sting**

The term double-speak means substituting an offensive word with a less offensive word to create less sting. Here are some examples of how double speak has made its way into our society.

Offensive	Repackaged
fired	let go
downsizing	right-sizing
used car	pre-owned vehicle
sex change surgery	gender reassignment
Kentucky Fried Chicken®	KFC (took out word “fried”)
garbage man	sanitation engineer
housewife	domestic engineer
interrogate	interview
murder	assisted suicide
cancer	growth
fail	not passing
buried	interred
fatty (beef)	marbled (beef)
final exam	celebration of knowledge

Double-speak is a commonly employed legal tactic. For either side, the situation will be described in a certain tone and using certain language, which can be completely opposite depending on whether the defense or the prosecution is speaking. In one particular case, a woman was in court for aborting her baby very late in the pregnancy. The prosecution used words and language portraying her act as causing the death of a “baby boy,” the loss of a “human being.” The defense argued to the judge that these words were inaccurate because, by law, it was only a fetus. Attempting to dehumanize the victim, the defense used such language to separate their client from the alleged wrongdoing.

## **Package Your Numbers**

Often salespeople, or people in any sort of persuasive situation for that matter, need to either play up or play down the greatness or smallness of certain numbers. When playing up a number, persuaders use this type of language:

- “More than  $\frac{3}{4}$ ...”
- “Almost eight out of every ten...”
- “More than two out of three...”

When playing down a number, they use this type of language:

- “Less than  $\frac{3}{4}$ ...”
- “Fewer than three out of four...”
- “Under  $\frac{3}{4}$ ...”

## **Positive Word Choice**

You can use positive words to help prospects feel more confident, safe, or happy. You can also use negative words to trigger depression, anxiety, or sadness. When you use positive words, you capture and keep the attention of your listeners on the points you want them to concentrate on. The words you choose to use can mentally keep them on track. For instance, if you want to plant seeds of doubt, you would use negative forms of speech. When we are in a positive mindset, we don't ask as many questions. Positivity puts our mind in a comfortable, more persuadable area. When the negative is triggered, it requires more mental effort and our mind begins to search for incongruities or weaknesses in the argument.

Newt Gingrich published "Language, A Key Mechanism of Control." In it, he advised Republicans to use positive governing words for themselves and negative words for their opponents. This pamphlet encouraged them to use the words "common sense, courage, dream, duty, empowerment, fair, family, and freedom" when talking about Republican ideals. He then advised them to use the following words to talk about their Democratic opponents and their position: betray, bizarre, cheat, collapse, corruption, crisis, destroy, devour, and disgrace.

Remember in 1980, when Chrysler almost closed its doors to bankruptcy? Their only hope was 2.7 billion dollars in loan guarantees from the government. This seemed hardly possible. Why would Congress approve such a sum for a private corporation? Chrysler and its lobbyists knew the right language would tip the balance. They positioned their argument so it was about the government providing a safety for its companies, the same way it does for individuals. They further argued that this was an American problem belonging to everybody and not a unique situation only to themselves. Their strategy worked! The argument won Congress over, and Chrysler got the financial guarantees it needed.

Effective persuaders use very assumptive and assertive language. For example, instead of saying, "If you get the report done by Friday, we'll leave early and go out to dinner," they would say, "When you get the report done by Friday, we'll leave early and go out to dinner." Effective persuaders also speak positively when accepting responsibility. Instead of saying, "That's not my problem. You'll have to talk to someone else," they would say, "I'll have the person responsible give you a call."