

Words on Steroids: And, Because, You

We know certain words have more pull than others. Who would have thought that “because” and “and” would have the power to move mountains? In a study by Langer, Blank, and Chanowitz, researchers found certain word choices could influence people to act against their own self-interests. The researcher approached a copier where a long line of students stood. She tried three different word choices at different times to see how the other students would respond to each request. She didn’t change the context she was saying, only the word choice. When she said, “Excuse me, I only have five pages. May I use the copy machine because I am in a rush?” 94% complied. When she said, “Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the copy machine?” 60% complied. But when she said, “Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the copy machine because I have to make some copies?” 93% complied. The magic was in the word “because.” Even when she used an obvious reason, for example, just to make copies, she had a higher compliance. The word “because” is very powerful. “Because” prepares the mind for a reason. Even if the reason is not legitimate, it is still a reason.

On the other hand, the one word that will impede your ability to persuade is “but.” “But” negates everything you said before it. We all know the drill, “I love you, but...” “I want to help, but...” The word “but” puts the brake on persuasion. Practice your vocabulary and use the word “and” in your persuasive communication instead of “but.” Another simple change is to use the word “can” instead of “could.” For example, say “Can you carry this for me?” instead of “Could you carry this for me?” Similarly, it is better to use “will” than “would” and better to use “try” than “do.”

Perhaps one of the most valuable words to learn how to use is “you.” When you use the word “you” instead of a more general word, like “people,” for example, there is a stronger sense of identity. Your listener will be more tuned in to what you are saying.

The “Let’s” Technique

Often in day-to-day living we find ourselves in circumstances where we need to direct, delegate, or even order. Usually our assignments are just short sentences (for example, “Can you please do this or that?”). You can create unity and alliance and lessen defensiveness when you use “let’s” in place of “you,” even when that individual, not you, is really going to be the one carrying the duty out. For example, “Let’s be sure and get this out in the mail today, okay?” It’s such a simple thing, yet you will find it works wonders. Make a habit of using the word “let’s,” and you will find more cooperation.