

Intentional Language

I don't have a great vocabulary. I have never been intellectual about the use of language. I only speak one language; this saddens me because I totally admire those that have a grasp of more than one. (I have it in my head that maybe somewhere along the way I'll learn Italian!)

But I do have one little something I know for sure about language: Leaders that understand the tool of "**Intentional Language**" give themselves an edge in creating a great team environment and in impacting productive performance.

Words are powerful. Words create attitudes and ignite energy. The right words trigger the right thoughts. The right thoughts create the action that you need to win. When the right language is used the right energy gets created. When the right energy is in place people get excited about possibilities rather than jammed up about problems. The right words get things going in the right direction.

What the great leader understands is that the use of specific words over and over again brings texture to a Vision. Good words communicate the visual that's needed if people are going to be excited about pursuing a Vision. When the Vision is textured, by the leader through the use of powerful Intentional Language, the team members get:

- ✚ **Emotional** and **Passionate** about the quest
- ✚ **Energized** and **Engaged** in levels of perspective that produce the necessary stamina
- ✚ **Opened Up** about the **Possibilities** that truly exist

Here is an example of how to create productive thrust and focus through **Intentional Language**. I used this "story" and follow up coaching with a client recently. Good things are happening already for her and her team of 25 people. (This is called the "**Chair Lift Tool**.")

So picture this:

We're all standing at the bottom of The Mountain. I've got enough money in my pocket to buy all of us a ticket on the Chair Lift so that we can get to the top of The Mountain fairly quickly. When we get there the view we'll see of the land will be magnificent. It's going to be an incredible view.

Or we can climb The Mountain together. We can hike it, walk it, climb it and push ourselves to the top, all together. When we get to the top we're going to be tired because it's going to take awhile. It's going to take a lot longer than it would if we just took the Chair Lift. When we get to the top the view is going to be magnificent and incredible. It isn't going to be any better view than if we just took the Chair Lift.

*But I will tell you this. If we climb The Mountain together we are going to feel an amazing sense of **satisfaction**, an amazing sense of **triumph**; we're going to feel proud of and energized by what we've **learned**. We are going to feel **alive**, far more **alive** that if we take the Chair Lift.*

*So, it's your call. What will it be, the Chair Lift or the climb? It's up to you. Do you want to **learn**? Do you want to **learn** more about yourself, about each other and about what we're capable of doing collectively when we put ourselves to the test? Do you want to feel **alive** because of the power that comes from being totally **satisfied** that you dug deep and made something significant happen? Do you want to experience true **triumph**? Do you want to feel that **inner knowing** that you are fully in the game of life and that you have the capacity to make great things happen. It's our Mountain. It's our choice. This is our chance to achieve an **inner knowing** that will lead us to greater levels of confidence that we can do whatever we want to when we put ourselves to the test.*

The follow through effort now has to consist of great discipline from the leader to engage in **Intentional Language**. She must bring up the Chair Lift over and over again. As in, "No Chair Lift, right?" She will do this in one-to-one coaching that is both structured and informal. She will remind people during team meetings that the choice has been made to climb together, rather than take the Chair Lift. She will compliment her team collectively and individually every chance that she gets on the spirit and attitude that represents *climbing* rather than the Chair Lift option.

But even more important will be the effort that she will make, as the leader of the team, to use the words:

- ✚ Satisfaction
- ✚ Triumph
- ✚ Learning
- ✚ Inner Knowing
- ✚ Alive

These are the key words. If she uses the key words enough people will start to think differently about the task at hand for the last quarter of the stretch run of their fiscal year. She will remind her team over and over again that the experience that they're in the midst of is all about the concepts above - that amazing feelings are available because of the quest that has been committed to.

The Vision Quest will not be about numbers. It will be about getting to the end of the quarter and feeling more **alive** and **satisfied** because of the greater existence of **learning** and **triumph**.

It's amazing what just one individual can do to the language of a team. If that's true, and it is, then it better be the ultimate leader that's paying the most attention to the words that are being used, to the team language that's being created. Because of the team language that exists within any group or team, attitudes will be created. Attitudes impact habits and habits impact performance.

I realized early in my career as a hockey player that if I started saying catchy and applicable words and phrases, pretty soon, starting with the guys closest to me, everyone would be saying the same things. If I had that power as a player—and a lot of people on a team do—I sure was going to use it as the coach.

Using impact words repeatedly with focus and energy develops for the team a common language. A productive and fun language makes a team close. The forming of a language that supports the system, style of play and the governing attitude that will be pursued is important to the team chemistry and to the molding of character and direction that the coach can create.

The team's secret codes are in the team's language. The language bonds the players and the coaches the way a secret bonds friends. The language is a commitment from everyone. It provides rhythm.

Catch phrases and impact words are like a book title: They have something to do with a concept, a plot, or a theme.

I have a client that's building everything in her Team Culture around the following language. (The words create the focus of key concepts, they create plot/identity and they supply a creed or theme to live by.)

- 🚩 *Show Up*
- 🚩 *Step Up*
- 🚩 *Never Let Up*

Here are some of my thoughts as to how *The 3 Ups* would fit for you and your team's quest right now.

Show Up is about pride. The thrust here is to ignite a “fire” in all team members to take responsibility to get their mindset right each and every day. There is a sense of professionalism built into these words. These two words ask each team member to recognize that they have the chance each day to be proud of who they are and of how they engage in their work - to put forth an effort that represents that pride.

Step Up is about getting team members to do two things in a constant sort of way: (1) Work on their game – always look to improve and (2) accept the challenge to

compete against obstacles that will occur. *Step Up* is all about thriving in the chance to compete when it matters most. There is a certain level of courage in all champions. That courage is about a willingness to step to the front-line of the battle and choosing to make a difference in whether the battle will be won or lost.

Never Let Up is about work ethic. It's about mental toughness. It's about being a True Pro. It's about playing hard no matter how much it seems that things are stacked against you. *Never Let Up* is about giving 100% to every circumstance no matter what "the score is" – it's about committing to a high level of play throughout the entire contest, no matter what. It's also about believing in oneself, a concept that is a cornerstone of every Championship Style Culture. It's about being a workhorse. *Never Let Up* would be about playing from the heart!

So much gets packed into the seven simple words found in the *3 Up's*. They're easy words to use but the truth is that they'll help the team overcome complex issues and fight through real problems that exist all over Corporate America.

Everyone will be able to grasp the initial meaning of the words and then be able to contribute to the expanded meaning of them as they come alive in the team's culture.

All it will take to ignite the fire is for the leader to use the key words with intention, with authority, with steadiness, with consistency and with a certain joy knowing that they'll help people have some fun while they work to stay on point and put in the effort to excel.

Here are some "*to do's*" for you

- Start paying more attention to the specific language that you are using. Be more aware of the choices that you make with the words that you use. Use words that demonstrate to others what you believe in and what you stand for.
- Use productive, powerful and positive words and then take notice of how you are impacting your world.
- All great leaders in any walk of life have command of their voice and of their words. This is because they are disciplined in their thought. That's a good thing to be. **Be disciplined with your thoughts. Be disciplined with your language.** Do this not just because you're trying to get your team to think great thoughts because of the words that you are frequently using. Do it because you're trying to create a culture of discipline and one of the things that you can control is your own language. So be disciplined and control it.

This effort will do two things:

1. You will increase your capacity to influence the outcome and results that you want. ***Intentional Language*** makes you way more efficient. Great leaders are efficient.
2. You will enhance your reputation; people will “feel” the difference that you are making in the experience they’re having at work. Intentional Language takes into consideration what you want to accomplish with your team and then gets activated by the use of key words that are aligned with the Vision you have for your team.

The following quotes add some texture to my message. Have fun thinking more about what you can create when you get intentional with your language!

“It is still not enough for language to have clarity and content... it must also have a goal and an imperative. Otherwise from language we descend to chatter, from chatter to babble and from babble to confusion.”

(Rene Daumal 1908-1944, French Poet, Critic)

“Language is the mother of thought, not its handmaiden.”

(Karl Kraus 1874-1936, Austrian Satirist)

“The language of truth is simple.”

(Euripides BC 480-406, Greek Tragic Poet)