

# The Science Behind Words

## How 'No' and 'Yes' Influence Our Physiological State

(Brennand, 2016)

Words have impact. They really do. And we have the science to prove it!

### Words Really Can Influence States

The study of micro-communications encompasses all forms of communication; the obvious spoken word, the subtle 'way' in which it is said to add emotion, place importance or direct instruction, right through to some of the less obvious ways that body language can influence congruence, emotion and behavior.

The idea that words influence our states is nothing new; in fact it dates back to the 1970's when Neuro-Linguistic-Programming was first introduced by John Grinder and Richard Bandler to bring together three key areas:

- N    Neurology                    The mind and how we think
- L    Linguistics                      How we use language and how it affects us
- P    Programming                    How we sequence our actions to achieve our goals

However, where the critics of NLP bemoan the lack of hard research to support the existence of such internal processes occurring as a result of external stimuli, subsequent and more emerging theories that build on the foundations established by NLP add real scientific research to support such ideas that words really can influence our states.

### Choose Your Words Wisely!

When you are preparing for a group or 1-1 coaching session, a formal meeting with key stakeholders or community engagement activities, do you give thought to the words you will use and the influence they will have? I'm not talking about tactical advice, nutritional support, team / business accounts or the details of where and when your coaching sessions take place.... No, I'm talking about the basics... I'm talking about the words you use to open sentences, how you address questions...often the words that most people don't give any thought to at all because they are merely 'link words': Yes or No, And or But, Try or Do, for example.

Just take a minute and think, when was the last time someone referred to something they 'tried' to do and actually got a positive outcome from? Do these examples ring any bells?

*How did your grant funding pitch go? If the answer is 'I tried my best' then it's likely that the rest of the sentence will follow something like... 'but unfortunately we weren't successful'*

Or

*Did you win at football over the weekend? It was a great match and our team tried really hard.... (you can guess what's coming)... but the other team won.*

'Try' is a future term that represents past failure. When you say to someone 'try your best', you are subconsciously reminding them of all the times they tried in the past and didn't succeed... not the ideal encouragement or mindset needed for the preparation of an important event!

### **Let's Positively Reframe...**

You can significantly improve the level of 'successful' influence you will have in a coaching, business or personal situation simply by positively reframing your language; you will become more convincing, more persuasive and leave your audience feeling in a more positive mood - which is a great association to create. After all, how you leave someone feeling after you meet them is the best business card you have!

Now let's examine the science behind how it works.

### **The Power of No**

Just seeing the word 'No' releases dozens of chemical stress-producing hormones and neurotransmitters, which immediately interrupt the normal functioning of your brain. The impact this has is significant – impairing your logic, reason, language processing and communication<sup>1</sup>.

Take it a step further and actually vocalize your negativity, or even slightly frown when you say "no" and more stress chemicals will be released, in your brain and in the listener's brain too! Your listener will experience increased anxiety and irritability, which will undermine cooperation and trust (not the ideal setting for a great athlete-coach relationship to be formed is it?).

In fact, the research suggests that just being around negative people will make you more prejudiced towards others<sup>2</sup> This concept is supported by theories of leadership that categorise people as nourishers or drainers when referring to a person's communication style and character and the influence they have on team culture.

### **The Power of Yes & Positive Language**

Reframing negative thoughts or worries into positive affirmations has shown to improve self-control, the communication process and increase self confidence<sup>3</sup>. However the power of No and Yes on our physiology isn't equal – unfortunately the brain barely responds to our positive words and thoughts!<sup>4</sup>. The reasoning is – we are primal beings and the positive words aren't perceived as a threat to our survival,

so the brain doesn't respond as rapidly as it does to negative thoughts and words<sup>5</sup>.

So how do we balance our language for a positive outcome?

To overcome this neural bias for negativity, science suggests we must repetitiously and consciously generate as many positive thoughts in ourselves and others as we can. Barbara Fredrickson, one of the founders of Positive Psychology, discovered that we need to generate at least three positive thoughts and feelings for each expression of negativity!<sup>6</sup>.

### **Preparation and Practice... Now it's Your Turn!**

So when preparing for your next important interaction:

- Pay as much attention to the words that you use and the emotions they will create as you do to the facts and figures!
- Remember that '3 is the magic number' if you want to balance negativity with positivity.
- We suggest you will want to more dramatically tip the scales in the favor of positivity for that really successful lasting impression.

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