

## The Power of Positive Language

The 'linguistic' part of NLP has long been the part of greatest interest to me. After all, there are limited opportunities in the working day to use the Swish Pattern, the Phobia Model or Parts Integration if, like me, you're not a full-time coach or therapist. But every single day we talk to other people.

We talk to other people to inform them or influence them. We ask questions of other people, we try to persuade them to collaborate, to co-operate or to buy from us. So what could be more important than knowing how to use language to get the result you want?

This is a big topic. (My 'Leadership through Everyday Conversation' self-study manual covers the language patterns you'd learn at Practitioner level and it's hundreds of pages long!) So where to start?

One of the most powerful patterns that you can adopt is easy to learn and simple to use. Simply start telling people what you want, instead of what you don't want. Effectively, you edit the word 'don't' out of your vocabulary.

You might be wondering why this is so important. Well, if I tell you 'don't worry about this, it's not difficult, it won't take long', what are you thinking? You're probably already thinking that it sounds like a problem. It's the same principle that means that if someone says to you, "Don't think about a pink daffodil" you'll immediately get a picture in your mind's eye of a just that – a pink daffodil.

It's much easier to make a mental representation of 'a pink daffodil' than of 'not a pink daffodil'. In fact, it's almost impossible to make a mental picture of 'not a pink daffodil'. We need language to create negatives and that adds a second stage to the thinking process and reverses the first stage of the process. It's almost a mixed message. And not surprisingly, it can generate mixed results.

So, what's the answer? Stop using 'don't' and 'not' and replace them with 'do' and 'is' or whatever equivalent makes sense in the context. By doing this, you enable the listener to make sense of what you say in one easy step. They have a clear mental representation of what you want.

Here are some examples:

"Don't worry, it's not difficult" becomes, "I know you'll find this easy"

"Don't forget the meeting tomorrow" becomes, "Remember the meeting tomorrow" or even better, "See you at the meeting tomorrow".

"Don't tell the customer that we've messed up the order" becomes "Tell the customer that their order is delayed".

This takes practice. Many of us grew up hearing 'don't' and it's become a habitual pattern in expressing ourselves. To get out of the habit, practice using positive language when you have time to think about what you want to say, such as when you write an email or prepare a presentation. The rest of the time, let yourself off the hook so that you can retain your usual fluency of expression. The more you practice when you have time to think about it, the more it will become an unconscious pattern in your everyday conversation.

And here are a few examples for you to practice on – have a go at writing an alternative for each of these everyday patterns that use negations:

"You don't have to work late if you can't get it all done"

"Don't tell them everything you know"

"Don't dominate the discussion"

"It's not what I wanted"

"No problem!"

If you'd like to develop your skill with language, have a look at the 'Leadership through Everyday Conversation' self-study manual.

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