

Words can cast down or lift up

"Words can destroy. What we call each other ultimately becomes what we think of each other, and it matters." -- Jeane J. Kirkpatrick

I was emailed the above quotation the other day, and it struck me how very important it is. The old childhood taunt has always been "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me," but millions of people on therapists' couches prove that words can hurt – and sometimes may create damage that outlasts the broken bones caused by sticks or stones.

Words alter the viewpoint of the person who says them. The words we use reflect our viewpoints, good or bad, but they also help formulate the thoughts that we dwell on.

Words change the way we look at something. Use words such as "problems" or "trouble," and you get a vastly different feeling than when you describe the same events as "challenges." Problems are to be avoided; challenges are to be overcome.

Words alter the way we see other people. Someone can be "pigheaded" or they can be "determined." You might be "visionary" or have your "head in the clouds." You may be "short-sighted," or you might be "focused." Both sets of words describe the same situation – only the words change the way we look at them.

The words we choose alter the way we see an event, and the judgment we place.

A favorite tactic of the those folks of the "controlling sort" is to make themselves out to be a victim. They do it by choosing words that illustrate or hype their problems. Most of the time, the trouble was of their own design, but that never enters into the conversation -- the words chosen are designed to ensure that you see them as being someone worth pity.

You can energize or depress someone by the words you choose. You can motivate a workforce, or you can depress them. Words can work wonders -- or they can paralyze a situation.

Worst yet, words can hurt others. Many a spouse has, in anger, said something they would later regret -- but once said, it hurts someone you love -- and as a result, hurts you as well. You can try to take back harsh words – but you never quite accomplish it.

Look at the mentor -- he or she chooses words that correct behavior, without damaging another person: "Perhaps I can suggest a better way," rather than the standard manager's "You dummy -- what kind of stupid thing is that?"

Words are powerful. The Fed Chairman can set off a bull or a bear run in the markets, just by the words he uses -- a president can be seen as a great leader or a real goof -- just by the words he employs.

Too many of us damage others by the words we choose. Kirkpatrick, a diplomat, no doubt chose words well -- she could have started a war with the words she chose -- but we can each start our own little wars by choosing the wrong words at the wrong time..

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