



Mind Your Language

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My neighbors have two miniature dachshunds. Karma is a long-haired black miniature dachshund and Tao is a smooth-haired black miniature dachshund. They are sisters and at present are about two and a half years old, having lived next door for two years. As miniature dachshunds they are tiny dogs - 6 inches in height. True to their breed they are very curious and brave. And Karma in particular is an extreme adventurer. Her life is about exploring every territory that exists, and sniffing out everything her sense of smell picks up. My neighbors have a challenge on their hands trying to keep her in their yard. No matter what barricades they erect to keep her in, Karma seems to find a way to get out. She digs holes under the fence, she works to enlarge spaces between fences, she makes spaces (aka holes) in fences, and I was told once that she was even found climbing a tree to get into my garden. As far as the dogs are concerned, if another living being can do something, they can also do it. If the cats can jump up on the wall and walk across it, then so can they. Tao gives up a bit quicker than Karma though. Karma never gives up. It took her about 8 months to work her way through the slats of the front yard fence, but she did it.

Recently, one Saturday morning I was in the garden and so was my neighbor and we were talking over the fence. She picked up the doggies (whom I adore to bits) so I could pat them and talk to them. She was telling me about how they had to reinforce the fence repeatedly so that Karma could not get through. Apparently Karma comes into my garden almost every day. Although I don't encourage her, I must confess that I don't do anything to stop her. In my view, she can come and visit every day if she wants to, and so can sister Tao, even though I am not there most of the time. That morning my neighbors believed they had found a way to permanently keep Karma in their yard. The dogs however had other ideas. They might have reinforced the fence, but as soon as I went back to gardening and she put the dogs down they charged the wall – not good for doggies who are prone to spinal ailments. They threw their little bodies against the fence and started scratching the wood with all their might trying to make a hole in it. So they were told to stop that and put in the house, which is their version of being grounded. The following day, Sunday morning at about 9 am, I was sitting on the sofa with the TV on and working on my laptop, when I looked up, and there looking at me through the lounge glass doors was Karma's little face. Less than 24 hours after my neighbors were convinced they had solved the problem, she had found another way through. Anyway, once I acknowledged her, Karma, nose to the ground and tail up, went all through the garden sniffing everything as usual. Then she went back home. About an hour later there was a furious hammering coming from the fence on the other side.

Although I have used the word language in the title, this article is more about words than about language per se. Language includes how words are put together – structured – as well as vocabulary. There is a fair amount of research on how language impacts thought (and also a fair amount of controversy as well) and this article is not about this either. (If you want to find out more about the most recent research in this area, do a search on the names Lera Boroditsky, John A. Lucy and Stephen C. Levinson.) What I want to talk about is how the words we think and speak influence our lives. And, as the dogs demonstrate, sometimes not having words can be a good thing if we use our words to limit us.



While language enables us to engage in some really complex thinking and produce highly creative works, it also can have a downside. You can use language against yourself. The words you think and speak can be to your detriment. Imagine if Karma understood and regularly used the words “can't”, “insurmountable obstacle”, “I will never succeed”, or “it's impossible.” My neighbors would have a lot less stress for one thing! And, if she actually spoke, Karma would be a very famous dog.

Peoples' conversations fascinate me. I never cease to be amazed/distraught/unhappy at the words that they sometimes use to describe themselves. And yes, they use the words to describe themselves, not their behavior. Time and time again I will hear comments such as, "I am lazy", "I am too old", "I can't do it", "this is not for me", and so on. And out of their mouths come words that disparage themselves and limit what they can achieve. And having used these words to declare who they are, and what they believe is possible for them, they then act to realize the self image they hold.

Your limiting beliefs come from the language you use. Whether it is the words you say to others or the words you say to yourself. Just think about the words you have used today. In how many instances have you used limiting words. How many times have you told yourself that you can't do something? If you do that often enough and emphatically enough then you could never try something you may be really good at. How many times have you talked yourself out of trying something new because you think it will be too difficult to accomplish? For that matter, how many times have you put off a task because you keep telling yourself that you hate it? If you have to do that task then stop telling yourself how much you hate it. It just makes it more painful to do. How many sales people, when they look at the sales targets they are set, say something like, "This is impossible to achieve", or "I will never be able to do it". And so they don't. When you talk yourself out of something your brain gives up trying to find a workable solution. When you tell yourself that it can be done, your brain keeps working to find a solution. And because we are creative beings, we eventually do find a solution to the problem.



The words you use will determine the vision you are able to set for your life, your business, and your relationships. This can be one motivation to improve your vocabulary! Your vision for the different aspects of your life determines what you will achieve in your life. If you use your words to think small, your vision will be small, and so will the life you lead. If you use your words to think big, then your vision can be big, and your life can be big too.

So for the next five days I want to give you an exercise to do – think of it as mental gym. Select four times during the day – they could be 9 am, noon, 5pm, and bedtime. Set an alarm if you need a reminder. At that time, for each of the five days, stop what you are doing, and write down all the negative, limiting, disparaging words you can remember thinking and using for the past few hours. Now resolve to change that. Think of some other not so limiting thoughts. You may not want to change, "It's too hard", to "It's too easy". That may be untrue. But you can change it to something like, "I have the perseverance and capability to find a solution", "I can do this, or "I will do this".

Have an awesome June

Best wishes

Penny