



freshwaysforward

# Discovering You

## Using language usefully

Last month I talked about how language shapes our reality. Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice offers an insightful (if somewhat macabre!) illustration of the power words can have. As the story goes, the evil Shylock has been promised a pound of the merchant's flesh. When the deal comes due and is challenged in court, Portia makes clear exactly what a pound of flesh means. She says:

*Tarry a little, there is something else.  
This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood;  
The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh'.*

The cleverness of Portia's pedantic plea saves the day. Not a 'jot of blood' was spilt.

### The words inside our minds

A client I was working with recently had noticed she had an inner voice that popped up frequently saying things like "I should know this" and "Why can't I do this perfectly? I should be able to get it right!" When I asked her what it was like she found that it was her father's voice, with a big telling-off kind of tone. From the study of NLP we know that when we hear a voice or sound or see a picture in our mind, the qualities of the picture or sound determine how it makes us feel. For example, when I asked my client how it made her feel if the voice sped up inside her mind, she said it felt more intense and she looked uncomfortable. Then I asked her what would happen if she slowed the voice right down. She said it felt ridiculous, and laughed.

She started to realise she could take more control of what she was doing in her mind. She later went on to replace the old voice with a new one, which was her own voice offering helpful advice in a calm, friendly, patient tone that made her feel good about learning and progressing.

### 'But' what?

When it comes to the words we use, the word 'but' is rather interesting to look at. Have you ever had the experience of talking with someone who kept saying "Yes, but ..." and feeling as if they weren't really listening to you? It's as if they're only interested in what *they* are about to say, as if it doesn't really matter what you say because they'll have a rebuttal prepared, or a better idea.

While there are times when it's appropriate to express our disagreement, the word 'but' is often used excessively. According to the Pocket Oxford Dictionary, it means:

*prep.* except, apart from; *conj.* nevertheless, however; *n.* an objection.

In short, 'but' is usually negating whatever idea or experience preceded it. When we use 'but' to respond to someone's point, it naturally cancels out what they've just said.

Instead, using the word 'and' as a bridge between your thoughts and those of the person you are talking with, creates a sense of cooperation and openness to ideas. It says, I agree and I have something to add. Using a "Yes, and ..." technique can create a sense of collaboration. It says, I hear you and I have something else for us to consider. Let's see how this works.

Jonathan and Keri are looking at a paint chart:

J: I thought we could paint the walls coffee and the ceiling white  
*He's feeling good about making a helpful suggestion*

*"Sleep is the best mediation"*  
- Dalai Lama

### Improving Sleep with NLP

NLP is becoming recognised as a reliable natural choice to treat problems with sleeping, often referred to as insomnia.

I find that clients experiencing problems with sleep most often report difficulty with getting to sleep or 'turning their brain off', to use their words. Often they will also have a sense of frustration or even dread about going to bed.

Using gentle techniques it is possible to uncover how the mind is 'doing' this current experience of sleep. In turn, one can make changes at an unconscious level that create new behaviours, such as sleeping in a relaxed way with a quieter mind. That sense of enjoying snuggling down for the night is renewed.

A friend and colleague of mine, Charlotte Hinksman, recently talked about this on [Breakfast](#) (TV One), following an article in [Next Magazine](#) (NZ). Follow the links to find out more.

And if you'd like to find out how to book, [click here](#).



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K: But I don't like the coffee colour, it's too dark  
*He's regretting making a suggestion*  
J: But you wanted something warm  
*He doesn't understand what she wants*  
K: But a warm colour doesn't have to be so dark  
*He still doesn't understand what she wants*  
J: So what colour then?  
*He's handing it back over to her*  
K: What about chic cinnamon?  
*She wishes he'd listen to her more carefully.*

Here is how the conversation could go when they replace the word 'but':

J: I thought we could paint the walls coffee and the ceiling white  
*He's feeling good about making a helpful suggestion*  
K: A white ceiling sounds good, and perhaps a lighter shade than coffee, to keep the room light?  
*He's feeling pleased they are working this out together*  
J: Which shade did you have in mind? I thought you wanted something warm?  
*He feels like he can ask questions to understand what she has in mind*  
K: Yes I do, and I just think coffee looks too dark  
*He feels like they're working it out together. So does she.*  
J: What about chic cinnamon?  
*She feels like he's listening. He feels like he understands her.*  
K: I like that too, let's do that.  
*They both feel good that they've made a decision with a sense of ease.*



I have heard people use 'but' as a standard response to everything they hear, including things they actually agree with (which they end up reiterating in their own words to present back to the other person!). It's as if it is the only way they can make sense of information they are taking in. I also notice that these same people frequently feel misunderstood and lack a deeper connection in their relationships.

I invite you to try this out. In my experience it can be really powerful. Try replacing the word 'but' in your conversations for the next five days and see what happens. You will find that on more than one occasion you will get a more positive result than you were expecting. *And* have fun with it!



*"What would you attempt to do  
if you knew you could not fail?"*

- Unknown