

Words Will Have Power Over Us to The Degree We Do Not Use Our Power Over Words.

Words play a very powerful and important part in our lives. Words are among ways our ‘minds’ organize and keep track of their-our operations. Our institutions and societies could not operate without words. As a race we probably could not survive without words...**And if we are not sensitive to the ways we use words, words could also contribute to our demise.** Words are traveling around the planet carrying information and misinformation at near the speed of light: The increase interactions are more likely to create more problems than contribute to resolving present ones. The ways we use words affect the way we think about things; the way we think affects the way we feel; the way we feel affects our thinking, attitudes and actions – and could increase or diminish our chances of achieving our goals. We use words to help us make sense of things; to communicate and share ideas, information and misinformation, truths and untruths across times (millenniums) and space. With words, we amuse, harass, help, distress, delude ourselves and others, and create societies, nations, institutions, laws, rules, religions, professional fields, philosophies, science, technologies, etc. **We use words to advance our intelligences, and expand our horizons (the range of our interest, concerns, worldviews, ‘knowledge’, beliefs, etc.)...but our unreflecting ways with words could also retard our development and diminish our creative expressions.** The words that organize our ‘minds’ (our inner world) also influence and organize the way we structure, think and relate with the outside world. **Words automatically trigger** images, memories, thoughts, ideas, feelings, attitudes, prejudices, questions, answers, and so on, in us. (Paradoxically: That we use words to help us gain *some* power over words gives us clues to the power and importance of words.) Our spontaneous reactions to words usually result in **“identification”** (We naturally identify). We contribute to the power words have over us when we do not **distinguish between words and the structures (internal and external) they are about or are intended to be about.** (In **“identifying”** we are **“one with”**...with no self-reflexive, self-critical, self-correcting intervention, we generally treat (relate) two ‘things’, situations, persons, etc. (different structures), as if they were the same: This often leads to personal, social and international disasters since things (structures) regardless of our definitions and labels, behave in their naturally different ways.

The less we use our power over words...the more words will ‘use’ us. We can extend our power over words through expanding our vocabularies, using different words, and especially **thinking in terms of “structures”** in dealing with situations. (For instance instead of hanging on to the word “mistake” we could think instead: “a heuristic-opportunity to learn from, and try another approach.” In a similar vein, thinking of “a problem” as “a challenge” is usually more energizing in awakening our creative talents.) Words that more closely remind us of “structures” include **“change, order, relationships, context, multi-dimensional structure, visualization, variable, functions, interdependence, interactions, asymmetric relations, a calculus approach” and others.”** (See “Practicing Conscious Times-binding” at <miltondawes.com>.) We can gain ‘some’ some power over words by applying general semantics principles to help us identify less, and structure more, through remembering these structural gems: **“Words are not the things (structures) words are about: No two things are the same: Words do not have meanings ...we give meanings to things (including words): a promise (words) is not its fulfillment; an advertisement (words) is not the product or service advertised. Words can be thought of as “semantic variables” and ‘maps’”.** Remembering the words **“A map does not represent all the territory”, and “A map is not the**

territory it is a map of”, helps us identify less and gain more power over words. (Re. “semantic variable”: Generalizing the notion of the “**algebraic variable**”, ‘anything’ that can be represented by a set of ‘values’ (numerical values, interpretations, meanings, significance, etc.) can be considered a variable: If we accept that words do not have meanings, and that we give meanings, importance, significance, etc. (values) to words, we can think of words as “semantic variables”, “maps”, “representations”, etc. And in terms of “change” and “non-identity” (difference) ‘anything’ we can think of (including ourselves) can be considered “variables” and “maps”. Expanding our vocabularies and thinking of words as “semantics variables” we ‘see’ things from many different perspectives...a way to become more creative in our responses to situations. With **“a calculus approach”, we move from higher order abstractions to lower orders:** We break down bigger, more complex structures, into smaller more manageable bits; we develop highly tuned awareness by being more attentive to **our doing** whatever we are doing. Thinking in terms of **“structure”** involves **thinking beyond things to their make-up**, how they are ‘put’ together, their arrangement, how they relate and interact with other structures, etc. We elicit more structural information by asking “How” after asking “Why”? We could think of ourselves as **“Neuro-psycho-biological-semantic-multidimensional structures, engaged in structuring structures of an indefinitely extended multi-dimensional structure...“Universe”.**

General Semantics

A “meta-psychological, self-management, epistemological, anthropological discipline”, based on a premise that **“science and mathematics represent human thinking at its ‘best’ (in terms of predictability)...and proposing that “If we study and apply the methods and approach of science and mathematics, we can achieve higher levels of understandings and less stressfully, adjust to our increasingly complex, personal, social, national and international relationships.” “General Semantics” as a way of thinking about how we think and react to/with (structure) situations** provides us with principles (semantic wedges of consciousness) -- ways to intervene between words we use, read, hear, etc., and our automatic reactions. We can use general semantic **principles as attitudinal and behavioral modifiers** (semantic “ABMs”) to diminish the power words have over us. The ongoing achievements of science-and mathematics can be considered as mainly due to the factor (a.o.f.) that scientists go beyond words (ideas, thoughts, hypotheses, theories, predictions, intuitions, beliefs, gut feelings, etc.), to **the study of structures, operations, and relationships.** “General Semantics” (as generalized science and mathematics) involves (a.o.f.) general principles we can apply to become more sensitive, more awake to the ways we use words...so like scientist, we can modify and refine our opinions, ideas, beliefs, etc., from a structural frame of reference, and **improve our usual ways of thinking about things. Adopting a scientific approach: We reflect on our ideas, opinions, beliefs, conclusions, etc. and ask “Is it so?” and “If so...How so?”**

A Structuring of the Words “Planning”, “Discipline”, and Knowledge”

“Planning”, “discipline”, and “knowledge” can be considered **“higher order abstraction words”, “a behavioral menu”** proposing ways towards achieving a goal: **“Lower order abstractions” are more structurally and operationally specific.** “Higher order abstractions” as **“more inclusive higher scale ‘semantic maps”** help us visualize more extended possible structures and the bigger picture and longer cycle of events. (Our explanations and instructions when stated in lower order abstractions are usually more understandable. The word “fruit” can be considered “a word at a higher level of abstraction than “orange”. “Drive safely” can be broken down to “adjust speed to road and weather conditions; keep your eyes on the road; don’t text while driving; look and signal before turning or changing lanes, and so on. (Note: There can be higher order abstractions to higher order abstractions and lower orders to lower orders: “Eatables” is an abstraction at a higher order than “fruit”. “Drive safely” a lower order than “Be careful”.) Bernard Lonergan S.J. in his book **“Insight, A Study of Human Understanding”** (page 396) wrote, **“A method is a set of directives that serve to guide a process towards a result.”** Applying a general method to our planning at a

lower order of abstraction involves: Thinking of a plan as a “word map” based on earlier experiences, assumptions, definitions, prejudices, speculations, etc.; and remembering that “a map is not the territory”, we prepare ourselves for the unexpected and remain open to the possibility of “midcourse corrections” involving modifying, changing, and even abandoning our plans in light of new information. (A ‘mistake’ helps us recognize what not to do next time.) Plans and methods are usually easier to follow and modify, and more likely to reduce misinterpretations through being more specifically worded: “I want to be the best”, or “I want to be successful” will likely bring less frustration and more satisfaction if we specify for ourselves (using lower order abstraction words), just what we ‘mean’ by “best” and “successful”. **Think “smart”**: We are more likely to achieve our goals, and better track how we are doing if our plans include ways to measure our progress (recognizing where we are related to where we want to be). We are better off making plans that are realistic and relevant (appropriate for the times, trends, environment, resources, etc.) and so, achievable in a stated time. Visualizing (imagining) structures associated with our plans helps us to be more creative and also more realistic. (“Smart” from Peter Drucker’s “Management by Objectives”, and “Management Review” by George T. Doran.)

A Structuring of the Word “Discipline”

“Discipline” involves (a.o.f.) a resolve, a determination to make ourselves do what we do not want or feel inclined to do; or a decision not to do what we strongly feel inclined or intensely want to do (usually referred to as “will power”). Constant “visualizing” (keeping our goal in mind) helps us keep excuses in check and maintain the discipline required to follow our ‘map’ (plans) to towards achieving our goal. An important factor (variable) regarding maintaining discipline involves “awareness” (being attentive to what and how we are doing with our goals in mind). Generally: If we are not attentive to what and how we are doing, we won’t be aware of straying from our ‘paths’ (plans) and be able to consciously modify, change, or abandon what we are doing. In brief: Discipline involves self-management through self-awareness and self-correction.

A Structuring of the Word “Knowledge”

If we don’t know anything directly or all about anything (including ourselves), we are being more accurate in saying “I know ‘somethings’ about ‘X’ in place of “I know ‘X’”. **Knowing involves knowing about structures** (whether we are aware of this or not.) What we ‘know’ depends on (is not separate) from the effects of light and sound waves on our nervous systems: and in terms of the “observer-observed interaction” (from “quantum science”) involves inputs from our individual-and-cultural experiences. Since we don’t have all the information about anything (our ‘knowledge maps’ do not represent all the territory), it suits us to plan to up-date our ‘knowledge maps’ through seeking more, more accurate, and more up-to date information: It suits us to avoid “identifying” -- being absolutely certain, and consequently acting as if what we ‘know’ exactly describes, or is the same as whatever is going on. To reach our goals, whatever they might be, we might be better off treating our ‘knowledge’, understandings, explanations, opinions, theories, beliefs, plans, methods, and so on, as “semantic variables”, “heuristic propositions” to be modified or abandoned in the light of new, more accurately representative, more up-to-date information.

It’s worth stating that “applying general semantics principles as “thinking and behavioral modifiers” requires a great deal of discipline”: Our usual, familiar, more convenient, more acceptable, more recognizable ways of thinking and talking about things have been with us from the moments we start ‘responding’ to words and need no training: Consequently, and

automatically, the semantic structures (social, linguistic, cultural, education, historical, legal, etc.) that surround us, that we have symbolized and internalized through our appropriately structured neural systems...if there are no interventions, generally and automatically influence our verbal, behavioral, attitudinal and other responses (what we say, what we do, how we feel, etc.) **Thinking and visualizing structures** associated with words is a foundational factor – an important key towards extending our power over words. But don't take my words for it: Think of them as **“powerful semantic tools we each can use in order to discover** their usefulness for our individual selves. (For more on general semantics read: Alfred Korzybski's "Science And Sanity", Bruce Kodishi's "Korzybski, A Biography", and "Dare to Enquire", Martin Levinson's "More Sensible Thinking", other books from "The Institute of General Semantics", and visit <miltondawes.com>)

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