

More Linguistic Pitfalls

Seems like some of my readers are paying attention and that's awesome. I wrote part one of this article a while back. It talks about eight common and avoidable pitfalls we have in language. In the article I wrote about 'but', 'if', 'try', and 'might' and how these words dilute the power of our language and dull our ability to persuade. Well, a few of my more observant readers noticed that if there are eight pitfalls and I only cited four, there must be four more traps out there with the potential to hurt us. Some readers went so far as to suggest I did this to demonstrate another persuasive technique--open loops.

Whether it was intentional or not, it seems to have worked with several folks enough for them to call up my assistant and e-mail me asking for the other four.

Well. . . if you've been awaiting in eager anticipation part two, thanks.

The first three of the final four: would have, could have, should have (woulda, coulda, shoulda).

Why are these problematic? First, they're all in the past tense and on the surface, this may not seem like a problem, but they can have an adverse impact on your ability to persuade.

As persuaders, we want to be in the present, staying with now, so that they can see themselves acting immediately. It's never a good idea to put people in their heads, into the past because we want them with us. As the spiritual teacher from the sixties and seventies coined it, 'be here now'. We want our clients and prospects to be here now with us. We're selling them in the present, and they're buying in the present.

When we allow our prospects to drift off into nostalgic, there's also the potential to create a whiny atmosphere which has the air of regret. 'I should have taken advantage of that situation. If only I had known. . .'

Number eight of the top eight words . . .

Can't. I can't. Can't is a negation and negations have the potential to pose a serious threat to your persuasive abilities in essence canceling out all that you have worked to achieve. When I was in high school there was one teacher who forbid us from using the word 'can't'. He wasn't having it.

Take for example the sentence: "You can't use negations". This, in essence, forces your mind to first picture yourself using negations which then negates your ability to use them.

When you tell yourself you can't sleep, what happens? You can't sleep.

Negations force the mind to think of the one thing you don't want to think about. The most important element to persuasion is to get your prospect imagining themselves, creating a mental image, of them doing what you want them to do.

Words like "can't" create the very image you don't want the person to make.

You can use negation powerfully and creatively. Simply take care that when you use them, you use them properly.

So now that you've gotten part two, are you happy?

About the Author

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