

The Way You Use Words Determines the Culture You Create

Words create worlds.

Words are powerful, and the way you use them determines the culture you create. It's true in a business organization, it's true in church life, and it's true in the home. I am recognizing more and more the sheer power that language plays in all these arenas, but this weekend I became more acutely aware of the "home" area. But we weren't at home this weekend. We were camping.

And, admittedly, I'm not a great camper. I'm trying to learn how to be because my oldest son is, in fact, a really great camper. But by the time I got to night 2 with my 3 kids, staring down a night in the 30's, with everyone drawing their energy from hot dogs and just a few hours sleep, my patience was running thin. And because it was, my words were running thick. I said some things that I shouldn't have said.

It was one of those moments when, directly after a statement is made, you wish you could have it back. I knew it was too much, too direct, and the way I knew it was by how good it felt. I felt so righteous and so justified, and I know my heart; the vast majority of the time when I feel that way something has gone haywire.

But words are powerful; you can't take them back no matter how much you wish you could. **Once it's been said, it's been forever said.** And words have a way of lodging themselves in our memories. They set up camp deep inside our minds and stay there.

So what do you do when you can't take the words back?

You recognize the power of words, and you use them again.

James wrote about the power of words in chapter 3 of the book that bears his name:

Now when we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we also guide the whole animal. And consider ships: Though very large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how large a forest a small fire ignites. And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell. Every sea creature, reptile, bird, or animal is tamed and has been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison (James 3:3-8).

Though James was instructing us about the negative potential of words, the power works both ways. Granted, a positive use of words might not necessarily be equivalent to the negative, but the power still remains:

Life and death are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.
(Proverbs 18:21).

When you can't take the words back, make sure the next ones are ones you don't want to:

"I'm sorry."

"Please forgive me."

"I was wrong."

These are words that flow so much harder from the tongue than the ones of impatience and anger, but these words have power, too. **Don't neglect that power while you're mourning what's already been said.**

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