

Generalisation, Deletion, and Distortion

Negative, vague language can work for or against you. Whether self-talk or dialogue with others, generalizations we make, details we leave out, or the way we distort through language, influences how we think, feel, and act. You can choose limiting vague language or artfully vague language patterns that are positive and empowering.

Key Points

- **It works.** I see the impact of generalization, deletion and distortion every day. I've long been a fan of shaping language for results. Words inspire or they can cut you down. The pen really is mightier than the sword.
- **Your language choice exemplifies your values and beliefs.** I think by paying attention to your language choice and the language of others, you learn the underlying values and beliefs.
- **You can use language to be empowering or disempowering.** Generalizations, deletions and distortions can work for or against you. Learn to pay attention to how your language or the language of others has an impact.
- **If you want better results, start by changing your language.** Your language impacts how you think, feel and behave. You have choices over your language. Change your language, change your results. A similar concept is to change the stories you tell yourself, to influence your emotions.

Generalisation

Generalisation is where the speaker takes a particular experience applies it generically to a multitude of other situations (generalises.)

Examples:

- You can't run a family and work full-time.
- Children need discipline
- Nobody loves me.

Words to listen for:

- Can't, unable, not possible
- Need, must, have to, go to, necessary, requirement.
- Everybody, nobody, anyone, every, always, never.

Questions to ask:

- What can you do? What stops you? What tells you that? Who can't? Do you know anyone who does? How many hours and days are you thinking of? What if you could?
- Need? Which children? Discipline in what way? What else do they need? who says?
- Nobody? Is there one person who doesn't? What tells you that? How are you measuring love? How do you love anyone?

Deletion

Deletion is where details are deleted as the speaker chooses what to focus on.

Examples

- He's a failure.
- Her children are not very bright.
- She rejected me.
- They were left to fend for themselves.

Words to listen for:

- Instances where a verb has been turned into a noun such as 'failing at' become 'failure' or 'he is performing' becomes 'his performance' or 'he is succeeding' becomes 'his success.'
- Those which require an opposite such as good, bad, cold, hot, bright, dull, insincere, happy, sad, rich, poor.
- Verbs which require clarification.
- Non-specific references to people/things such as they, people, computers, children.

Questions to ask:

- How did he fail exactly? What did he fail at? Who says so? Has he failed at everything he's done? Is there nothing he has succeeded at? Has he not succeeded at drawing your attention? What else is he succeeding with?
- Compared to whom? What standard/who are you measuring them against? Bright in what way?
- What did she do that you are calling rejection?

Distortion

Distortion is when the speaker distorts something to mean something it was not intended to mean.

Examples:

- He never buys me flowers so he doesn't love me.
- My children are driving me crazy.
- I know you don't want to support my initiative.
- Families should stick together through all life's challenges.

Words to listen for:

- Statements that don't 'add up,' where a conclusion stated in the second part is based on the meaning attached in the first part.
- Statements in which one thing causes another.
- Statements which include conjecture and suggest mind-reading.
- Statements lacking reference to the author.

Questions to ask:

- In what way does him not buying you flowers mean that he doesn't love you? So what ways does he show that he loves you?
- What specifically are you doing that causes you to feel crazy? What are your children doing when you choose to go crazy?
- How do you know? What tells you that? You can read my mind?
- Who said that? Who are you quoting?