

“Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones, but Words Will Never Hurt Me”

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Over the holidays, a good friend and I got to talking about the power of words. Having worked as psychotherapists, we both agreed that words are extremely powerful. We discussed how words can be inspirational but also damaging. She and I concluded that the old adage, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” is absolutely erroneous. Words can be very hurtful and people are often unaware of when their statements negatively affect others.

Statements made by organizational leaders are listened to more than those made by other organizational members. Therefore, prior to speaking it is important for leaders to think about how their words will affect their employees and whether their statements will serve their intended purpose. By gaining a better understanding of the power of one’s words, leaders can begin to speak more strategically and to provide more effective feedback.

Not only do our words affect others, but the statements we say to ourselves have a powerful impact on our own ability to succeed. As we have all heard before, if you constantly tell yourself that you **can’t**, then it is likely that you **won’t**. Our statements to ourselves can be very harmful and limiting.

Successful leaders routinely assess the statements they make to others and about themselves. They question whether they have provided their employees with the positive feedback and appreciation they deserve, and whether they have helped to improve their employees’ performance by providing not only criticism but feedback regarding how an employee may do his/her job better. In addition, successful leaders assess their self-statements in order to ensure that what they tell themselves is helping rather than hindering their ability to lead and succeed.

Assessing the statements you make to others and yourself is a vital piece to successful leadership because although words may not break bones, they can break an individual’s spirit and motivation, which is likely to breed apathy and resentment.