

The Words We Use

by Cathy C. Bonczek

I am always pressing the point that **HOW** we say something is more impactful than **WHAT** we say? That is true, but that doesn't mean you can be careless with your words. When we reduce the number of words – always a worthwhile goal in meetings – they become even more powerful. The goal is to use the words that matter, and to say them well.

Three things to consider are

- 1) to tailor your level of formality**
- 2) to make your message understandable to a wide audience**
- 3) to make the language your own.**



Regarding the style, it's important to determine how formal or informal your audience or Decision Maker may be. If you use your most elegant, multi-syllabic way of describing your company or product, you might cause a more casual listener to find you highfalutin. Conversely, if you use extremely casual language, you might not be perceived as professional enough.

It's important to listen to your contacts and check out their company materials before you meet for clues. Then you adjust to how they speak during the course of your meeting.

Once you've calibrated the tone of your message, you should next adjust the level at which you talk about it. Does your audience know as much as you do about the subject? Will talking at your highest level of expertise come off as condescending?

Or, are they expecting you to be a visiting expert and looking for you to know more than they do? There's a wide range of expectation between those two points. If you don't know where your audience lands, start your conversation off with some query to see if you can gauge. This is a good underpinning for the third consideration, which is to then make the language your own.

By this I mean, avoid jargon. Avoid phrases that your company has coined and repeated over and over. Try not to speak from someone else's script. There are only a few steps between interesting phrasing and a "beaten horse" of a descriptor. Take the heart of the concept and talk about it in your own words – it will be much more compelling and authentic.

An example might be: "We operate as One Team." I hear a version of this message spoken by nearly all of my clients. It no longer has zip or energy behind it. Or believability, if everyone says it, then how can it be a defining attribute?

What if you said, instead, "My colleagues are always ready to offer me context, contacts and support – and I give the same to them. It's a joy to work at a firm that rewards that kind of behavior. What that means for you is you'll always get the best thinking around the market or a deal, and you'll get it more quickly."

By calibrating your tone, level and simplicity of your messages, you will be able to use fewer words to make a more impactful impression, while staying authentically yourself.