WORD WISE

SAY WHAT YOU MEAN,

DEEPEN YOUR CONNECTIONS,

AND GET TO THE POINT

Will Jelbert

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For my parents

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RUNNING
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INTRODUCTION

> I'd come to realize that all our troubles spring from our failure to use plain, clear-cut language.
>
> **—Jean-Paul Sartre**

Language habits are evolving on social media faster than at any other time in the history of the English language. Some usage trends offer new words that connect us better than before—such as *woke, hygge*, and *emojis*—but many do the opposite and clutter and disconnect our communication—think: *like, epic, random, awesome, touch base, offline, killing it*, and *slayed*. Hyperbole is just the beginning in this age of overstatement, but not all word-trash habits are new —some have been disconnecting us for centuries. The road to hell is paved with adverbs, but it is also paved with *should, never, always,* and crappy conversations.

This is a book about creating human connection with words. Its first mission is to expose the words and phrases—the bad language habits—that disconnect us. Its second mission is to reveal the words and phrases that connect us well.

We often take shortcuts and say things out of habit that fail to express what we are feeling or what we mean. Why does that matter? Those shortcuts in word selection shortchange our relationships both at home and in the workplace. Since the advent of social media, shortchanging has become endemic, while a more connected world has become a paradox. We say we'll "connect *offline, reach out*, and *touch base*," but often we are just *saying*—not meaning—it. And when we literally end a tweet with a #justsaying, it's a disclaimer that we don't mean what we just said. But the truth is we did mean it and #justsaying is just a vain attempt to avoid sounding judgmental.

I'm a dual British-Australian citizen, who lives in the USA. I grew up on a farm in England, watching *Dallas* with my parents, in the same years I received

advice—in Aussie slang—from an Australian family friend (who was besotted with my auntie) on how to talk to the girl who lived on the farm next door. Ever since, I have wondered about the differences in English (and other languages) across the globe. I wondered and wandered to Australia in my 20s and the United States in my 30s. The same year that I moved to the States—2013—the seed of desire to write this book was planted while I was doing research for my first book, *The Happiness Animal*. That research led me to the world's leading expert on "radical honesty," Dr. Brad Blanton. During an eight-day honesty workshop Brad led in Greece, I witnessed how powerful our word choices can be when it comes to connection. I heard couples resenting each other, shedding tears of pain, and moments later appreciating each other, with tears of joy. Even resentment connects us when we express it with specifics, because specifics provide the keys that open the connection. I took away three or four of those word keys from that Radical Honesty workshop. But the more I used them, the more I began to question all my word choices. The idea that every word we utter affects every one of our connections began to germinate in me until it grew into the sapling notes for this book. I fed the sapling (and my curiosity) with research, interviews with pioneers in the artificial intelligence (AI) industry who are scoring words to enable machines to gauge sentiment, Google's Ngram corpus data, and social media analysis. The result? I formed a new word-by-word awareness of what disconnects us from our desires and relationships, and I discovered alternate word selections for more powerful connections—including a few rare words from other languages that have no equivalent word in English.

I wrote this book for everyone who shares the basic human need to feel connected to others. But it's also written for you if you:

• Want help writing emails, essays, text messages, tweets, blogs, corporate communications, articles, and/or books

• Want help expressing yourself in relationships

• Want a book that will equip you to be a better speaker, leader, lover, or family member

• Want a book that will make you laugh out loud (for real)

• Are curious about language and how word habits evolve

As a lover, use this book to rid yourself of the three lie-maker words at the root of most arguments, and create warmth with ear candy and onomatopoeia (chapter 8).

As a leader, use it to wipe a chapter's worth of corporate bullsh*t from your

whiteboard, and inspire others ([chapter 6](#)).

As a friend or family member, use it to cut out the deflectors, fillers, and overstatements, and create laughter with specifics ([chapter 9](#)).

As a salesperson or marketer, use it to drop the exaggeration and adverbs, and switch to nouns and action verbs (chapters 10 and 7).

Certain words disconnect and don't say what we mean. And certain phrases end a conversation, rather than offering up more room for discussion and connection. *I'm fine*, for example, often does all of the above: It disconnects, doesn't say what we mean, *and* ends a conversation. Part one of this book ("Word Trash") provides you with a hit list of the top word-trash culprits, from those that pop up in work emails to those that pop out in the bedroom. You'll learn to eliminate them so that they no longer undermine your connections with other people. We'll also cover why word trash is on the rise and how specific examples support wider trends that the (social) media often propagate and perpetuate, but that most of us—from speech-language pathologists to the president—also fall into the habit of using regularly.

> **Word trash:** Words that deflect, mask, or disconnect us from specifics and each other: filler words, hyperbole, ego juice, unnecessary adverbs and adjectives, abstractions, false necessities, shoulds, nonspecifics, and insult metaphors.

Being *word wise* also means being specific with word choices, using a vocabulary of word power to instill your listener (and yourself) with a meaning or a feeling—a sense—that connects the two of you in that moment. That's what we'll cover in part two.

> **Word power:** Verbs of action, ear candy, onomatopoeia, adverbs denoting place and time, adjectives that connect with specifics (and the adjective *specific*), nouns that ground (e.g., calling out *ego* and *bullsh*t*), emojis, and untranslatables (e.g., *hygge* and *eudaimonia*).

It also goes without saying that all disconnectors and connectors I speak about in this book apply to both the spoken and written forms. In some instances, words can hold different meanings depending on their medium, and I'll touch on that, too—we've all received a one-word text that leaves us feeling slighted, whereas that same word spoken aloud wouldn't have us thinking twice.

Once you start reading this book, you will begin to notice how often you use the words *should*, *always*, and *never*. You'll find yourself paying more attention to all your word choices, thus reducing your word-trash output. You will have more engaging, often humor-filled, conversations with friends, family, and lovers—and some of those humorous conversations will likely be about word-

trash examples. You will also find it easier to connect with an audience when you are presenting at work or giving a talk. Finally, this isn't a book you give away after reading: I encourage you to use its A–Z index of word trash and word power as a reference tool for writing anything from emails to essays, blogs to bios, resumes to recipes, speeches to Instagram stories.

The English language contains more than half a million words, but the average habitual vocabulary consists of only two to three hundred words. The TV series *Westworld* is about a theme park inhabited by humanoid AI "hosts" that are programmed to follow a limited number of scripts—a preset "narrative"—when speaking with humans and other hosts. If, for example, a host sees something it doesn't recognize or understand, it's programmed to reply with, "It doesn't look like anything at all." We are not hosts in *Westworld*, and we can change our narratives. It's time to clear out the closet, take out the word trash, and make space for some new selections. In other words, it's time to rescript our lives.

Part I

WORD TRASH

Instead of saying *sh*t* or *damn*, Russians often say *blin*, which means "pancake." You drop your textbooks on the floor: *pancake.* A Russian New Yorker named Margarita (after the Margarita in *The Master and Margarita*) told me her university professor described the word *pancake* as "word garbage" and asked her students to pay a five-ruble fine every time they said *pancake* in class. I like that, although I disagree with Margarita's professor on what constitutes word trash. The word trash in this book has more in common with sh*t than it does with pancakes. Word trash deflects, masks, or disconnects us from the truth and each other: It's empty filler words, hyperbole, ego juice, unnecessary adverbs and adjectives, abstractions, false necessities, shoulds, nonspecifics, and insult metaphors.

SHOULDS AND OTHER LIES

Evolution shaped us not only to feel bad in isolation, but to feel insecure.

—Professor John Cacioppo, former Professor of Psychology, Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience, and Director of the Center for Cognitive and Social Neuroscience, University of Chicago

The world is out of tune. The world is noisy. The world is full of the sounds of words that don't resonate with people's thoughts. And it's out of tune because it's not using the language of the senses. Instead, it's using fake, plastic copies of true sounds. It's using word trash: the language of advertising, the language of magazines, the language of television. Most of all, the language of social media, a language of egos and fear.

Harmony happens when what you express aligns with what you feel and mean. An orchestra *harmonizes* when each musician plays the notes in synchrony. Each one of the musicians in the orchestra sees and plays the same note at the same time with their unique instrument, breath, or hand movement. If you feel a G note but you play an F, you will be out of tune. Seeing and feeling a G note while playing an F is a form of lying. Sure, the act itself might have just been a mistake—an accidental note played—of words said out of habit rather than consciously chosen. But we'd still feel and hear that the F didn't resonate, and unless we corrected our note with an adjustment, we'd allow the lie to persist.

We are in the habit of not paying attention to how we play our instruments of language. The more we use a word, the more attention we bring to it and to what

it represents. Our goal with this book is to find ways to use *harmony* more often and find ourselves resonating more because of it.

I assume that you, the reader, are not an intentional liar. What I'm more interested in talking about in this chapter are the lies we don't know we are telling through unconscious word selection and bad vocabulary habits. They are the parasites nibbling away at our trust and well-being every day. I call them *lie makers*.

Always and *Never*

Dictionaries define *always* as "at all times, at one uninterrupted time, forever." Have you used the word *always* in the last week? What about *never*? The only *always* that's true is that there is *always* an exception to your *always* and *never*. And the only *never* that's true is that there is *never* a knowable *never*. For those of you in relationships, the following sentences may sound familiar:

Lie: "You never listen."

That's a liar liar frequent flyer. Everybody who can hear has listened to something. Otherwise, it would be impossible to learn how to speak. So what's the honest version? "You are not listening to me now." If you say, "You *never* listen," to your girlfriend, the natural response for her is to be defensive—and what she defends is her truth against your lie (that she *never* listens). As her defensiveness grows into anger, she'll exaggerate her response into a lie about you: "You're *always* moaning about me." Within a moment, no one is telling the truth. And without any specifics to connect to, neither one of you can discharge your resentment. Instead, you both become charged with more frustration, resentment, and anger until one of you (or both) explodes. And then you break up or make up, or you go passive-aggressive for months or years until you barely talk, until divorce or death, whichever comes first. That's why it's best for your relationship to steer clear of the word-trash lies in the first place—so you avoid all the nonsense and stay connected through the truth. If your boyfriend does or says something that irks you, you tell him you resent him for it, but you keep your resentment specific to (and limited to) what he did or said, when he did or said it—we'll talk about how to do that with specific word choices in chapter 9.

Here are a couple more word-trash statements you'll hear in an average relationship:

Lie: "You *always* forget to take out the trash."

The honest version? "You didn't take the trash out this week and the week before last."

Lie: "You *always* make stupid comments."

The truth? "I resent you for saying that Kim Kardashian's butt is real and amazing."

These are examples of inconspicuous and unconscious lies that disconnect us from ourselves and from one another. But we're all good people here, right? We don't tell lies!

No! That's a lie! Everybody—myself included—is at least an occasional, unconscious liar. And if we have any politicians in the room, we can expand that to regular and conscious liars. But even little lies demoralize.

In February 2018, I conducted a survey on the word choices of 80 speech-language pathologists (SLPs) working in middle and elementary schools in the New York City public education system. These SLPs had attended my seminars on connection at New York University. I measured their usage frequency of 63 words that represent the 12 different word categories you will read about in this book. I defined the usage frequency as 1=daily, 2=often, 3=sometimes, 4=rarely, 5=not at all. The SLPs' average use of *always* was 2.33 (often) and use of *never* was 2.15 (more often). If we are to believe their words, *never* happens more often than *always*—try getting your head around that. This trend is also reflected in the Google Books corpus[1]: For every two *always,* there are three *nevers.*

Both *always* and *never* fall into the *lie makers* category. The SLPs working in middle schools use lie makers more often (average of 1.96) than those working in elementary schools (2.16). This is likely due to the influence of the elementary schoolchildren themselves: The younger we are, the more we speak of things we notice with our senses. We point at specifics: "I want the ball; it's *red*." As we grow older, middle school exposes us to the language of abstraction and generalization, also known as exaggeration or lies: "Billy *never* shares the ball with us. He *always* keeps it." As adults, we can do a better job at not passing on our abstractions—lies—to our children. Almost everyone I know uses *always* and *never* more than once a day, and, in some cases, more than once per five minutes of conversation. But the most used lie maker is not *always* or *never.* It's *should.*

De-Moral-Lies (*Should*s)

Have you spoken a sentence today containing the word *should*? It doesn't matter if it was I *should* or I *shouldn't*: "I *shouldn't* have another coffee; I *should* go to bed earlier; I *should* be good." The synonym of *should*, more at home in a *Downton Abbey* script, is *ought*. In her book, *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*, palliative-care nurse Bronnie Ware tells us the number-one deathbed regret is having lived a life of *shoulds* and *ought to*'s: "I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me." If you can work on trashing your *should*s, you will have taken a step towards a regret-free life.

Shoulding yourself is an example of moralizing: trying to model your existence around rules made up by your mind—rules that your ego identifies with. Let me be clear: When you *should* or *should not* yourself, you sh*t on yourself. And we are sh*tting on ourselves multiple times a day, although elementary school SLPs sh*t on themselves less often (1.82) than those in middle schools (1.61). Whether you call it *shoulding* or sh*tting, moralizing has nothing to do with happiness. It has everything to do with ego, and ego has everything to do with happiness traps: Ego tries to grow itself through identification with and acquisition of labels, money, and things to gain proof of a physical existence. Ego is a creation of our imagination. And if it's not real, it's not honest.

So, what's the egoless alternative for the *should*s? I spent some time with a vegan friend over the weekend, so I'll use this as an example: I was explaining that I've noticed myself feeling more sluggish after my cappuccino-induced caffeine buzz wears off and I imagine that has more to do with the milk than the caffeine. I have two choices in how I express myself next. I could say, "I should stop eating dairy" or I could use one of the following more specific (and honest) sentences: "I could try giving up dairy," "I want to try almond milk," or even "I need to give up milk if I want to stop feeling crappy after my coffee." Any one of these three sentences is more connected to my truth than a sh*tty *should*. Sometimes we sh*t on ourselves to go to events—such as a girlfriend's friend's second child's christening—when the truth is we *don't want to go* and we use the *should go* label as a way of withholding truth. Withholding, says Dr. Brad Blanton, "is the most pernicious form of lying."

Pernicious is another way of saying *destructive* or *deadly*, and what withholding destroys is human connection. Why do we say, when someone is talking about the book she is reading, "I *should* read that book, too"? Why not, "I want to read it, too"? Why make it sh*tty? Often, we don't want to get

vulnerable and tell the truth that we *want* to do things: "I *should* go with you to Bali." Our ego says, *I'm not worthy of saying what I want—who am I to have my own desires?* Getting vulnerable enough to take off your *should* mask takes courage. But, as with exercise, the more often you do it, the easier it gets. Over the last three years, I've been able to eliminate most of my *should*s. Nowadays if I hear myself slip one into conversation, I stop, retract, and correct what I just said into a more accurate expression of my truth. That action alone is a way to instantly increase the connection in a conversation: As soon as I say, "I don't know why I just said *should*. What I mean is I want to," both of us in the conversation start paying more attention to our word choices, and we boost our connection.

Saying "You *should*" to your loved one is as healthy for your relationship as taking a (moral) dump on the one you love. When you say, "You *should* stop eating sugar" to your girlfriend, she'll want to slap you. Ego repels. She feels that you are taking the moral high ground, trying to control her, acting as Mr. High and Mighty. You patronized her. Instead, if you want to talk about her candy-munching habits (out of concern for her health), try saying, "Would you be *willing*[2] to give up processed sugar for a week?" Or "I recommend giving up processed sugar for a week and seeing how you feel." Or "Would you be willing to read this article [about sugar]?"

If you want your relationship to last, don't tell her what she *should* or *shouldn't* be eating. The word *should*—and the negative *should not*—is a demoralizing dump on someone (or yourself). If you post on social media using the word *should*, it's a *sh*tpost*. According to BuzzFeed copy chief Emmy Favilla, this is an existing internet term for garbage content. Let's expand the meaning to cover content that contains the word *should*. My final take on *shoulds* is this, and it's something that's become a message on repeat in my interactions with others: You can replace *I should* with either *I want to* or *I need to,* and if you don't *want to* or *need to* do something, then why the hell are you doing it?

Here's my suggestion: Be open to listening for your and others' *shoulds* and start making a mental or toilet paper note every time you hear them. On your phone or in a notepad, start a Should Sh*t Log for the next week, starting now. Every time you notice yourself saying the word *should*, write *I sh*t on myself* with the time and date. After a week of entries, reread your "Should Sh*t Log." Congratulations! You have now identified the bullsh*t of your ego. Now flush it down the toilet.

False Necessities (*Have to*, *Need to*)

"*Ought* once was, of all things, the past tense of owe.… But when you owe, you're under an obligation," says English professor John McWhorter in his book, *Words on the Move*. *Obligation* is a synonym of *need*, and so our word–bowel movements evolve from moral dumps (of *should*) into need–diarrhea. Recently, a friend of mine said, "I *have to* go to a wedding." My response: "OK, but you want to go to the wedding so I'm curious about you saying, 'I *have to* go,' rather than 'I'm going.'"

I *have to* means "I need to." We have very few true *needs*, and going to a wedding isn't one of them. For reference, let's check the best-known model of human needs, developed by psychologist Abraham Maslow, most commonly known as Maslow's hierarchy (of needs):

Self-actualization

Esteem

Love/belonging

Safety

Physiological
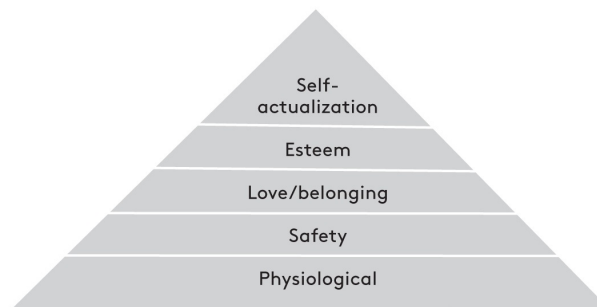
Yep, can't see going to weddings anywhere in there. It turns out that she wanted to go to the wedding more than she didn't want to go. No one forced her to go, and she didn't sh*t on herself to go—although sometimes we do sh*t on ourselves to go to weddings that we don't want to go to and mislabel the sh*t (*should*) as a *need*, to disguise the sh*t at the core of what we are saying. Why did she say, "I *need to* go to a wedding"? Why not, "I'm going to a wedding"? Why make it sh*tty? Perhaps she didn't want to get vulnerable and tell the truth that she wanted to go. Perhaps she had a thought along the lines of *I'm not worthy of saying what I want to do*, so she created a lie to *mask* how she felt. She disconnected. For me, *needs* are even more simple than Maslow's. The only thing I *need* to do is go to the toilet (where I also want to flush my *should*s—but I don't *need to*), eat, drink, breathe, sleep, receive and give affection and love, have physical contact with other human beings—more hugs, please—and have a place to sleep each night that's warm and dry enough. True *needs* are few, *wants* are common, *don't wants* are often even more common, but I want *should*s to be nonexistent.

RECAP: SHOULDS AND OTHER LIES

• (Unintentional) lying through bad language habits will disconnect you from others, and if you disconnect often, you will be unhappy.

• The only *always* that's true is that there is *always* an exception to *always* and never.

• The number-one deathbed regret is living a life of *shoulds* and *ought to*'s.

• You don't *need* to go to a wedding. You may *want to* or *not want to*, and if you *don't want to*, don't go.

• Find ways to use harmony more often and find yourself resonating more because of it.

• It's OK to *want* things, and you'll connect more when you tell people what you *want*, even if you often don't get what you want. Getting things won't make you happy, but telling the truth can.

Footnotes

[1] Searchable via Google Ngram viewer; see page 21.

[2] For more on the power of *willing*, see page pages 157-58.

ADVERBS, ADJECTIVES, AND EGO BOOSTERS

I believe the road to hell is paved with adverbs, and I will shout it from the rooftops.

—Stephen King

Visualize the Taj Mahal. It is constructed from white marble, embedded on the inside with semiprecious stones. Imagine now that someone covers the Taj in a plastic sheet, and you're getting close to what we do when we take a sentence of truth and insert an adverb. Perhaps the people who don't take the plastic off their new car seats won't relate here. But people who read classic literature may.

In his book *Nabokov's Favorite Word Is Mauve,* Ben Blatt reveals that award-winning books are those with the fewest adverbs: "*The Great Gatsby* is F. Scott Fitzgerald's book with the lowest adverb rate.… Toni Morrison's most acclaimed novel, *Beloved,* is tied as her book with the fewest adverbs.… John Updike authored 26 novels. The four novels with the smallest adverb rate were all four books in his Pulitzer Prize–winning *Rabbit* tetralogy." *Great Expectations* was also Charles Dickens's book with his second-lowest adverb rate (*A Tale of Two Cities* had his lowest rate). Which authors had the lowest *-ly* (e.g., *definitely, sleepily, sadly, angrily*) adverb usage across all their books? First place goes to Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winner Toni Morrison, whose *-ly* adverb rate was only 76 per 10,000 words. In an interview with *Essence* magazine, she pointed out, "I never say, 'She says softly,'… If it's not already soft, you know, I have to leave a lot of space around it so a reader can hear that

it's soft." Morrison was a master of the vivid instance, and she *showed* how her characters felt; she didn't tell. Second place goes to another Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winner, Ernest Hemingway (80 per 10,000 words), followed by Mark Twain (81). Not your *Fifty Shades of Grey* caliber of author—E. L. James has a rate of 155, which is more on par with (amateur) fan fiction. The majority of books rated highly on Goodreads are also low in adverbs. Fewer adverbs = increased reader (and conversation) connection.

When we get to , we'll look at how filler words, such as *like*, muffle connection. For now, if we can agree that inserting the word trash *like* into sentences disconnects, for example in "So I *like* said to him, *like*, it's *like* cold," then we can agree that inserting adverbs that end in *-ly* into sentences also disconnects. By what logic? I hear you ask. By the logic that the *-ly* suffix *is* (short for, and started life as) *like*: *slow-like* became *slowly*, *gentle-like* became *gently*, and so on. If you want to connect more like a Pulitzer Prize winner than a trash novel, start by ridding yourself of these *like* containers, aka connection coffins.[1]

Definitely (Definite-Like)

As far as adverbs go, *definitely* is a frequent flyer. We use it with the intention of bolstering what we say because our fear is that what we say isn't enough to stand naked. We bolster the Taj Mahal's marble with plastic. Because of doubt. Because our ego wants to make something seem bigger. Now, I'm not saying that we all come out with a Taj Mahal of a sentence in every conversation, but which of the following inspires more confidence:

1. There *definitely* won't be a problem.
2. There won't be a problem.

Which of the following do you connect with as sincere:

1. I apologize for what I said earlier.
2. I *definitely* apologize for what I said earlier.

What's more believable?

1. It is *definitely* the Taj Mahal.

2. It is the Taj Mahal.

Really (Real-like)

Really and *actually* are the siblings of *definitely*. At Christmas, my mom told my dad, "You can't see any lumps in your dessert, *really*," to which my dad responded, "*Really*?… So that means you can see a lump?" What my mom had intended to communicate was that *I assure you, you can't see a lump in the dessert*. The *really* was not only unnecessary, but also failed to express what my mom wanted to convey, although her intention was to use the *really* for emphasis. Instead, she bolstered my dad's Taj Mahal of a dessert with plastic (and made him doubt the truth about the lumps).

In the last 200 years, the usage of *really* has more than doubled. Combined with the social-media surge in hyperbole, superlatives, corporate BS, metaphors, and polarizing language, *trust* and *confidence* in each other's words are at an all-time low. No wonder the percentage of people suffering from depression is at an all-time high when disconnection is at an all-time high. No wonder disconnection is at an all-time high when word trash is at an all-time high.

Really, *very*, and *truly* all evolved from words that meant *true/truth*. In his *Words on the Move*, English professor (and author) John McWhorter provides the history lesson: "*Really* was one of many English words meaning 'truth' that came to mean *very*—such as *very* itself, which came from the French word for *true*, *vrai* (*verrai* in the late 13th century). *Very* is the well-worn version of *verily* just as *rilly* is what happens to *really* with heavy use."

A move from *truth* to *very* (for the meaning of *really*) is right up the overstatement generation's street—instead of saying, "It's true," we overstate with "It's *really very* true," meaning "It's *very very* true."

Examples of the use of *really* where it improves a connection are rare. And McWhorter admits to the falsity of *really*'s forced sincerity: "[With *really*] we prophylactically attest to sincerity." *Really*, says McWhorter, is an example of factuality maintenance, a marker—also called a "veridical marker"—that flags truth. I call it an example of unnecessary factuality overstatement. If what you are saying is true already, why do you need to flag it with a truth marker? Doesn't that assume that anything not flagged as *real* or *truth* is not? The delivery of truth—if what we are saying is true at all—is a job better done by pauses, emphasis, and the emotion of our intonation.

We don't need a prophylaxis for connection, and if we used it, we wouldn't feel it.

Just

One non-word-trash sense of *just* that doesn't disconnect is the meaning of *a moment ago*—it *just* happened—as in "The plane *just* landed" or "I *just* arrived." For clarity and connection, we can also substitute this use with more specifics: "The plane landed less than a minute ago" or "I arrived 20 minutes ago." Or— and especially in text messages—go with a one-word *landed* or *arrived*—both of which convey that it happened in the present moment (or moments ago). Say more with less. But I digress. The word-trash meaning of *just* that I want to talk about here is Merriam-Webster's third definition of *just* when it is used as an adverb, defined as "only, simply."

In 2015, former Google executive Ellen Leanse and her colleagues decided to ban *just* from their communications after Leanse saw how often she was using it in emails. She also realized that women use *just* more than men, and concluded that it is a marker of a lack of confidence, a timid, apology-for-asking word:

> I *just* wanted to check in on…
>
> *Just* wondering if you'd decided between…
>
> If you can *just* give me an answer, then…
>
> I'm *just* following up on…

Leanse adds, "I began to notice that *just* wasn't about being polite: It was a subtle message of subordination, of deference. Sometimes it was self-effacing. Sometimes even duplicitous. As I started really listening, I realized that striking it from a phrase almost always clarified and strengthened the message."[2]

As Leanse and her colleagues paid more attention to not using *just*—and calling each other out when they did—their frequency of using the word dropped. "And as it did we felt a change in our communication—even our confidence. We didn't dilute our messages with a word that weakened them."

I recommend you Ctrl+F *just* on all your emails, and count how often you are using it. Pay attention to it, then bring down your frequency. And if you find any occurrences of *just want to say*, turn to here for a look at that other phrase, *just saying*.

Quite

Another reason to avoid adverbs is they can double-disconnect if they have different meanings, depending on which side of the Atlantic you live on. *Quite* can have the same meaning as *really*, but if you have British ears, you may interpret *quite* differently from those with American ears. In Britain, *quite concerned* means "*less* than *very concerned*." In the US, it means "*more* concerned than *very concerned*," says Lynne Murphy, a professor of linguistics. Back in the UK, *quite good* can be faint praise—to the point of being a criticism, rather than a compliment (depending on the tone). And in the US, *quite good* is often stronger praise than *very good*. "That camera is *quite good* for the price."

If you are British and you don't believe me, check the (American) Merriam-Webster definition for *quite:*

1: wholly, completely

2: to an extreme; positively

Let's avoid a transatlantic disconnection and translate our *quite good* into words that can connect. What specifically was good about it? The colors, the sound, the textures? Better still, instead of saying "the food was (*quite*) *good*," say:

The food impressed/inspired me (in the US).

And let's translate *quite concerned* into specifics by detailing the frequency of feelings: "I've been worrying about it every day for the last week." If you are British, translate your *quite concerned* into "a little anxious/worried about." Or instead of saying *a little*, be specific about the extent by quantifying how much think about it, For instance, "I worried about that last night for half an hour" or "I've been thinking about that, and it made me anxious this morning before work." The "fewer words = better connection" rule doesn't apply when the fewer words omit specifics.

Extremely, Greatly, Hugely, Massively

Really can either undermine or emphasize, but *extremely*, *greatly*, *hugely*, and *massively* all exaggerate and turn feelings to phoniness, reality to drama, and openness to opera. Says the father to his son at graduation:

"I am *massively* proud of you, son."

as opposed to

"I am proud of you, son."

I would argue that only the second sentence will cause a genuine rush of warmth from the son for his father. The directness of its message connects with more power without the feeling mask of the exaggerated *massively*. These bolstering adverbs are also used to mask—that is, dress up—a blanket statement, or to disguise lies.

The 45th president of the United States is known for seasoning his sentences with the *massively, extremely, greatly, hugely*—let's call them MEGH—group of words.

Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump, Oct 30,2018:

The Stock Market is up massively since the Election

Word-trash count: 1 (*massively*)

Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump, Nov 23, 2018:

I am extremely happy and proud of the job being done by @USTreasury Secretary @StevenMnuchin1. The FAKE NEWS likes to write stories to the contrary, quoting phony sources or jealous people, but they aren't true. They never like to ask me for a quote b/c it would kill their story.

Word-trash count: 3 (*extremely, never, kill*)

Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump, Jul 18, 2018:

3.4 million jobs created since our great Election Victory—far greater than ever anticipated, and only getting better as new and greatly improved Trade Deals start coming to fruition!

Those trade deals sure have been *great*, haven't they? Word-trash count: 4 (*great, greater, ever, greatly*)

Quickly

As a side project, I collaborate with an illustrator on a series of children's books. I send over an initial draft and then Jamie, the illustrator, has license to adapt the story, based on the images she creates. She does, however, have a penchant for

adverbs, which can muffle reader connection. One of the unnecessary adverbs we removed from our children's book on kindness (*Dillie's Blocked Blowhole*) was *quickly*: "She gulped her flipperchino *quickly*." Gulping is a quick action, so *quickly* is unnecessary. On the flip side, *slowly* is often a muffler, where we could create a more vivid picture with specifics: Compare "He drove *slowly* through the village" with "He drove through the village at 4 mph." One evokes a specific, relatable speed that's about as fast as most of us can walk, but about as slow as a car can go, whereas *slowly* could be anything from 0.5 mph to 30 mph (or up to 60 mph on the freeway). Most of us probably imagined that he was driving *slowly* through the village at around 20 mph. Specifics connect more to reality and to other people than labels. Try telling a police officer you were going *slowly* when he pulls you over for exceeding the 20 mph limit by 10 mph in the school zone.

Whatever

Whatever has three entries in the dictionary: as a pronoun, as an adjective, and as an adverb. I want to talk about it as an adverb. Here's Merriam-Webster's definition:

> in any case: *whatever* the case may be—sometimes used interjectionally to suggest the unimportance of an issue or decision between alternatives: Go see a movie, watch TV—whatever.

Its use often doesn't reflect the Merriam-Webster–defined meaning. In this case, the Urban Dictionary offers a more usage-accurate definition:

> 1. Indifference to what a person is saying! Who cares! Get a Life!

or

> 2. Used in an argument to admit that you are wrong without admitting it so the argument is over.

or (the most frequent meaning)

> 3. "I don't give a sh*t," and "F*ck you," especially when sent as a text message.

Any of the above are tantamount to saying, "I want to disconnect from you." And this is about as healthy for a relationship as taking a crap on your partner (I promise I'll be done with all the sh*t-talk soon).

SHOW, DON'T TELL

A rule of thumb is that most *how* or *to what extent* adverbs will be adverbs that weaken your connection by taking the focus away from the action of the verb. A good storyteller creates vivid scenes by showing what people and things *do*. If you want to *tell* less and *show* (and connect) more, reduce your use of the following list of adverbs and replace them with vivid specifics. For example, instead of saying *hungrily*, say, "He took a third of the burger into his mouth on the first bite, which he chewed twice before swallowing, as ketchup dripped onto his chin."

HOW **ADVERBS**

A: absentmindedly, adoringly, awkwardly

B: beautifully, brutally

C: carefully, cheerfully, competitively

E: eagerly, effortlessly

G: girlishly, gracefully, grimly, greatly

H: happily, halfheartedly

L: lazily, lifelessly, loyally

Q: quickly, quietly

R: recklessly, ruthlessly

S: savagely, sloppily, so, stylishly

U: unevenly, urgently

TO WHAT EXTENT **ADVERBS**

E: extremely

G. greatly

Q: quite

R: rather, really

T: terribly, too

V: very

There are some exceptions to the adverb disconnection rule. I will talk about those in chapter 9.

The United States of Abstraction: Adjectives

When it comes to weakening connection, the adjective is to the noun what the adverb is to the verb. This is a word category where the speech-language pathologists scored in the *often* frequency—with those in middle schools a little less often (2.69 versus 2.55 in elementary). I'm not telling you to stop calling your blue fence blue. But if I say, "My drive to work took half an hour longer than normal today because of the traffic," and someone replies, "Oh, that's *bad*, oh, that's *terrible*, oh, that's *nasty*," they are abstracting my 30-minute-longer journey in the same way your boss might abstract if you came to work late twice in one week, and he commented that you're late for work *a lot*, and it looks *bad*.

The news—and note I didn't say *bad* (or *fake*) news—is that disconnection is on the rise from increased usage of *good* and *bad*. In Google's corpus, *bad* represents an increasing percentage of total word usage in English with a jump in 2007. And *bad* is one of the first words we learn: SLPs in elementary schools say *bad* more often (2.68) than SLPs in middle schools (3.00). The *bad* trend mirrors that of the abstract, polar opposite *good* over the same time period. It is also easy to monitor what Donald Trump is putting out. The following tweet came out 10 days ago, as of the time of writing—and no, I did not make this up:

Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump, Nov 12, 2017:

When will all the haters and fools out there realize that having a good relationship with Russia is a good thing, not a bad thing. There [sic] always playing politics—bad for our country. I want to solve North Korea, Syria, Ukraine, terrorism, and Russia can greatly help!

Holy sh*t, Donald! Can I call you the president of the United States of Abstraction? If you strip this tweet of all abstractions, you are still not left with much in the way of specifics: "I want to solve North Korea, Syria, Ukraine, terrorism, and Russia can help." Though how does one *solve* a country? Abstractions are like horoscope generalizations: Many people can associate their own specifics with a generalization, but that then changes the meaning of their specifics to a big bucket of bullsh*t. Polar abstractions galvanize polar opinions and divide countries. They disconnect people by way of labels and ready-made opinions that are easier to process: feminist or misogynist. Liberal snowflake or redneck NRA supporter. Pro-choice or pro-life. Democrat or Republican. Minority group. Muslim or Christian. It's language that makes people feel alienated and *othered*—a term defined by BuzzFeed copy chief Emmy Favilla as "use of language that ultimately serves to call someone, or a group, out as intrinsically different."

It's easier to paint a *good* or a *bad* line than to explore all the specific details

of a photograph. So, we're lazy. We take the verbal path of least effort and stay asleep in unconsciousness while our ego rules our mouth.

But the *good* and the *bad* are ugly. They abstract away from specifics we can notice and disconnect us from reality and from each other. Oftentimes, we don't stop with *good* or *bad*, and we embrace the United States of Abstraction's dramatic exaggerations, and bolster our nouns with adjectives the way we bolster our verbs with adverbs to make them *seem* stronger. Well, I got news for you, kid: Truth can't seem. Truth *is*. *Seem* can't connect. Only *is* can.

Terrible, Awful, Horrible, Evil

From the *Washington Post*, November 23, 2017: [Wizards player] "John Wall has a succinct assessment of the Wizards' three-game road trip: 'It's terrible.'"

Is a 129–124 overtime loss *terrible*? Yes, it is, if it causes Wizards guard John Wall terror or extreme distress. But did it? The Wizards began the road trip with a 100–91 loss to the Toronto Raptors. Was that *terrible*, too? His teammate, Bradley Beal's assessment of the same situation was "a little disappointed." Who is more connected to his words, his feelings, and his reality?

And did you know that in Shakespearean times *awful* meant *awesome*? *Awful* is derived from *awe* and also used to mean *inspiring* or *filled with awe*.[3]

Terrible, *awful*, and *horrible* are all on the rise (and so is *evil*; more on that in chapter 3). The frequency of use of all three words almost doubled between 2005 and 2007, according to Google Ngram Viewer. Why 2007? If you are following, you may have realized by now that disconnector adverbs and adjectives are spiking around the advent of the mass adoption of social media. On September 26, 2006, Facebook opened its website to everyone age 13 or older.

Fine

Fine is rarely used honestly. It does have the *good-looking* meaning when it's used in the third person, as in the sentence "Oh my god, she's so *fine*," but I dislike it when someone says, "I'm *fine*." It's a mask for "I'm not *fine*. I'm pissed at you or pissed at something or someone else, so go away, you mofo. Stop talking and leave me alone."

Most of us can empathize with how disconnecting this particular phrase is in our relationships. It's passive-aggressiveness distilled into two words. Merriam-Webster defines passive-aggressive with this quote from Hilary De Vries: "the

donning of a mask of amiability that conceals raw antagonism toward one's competitors, even one's friends."[4] That *I'm fine* is that mask of amiability. But the mask is starting to crack, with the shifting of the meaning of *fine* over time.

In his book *Words on the Move*, John McWhorter writes, "I'm *fine* began as meaning one was terrific, with that earlier meaning of *fine* (in the sense that requires us today to say we are 'great' or 'fantastic') but gradually whittled down with centuries of use into meaning, 'I'm not dead.'" But "I'm *great*" or "I'm *fantastic*" have also now become (sarcastic) masks of amiability in the passive-aggressive word-wardrobe. And when they are not masking passive-aggressiveness, they are more often than not masking something else.

Strange but True: "Positive" Words That Push People Away

Exaggeration, be it negative or positive, is a disconnector both in relationships and within oneself. If someone tells us we look *awesome, amazing*, or *fabulous!*,[5] or describes the event she went to with one of those adjectives, we get an instant phony vibe that she is not being straight-up/honest. Melodrama, acting—call it what you will—is the fake BS of an ego mask that we use when we are afraid to stand naked with the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God. But that's the only truth that can connect us.

In *Words Can Change Your Brain*, authors Andrew Newberg and Mark Waldman provide a list of phony-positive words that turn friends and customers off, including *amazing, excellent, fabulous, fantastic, incredible, marvelous, great, phenomenal, splendid*, and *wonderful*.

Amazing stands out as one of the words that often disconnects people, both face-to-face and on Facebook, regardless of whether they are in Australia, the UK, or the USA. It has become a default, blanket response, in place of one that connects with specifics. In a text message exchange, I told a New York friend I'd taken a Citi Bike to work (something I do almost every day—my commute is less than a mile), to which she replied, "Oh wow that's *amazing*." I couldn't come up with a response to that. Acknowledging that riding a Citi Bike to work was *amazing* would be tantamount to lying. Her *amazing* had disconnected us and that ended our text exchange for the day.

Amazing use has doubled since 1985. And given that SLPs in the New York public education system use this word daily (1.78 for elementary school and 2.00 for middle school), we can expect it to continue to rise in the speech of the next

generation.

But what's this got to do with the increased use of *amazing*? Social media's correspondence bias—a term used by psychologists to describe the drawing of false conclusions about others based on limited knowledge (e.g., seeing several photographs of someone smiling on Facebook and concluding that someone is *always* happy)—has given those of us who have grown up with it a sense that everyone is entitled to an *amazing* life. There's a tendency to exaggerate the normal to *amazing* to compete with the extreme amounts of *amazing* in the feeds of others. When it's the norm for everyone else, it's easy to feel as if you (and your posts) are not good enough without it. Spending five minutes to select an Instagram filter to make that meatball-stuffed baked potato look like a Michelin-starred meal so you can feel entitled to use the hashtag *#amazeballs* doesn't make for an *amazing* life. For a potato to be truly *amazing*, it would need to cause "astonishment, great wonder, or surprise" (Merriam-Webster definition). In the US, *awesome* often stands in for *amazing*, and has the same disconnecting effect. Emmy Favilla, BuzzFeed's copy chief, adds that "casually describing a restaurant as 'awesome' does not mean your dinner last night inspired feelings of awe and wonder, any more than calling your Nintendo game 'radical' in 1988 implied that it contained secret messages advocating extreme measures."

Our sensitivity to the meaning of words declines every time we watch the news or scroll through posts. In a study titled "Affective Habituation: Subliminal Exposure to Extreme Stimuli Decreases Their Extremity," by Ap Dijksterhuis, reported in the October 2002 issue of the American Psychological Association's *Emotion* journal, the author states that "people can become immune to the overuse of strongly positive or negative words. Their awareness and sensitivity decreases, which may explain why chronic complainers are often unaware of their negativity and the emotional damage they are causing."

Is Donald Trump aware of his own negativity and the emotional damage he is causing through his lack of sensitivity to meaning?

Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump, Nov 18, 2017:

Crooked Hillary Clinton is the worst (and biggest) loser of all time.

He also has a tendency to overuse one of the words Andrew Newberg and Mark Waldman listed as both a negative and a positive exaggerator—*great.* Donald Trump is desensitizing us to its true meaning through his daily *great*-dropping. Here he is using it as a negative exaggerator:

Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump, Nov 20, 2017:

Marshawn Lynch of the NFL's Oakland Raiders stands for the Mexican Anthem and sits down to boos for our National Anthem. Great disrespect!

If he's not making America *great* again, then no one can deny that he's making America hear the word *great* again. His first presidential campaign may have ended in 2016, but the slogan has not.

Epic

Here's a word that I'd like to add to Andrew Newberg and Mark Waldman's list of phony positives. Let's start with Merriam-Webster's definition: "recounting the deeds of a legendary or historical hero." But that's in need of some updating. You might see tweets of people describing their new drone or the fried chicken they had last night as *epic*, despite the lack of legendary deeds of either the drone or the chicken. *Epic* might mean "legendary" but in most cases only when *legendary* is hyperbole.

In her book, *A World Without Whom*—in a section titled "Devaluing Language"—Emmy Favilla refers to *epic* as the "Adam Sandler movie of the adjectival world." She adds, "Nothing *epic* can be taken seriously anymore. You'll often find it nestled comfortably between its buddies *nice* and *good* on a shelf in the Empty Shells of Words section." What Favilla describes here is a trend of an overstatement generation (OG) toward nonliteral, largely disingenuous exaggeration. She says we also use these tired words because we're lazy and we don't want to make the effort to be specific about what we mean.

But maybe in the overstatement generation, it's not cool to be specific. My editor, Keren, calls it the "generic era." Instead of asking, "How was your morning?" we're asking, "How's *everything*?" Instead of telling our dinner host that we thought the dessert was the best part of the meal, we say, "That meal was *awesome*" or "That was an *epic* meal." Instead of telling your friend that the guy you are dating is from a small town in southwest England called Penzance, you tell your friend, "He's from London." Yes, using *from London* as a generic label for anyone from the UK happens a lot in America, even for people from Scotland! Instead of telling our friend we ate Japanese fusion fish tacos at Chelsea market, we say, "We did tacos." Instead of telling our friend we ordered the halibut with zucchini, green beans, and tomatoes, we tell him, "I had the fish

and veggies." Instead of saying, "grilled chicken breast," we say, #Protein #Goals.

The idea that you have to label your experiences with generic, trending hashtags reinforces the overstatement generation's belief about what language is cool (accepted) and what isn't. But this lack of expression of specific feelings—aka lack of connection—causes isolation.

Fun

Fun may be the number 35 word for eliciting a feeling of happiness, according to a 2012 University of Vermont study,[6] but that's when its use is an accurate reflection of its meaning (which, according to Merriam-Webster, is "entertainment, amusement, or enjoyment"). When it's not, it's a minimum-effort, cop-out, word-trash label. Hell, why not pull the elastic strap on your underwear up above your belt as you say it? Its word-trash use is often verbal. Perhaps you tell someone you are going to Swindon for work next week, and he replies, "Oh, *fun.*" Not really, unless he knows you will be entertained, amused, or find enjoyment there—which is possible, though unlikely.

Unless his tone indicates sarcasm,[7] he is disconnecting from you with abstract labeling. You could substitute *fun* with any label associated with Swindon: "Oh, Conservative"; "Oh, crap town"; "Oh, boring." They are all ego judgments, and all disconnect.

Compare these responses:

"Oh, *fun*."

"What are you going to get up to after work in Swindon?"

Which response is more likely to put an end to the connection (and the conversation)? Avoid telling anyone to "Have *fun*." It's shoulding someone to enjoy themselves. We don't need to be told to do that.

Fun, don't kill my vibe.

Random

Random has been devalued by its use as a blanket-statement response by the overstatement generation. Favilla describes *random* use as "lazy, imprecise, and kind of[8] annoying. It's so *what*, exactly? So strange? So funny? So unexpected? So illogical? Somewhere along the way, *random* mutated from meaning 'without plan or pattern' to… literally anything you need it to be."

Your friend says, "I hooked up with some *random* dude from the bar last night." It wasn't *random* if they were both in the same bar at the same time.

"You're so *random* sometimes." Oh yeah? Am I? So, there is no pattern to my behavior or thought behind what I say? I guess what you mean is that I said something you weren't expecting me to say. And for you that's weird. Well, I guess that makes me less predictable, but does it make me *random*?

I imagine I could come off as a fuddy-duddy with my feelings about *random*. With a little stretch of the imagination, it's easy to grasp what *random* means in these sentences, but would these sentences connect more—and be more precise —without the abstract adjective? Take the *random* out of the next sentence you hear where it's included, and it quickly becomes apparent it's little more than an empty filler, shell of a word, *umm, kinda, like, trash*.

Empty Shells of Words (aka Fillers)

- *Nice*—Did you know the origin of nice is the Latin *newciys*, meaning "ignorant"? Coincidence?
- *Like, so* and *kind of/kinda* (and *like* and *so* used separately)—*Like* means something *is not* what it *is. So* is *very* overused.
- *Random*—I don't believe in coincidence, only *random* numbers and patterns. If you went home with some *random* person, weren't you both in the same bar at the same time?
- *Everything*—No thing is *everything*. "How's *everything*?" No idea!
- *Good, fun, epic, great, awesome, amazing*—Get real (that is, specific).
- *Best, best regards/wishes, all the best*—These sign-offs ended messages for centuries before the overstatement generation. The next time your parents accuse you of exaggeration, ask them how they end their emails and call them out on it: We *should* on ourselves to add it to the end of our emails by default, yet Merriam-Webster's definition of *best* is "excelling all others"—and I imagine we want to save our *best* greetings for the people we love, not a colleague we email once a month. Drop the *Best* and go with *Regards* if you want to keep the friendly feeling alive without the bullsh*t. M-W's definition fits the bill: "regards (plural): friendly greetings implying such feeling."
- *Lol*—back in 2000, pre-Facebook, pre-Instagram, and pre-Twitter, we used *lol* on MSN or AOL messenger and texts when we were laughing out loud FOR

REAL. Now we have to say "I actually just laughed out loud for real" or *LMAO* (laughing my ass off—because… overstatement generation). *Hahaha* might be genuine, but *lol* has been reduced to an empty shell, a filler. It's for "filling awkward e-silence," says Emmy Favilla. At best it means, "Don't take what I'm saying here seriously." OK, then don't say what you are saying at all. How about you switch the *lol* for a smiley-face emoji?

Others, like English professor John McWhorter, argue that *lol*s do serve a purpose. In his book, *Words on the Move*, McWhorter says, "All *LOLs* take the edge off. They buffer the uncertainties and vulnerabilities of, for example, burgeoning romance." McWhorter says the *lol*s do this in the same way that we laugh in between vulnerable statements in a face-to-face conversation, and that just as laughter is important on a date, *lol*s are important in texting romance. Perhaps, but only, I'd argue, if we are chuckling FOR REAL as we *lol*. Otherwise, it's phony (and not in the sense of the device you use to call and text). Phony disconnects, so keep your *lol*s at least chuckle-real.

Ego Juice

Never use a long word, where a short word will do.

If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

—George Orwell (the second and third of his six rules in "Politics and the English Language")

There are words and phrases that add no meaning to communication, but instead bolster the speaker's sense of self-importance by making her think she sounds more academic. It's the spoken equivalent of wearing non-prescription glasses. Disconnection results.

What's Interesting Is… (the Size of My Ego)

I have a friend who prefaces almost every story of a lesson she learned from her latest self-help guru with these three words. For example, "*What's interesting is* that certain people need to eat more pork than others." Just tell me the story and trust that I have enough intelligence to decide what's interesting for myself.

Show, don't tell.

If your ego is more concise, it may substitute one word for these three and use the adverb *interestingly* instead. *Interestingly* is one of several adverbs classed as a "disjunct." The name suggests a *dis*connection, and *disjunct* is often defined as "disjointed" (from the rest of the sentence) in dictionaries. These disjointed disjuncts disconnect our conversations and, in return, offer no value. Favilla says disjuncts such as *interestingly, frankly, clearly, luckily,* and *unfortunately* are "so ordinary as to excite no comment or interest whatsoever."

Imagine that you are having a conversation with a new acquaintance at a mutual friend's party and she says one of the following to you:

1. *Interestingly,* the world's population of blowfish is on the increase.

2. The world's population of blowfish is on the increase.

3. The world's population of blowfish is on the increase and that interests me.

In sentence 1, the speaker doesn't give us the opportunity to decide for ourselves if it's interesting or not. We are told it is. Being told what opinion or attitude to have is a repellent. Let's go find some cake instead of listening to this person jabber on about how we *should* be interested in blowfish. In sentence 2, we can decide for ourselves what's interesting, but unless the sentence is uttered in the context of a conversation about marine life, we may start to plan how we can get away from the speaker. In sentence 3, we get to learn a little about the speaker and what interests her, and our response is likely to be a personal, specific question, which will keep the connection—and the conversation—alive.

Appropriate or Inappropriate

Appropriate implies a moral judgment that something or someone's behavior is *right* for a situation. For instance, "It is not *appropriate* to clap during the mass." Any judgment is the product of ego (that is, products of associations and abstract labeling of what's *right* or *wrong*). Saying something is *appropriate* or *inappropriate* won't help you connect with the specifics of truth. This is something I have gotten into a couple of arguments with psychologists and aspirational politicians over. They argue that people need to be *told* what is appropriate. My response is that we do what we want to do to feel happy, and what we need to do to stay alive and out of jail. Everything else is bullsh*t. There's a misconception that people want to harm each other. Do you?

A lot of what we want to do is to connect with each other, and we connect only by being honest, kind, curious, and courageous. What is *appropriate* can go f*ck itself.

Fundamentally and Essentially

"Fundamentally, I see no reason why anyone would want to attend his party. He's *essentially* no more than a glorified banker." This makes the speaker feel high and mighty.

But if you find yourself talking to someone who inserts *fundamentally* and *essentially* into his sentences, you'll probably want to find an excuse to get out of that conversation. As with disjuncts, these adverbs disconnect us, in this case by asserting an *opinion* (as fact) of what something is at a basic/*fundamental* level, i.e., *in essence*. Such assertions imply (and create the sense) that the speaker/writer is an authority on the subject. Dropping into your conversation a *fundamentally* or an *essentially* is a quick ego-boosting, statement-bolstering trick, especially for those who fail to support their statements with specifics or facts.

Readers and writers of the *New Yorker* have a reputation for elitism. This reputation may be justified given their headlines like this:

DONALD TRUMP, JR.'S E-MAILS HAVE FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGED THE RUSSIA STORY

Or how about:

CAUGHT AMONG CONFLICTING POLITICAL CURRENTS, COTTON DECIDED, ESSENTIALLY, TO SAY NOTHING

Here's an experiment you can try at home. Go to www.newyorker.com. Click on the search icon (top right) and type in the word *fundamentally*. At the time of writing, I see about 1,100 results. Do you get more or less? That's a crude measure of the amount of ego and its increase or decrease in the writing at the *New Yorker* since I wrote this sentence in May 2019. Now try the same experiment with the word *essentially*. I am tempted by my own ego to insert the word *whopping* here, but about 3,800 results speaks for itself.

Here's another egotistical example from the *New Yorker*:

As a daily composite of the tonnage fees on popular seagoing routes, the B.D.I.

essentially mirrors supply and demand *at the most elementary level*.

Here, the author of the article double-bolsters his writing with the unnecessary make-me-smarter-sounding words *essentially* and *elementary*. But he doesn't stop there. He adds a superlative *the most*, further disconnecting himself and his readers from the truth. None of the *New Yorker*'s headlines or sentences are any weaker with the word *essentially* or *fundamentally* removed. Even if you substitute one of those with the word *basically*, you are still bolstering. If ego is—per Merriam-Webster—"the self especially as contrasted with another self or the world," or—per Ryan Holiday (in his book, *Ego Is the Enemy*)—"The need to be better than, more than, recognized for, far past any reasonable utility—that's ego," then bolstering with disjuncts and adverbs, such as *fundamentally* and *essentially*, is what the ego does to help prove its *disconnected* existence: Look at me, I am an authority on this subject, I am separate and I am special. But take away the bolstering and the ego mask, and what we really desire is connection.

RECAP: ADVERBS, ADJECTIVES, AND EGO BOOSTERS

• *It is* is stronger than *it* really *is* or *it* definitely *is.*

• *Extremely, greatly, hugely,* and *massively* exaggerate and turn feeling to fakery.

• Show, don't tell: *How* adverbs (e.g., *slowly, beautifully, happily*) weaken your connection by taking the focus away from the action of the verb.

• Adjectives, such as *bad, nasty, terrible, awful*, and *horrible,* are generalizations that change specifics into bullsh*t. What's real is specific.

• *Fine* is rarely used honestly. "I'm *fine*" often means just the opposite.

• Phony-positive words, such as *amazing, awesome*, and *fabulous*, can turn friends and customers off. They hear bullsh*t splat in their ears.

• You spew *ego juice* on people when you tell them what's *interesting, appropriate* or *inappropriate, fundamental*, and *essential.* Make-me-smarter-sounding words are unnecessary bolsterings to create the pedestal effect, which requires the sacrifice of connection.

Footnotes

1 In Old English, *like* was the word for *body*!

2 From an article first published on Women 2.0, subsequently as her LinkedIn article "'Just' Say No": https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/just-say-ellen-petry-leanse/.

3 "*Awesome* is a compliment, *awful* is a put-down. Yet there isn't anything inherently positive about the ending *-some*, as we know from *loathsome* and *gruesome*. Nor is *-ful* inherently negative—note *wonderful* and *bountiful*. *Awesome* is good and *awful* is bad solely because of how the cookie happened to crumble, as we know from the fact that *awful* actually used to be a compliment as well," says John McWhorter in his book, *Words on the Move.*

4 Cited in Hilary De Vries, "In Hollywood, Rudeness to Make an Oscar Blink," *New York Times* (October 20, 2002). https://www.nytimes.com/.

5 Use of the exclamation point also surged with the advent of social media. While *!* can add drama, it can also make a written message warmer or friendlier. Compare *I'm fine!* with *I'm fine.* The exclamation point alone isn't a disconnector, but it can disconnect when overused, and make messages seem melodramatic and phony. It's a sign of weak writing when the writers rely on *!* to make their writing more exciting. I recommend that you watch the *!* episode of the Netflix documentary series, *Explained.*

6 The top 50 words for eliciting a feeling of happiness from the study, titled "Positivity in the English Language" appear in chapter 11.

7 Swindon is not known for fun and often bears the brunt of UK jokes, including this one by Ricky Gervais (as David Brent) in the UK comedy series *The Office*: "I heard they dropped an atomic bomb on Swindon. … And did about £15 worth of damage!"

8 It's BuzzFeed, not the BBC. Another example of how these *kind of* deflectors creep in, even in the language of copy chiefs.

EMOTIONAL DISCONNECTORS

The internet is a breeding ground for relentless hyperbole.

—Emmy Favilla, in *A World Without Whom*

We are in the habit of using certain words because we overhear (or see) other people using them. If you've ever learned a foreign language, you know that mimicking patterns in word use is how we become fluent. That's why the fastest way to learn a foreign language is to spend time in a country where it's the first language. But in our own mother tongue, we are often unaware of how the copying of some word habits disconnects us, and we repeat words and phrases that other people say, text, or tweet without realizing that they are harmful to our connections. Often, these words are loaded with *emotional associations* that bring down the vibe of the conversation, tweet, or article we are reading. These are also vibes that can trigger billion-dollar sell orders in the financial markets that lead to a company losing 20 percent of its value in a few hours.

I spoke to the CEO of MarketPsych, Dr. Richard Peterson, who worked with Reuters to quantify the emotion of certain "up and down" words—think *rose, fell, climb, higher*—in news stories, and assign numerical values to the individual words and each story as a whole. Using Dr. Peterson's model, Reuters developed machine-readable news software that rates companies, currencies, and countries for emotions such as joy, anger, and fear. Banks integrate the software into their trading platforms, which can be set so that, if a breaking news story comes in with a low score, it triggers a sell order in milliseconds before the human traders have time to react! When Covid-19 became a global pandemic, fear was the sentiment that triggered the worldwide sell-off and sent the stock

market tumbling. Words control sentiment, sentiment controls machines, and machines control the markets. And now, machines also write some of the news![1] The *Washington Post*, the *Guardian,* and *Forbes* (and others) already use robot reporting. But a technology nonprofit (cofounded by Elon Musk), called OpenAI, has created a bot called GPT-2 that even OpenAI is afraid to share.

As *Inc.* journalist—and owner of content consultancy, Aveck—Betsy Mikel writes, "GPT-2 'studies' a single line of text to learn the patterns of human language. It can then generate full paragraphs of text and *mimic* the writing style. … OpenAI quickly discovered a big problem with GPT-2. The algorithm-generated texts were good. So good that you couldn't tell a robot wrote them. It began to generate paragraphs of text that were eerily too human. The *Guardian*'s Alex Hern fed GPT-2 a few sentences about Brexit. It spat out a full-length artificial article that even generated fake quotes using real names.… The fake news implications are obvious."[2]

But Peterson's software also processes the words we "publish" on social media. We may not be paying attention to the sentiment that goes with our use of certain words, but AI is already helping banks to exploit it. So the next time you tweet or post, remember that there can be a broader journalistic and economic impact to the words we repeat. Even if you don't tweet, you talk. Phrases we hear and read, we often end up using ourselves. *Pity party* and *hater* are "downer" terms we picked up after being exposed to them repeatedly, online and in spoken conversations. Why does this matter? Because the same words that bring down the sentiment score of a news story or a tweet, also bring down the sentiment of a conversation. So, consider yourself an independent journalist and reporter on your own sentiment. And if you don't want to contribute to fake news, low sentiment (anger and fear) and disconnection, don't broadcast (speak or tweet) the following.

Pity Party with Shame

Let's focus on the definition of the word *pity*: "sympathetic sorrow for one suffering, distressed, or unhappy." That's from Merriam-Webster. Sympathetic *sorrow*. What does *sorrow* mean? "Deep distress, sadness, or regret, especially for the loss of someone or something loved." It's not hard to find evidence of (hyperbolic) "deep distress" in the media's rendering of American politics, with comments such as "a primary campaign would need to be waged more in *sorrow*," and (on the subject of trade tariffs) "Canada was rolling them out more

in *sorrow* than in anger," appearing in the *New York Times*.

Sorrow is often found in music lyrics and is the title of one of the National's songs. It opens with the lyrics, "*Sorrow* found me when I was young, *Sorrow* waited, *sorrow* won," which reflects the usage changes witnessed across a lifetime by anyone born in the early decades of the 20th century, like my grandparents: *Sorrow* use dropped in the 1980s and '90s, but is now making a comeback to its highest use since 1920 (the year my grandfather was born—and, yes, he's still alive at the time of this writing in 2019).

If *sorrow* is "deep distress," then *pity* is "sympathetic deep distress," and in most cases when someone uses the word *pity* in conversation today, she is lying. For example: "It's a *pity* the store was closed today." Did that cause you sympathetic *deep distress*? "What a *pity*." What are you feeling *sympathetic sorrow* toward? I *pity* the fool.

We are not only lying through a language bad habit, we are also creating an association with deep distress. "Yes, but," I hear the lexicographers among you sputtering, "the role of the dictionary is not to prescribe word usage. It is to describe current word usage." That may be, but the original emotional association of *pity* with *sympathy*, *sorrow*, and *deep distress* also remains.

Even if we don't use the word *pity*, the *Associated Press Stylebook* recommends that we avoid other word choices "that connote *pity*, such as *afflicted with* or *suffers from* multiple sclerosis. Rather, *has* multiple sclerosis." In this example, *afflict* and *suffer* are pity verbs based on an ego judgment of the speaker. Where there's ego, there's disconnection. *Has* communicates no *pity*, no judgment, no ego. In her book, *A World Without Whom*, BuzzFeed copy chief Emmy Favilla adds that it's better to say "people with mental illness" than "mentally ill people." We are all people first. We are not our conditions, whatever they may be—although our ego works to classify and label people by *their* conditions so it can strengthen (the idea of) its separate identity.

A New Kinda Party

Yes, the *pity party*—a phrase that you wouldn't have heard until the late 1990s. The *pity*—like the *party*—is nonexistent and the term is often used in scathing comments about someone else:

> **new year, same nasty woman @littleandlashes, Jan 20, 2018:**
> So I may be moving back to VA after that argument. My mom told me that I'm a huge disappointment to her because I reject all the ideas that she raised me with. She twisted my words and threw herself a pity party and my stepdad happily played into it.

@littleandlashes's tweet—from *that argument* to the *pity party* to *happily played into it*—is full of abstractions and devoid of specifics.

What did the stepdad *do*? Who said what? *That argument*? Did @littleandlashes's mother actually say, "You're a huge disappointment to me because you reject all the ideas I raised you with"? If so, why didn't you just say that? Without specifics, nothing exists. And we know that a *pity party* doesn't exist. Talking about things that don't exist as if they did is increasing the amount of nonexistence in the world. Our language reflects our reality, and it is increasingly figurative, abstract, and ungrounded. It's no wonder there's a need for meditation, mindfulness, and other grounding techniques when the language of our minds (read: ego) disconnects from the reality of our senses. Parties aren't what they used to be.

Shame

The second word at the party. As it is with *pity*, this is both an emotional-anchor disconnector and a lie maker. *Shame* is in the top 30 percent of words looked up on Merriam-Webster, which offers this definition: "a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety."

That's a damn *shame*. It's a *shame*. What a *shame*.

Are you sure it's a *shame*?

I challenge my mother on this as she is *shamelessly* guilty of responding to any statement I make about something that doesn't go according to plan with, "That's a *shame*."

Me: "There was a lot of traffic on the drive down today."

Mom: "That's a *shame.*"

Shame on me for experiencing the reality of traffic! I jest. I know Mom doesn't mean anything by it, but when I hear *shame* as a response to something I say, it doesn't make me feel connected. It creates an unnecessary downer.

Brené Brown, PhD, LMSW, says that shame needs three things to grow: secrecy, silence, and judgment. If you put these three ingredients into a petri dish, they will grow shame.

Dead, Dying, Slay, Kill Me Now, Savage

As I walked down Ninth Avenue in Manhattan a few nights ago, I heard a woman almost yelling into her phone, "I was *dying. Dying*!" I pieced together that she'd arrived at a party, saw someone there, and that's why she was "dying." She still looked plenty alive to me. A few days later I heard another woman on West 29th Street say to her boyfriend, "I'd rather be *dead*." This is something I remember my 30-something female roommates in New York saying often, and that usually prompted me to exit the living room.

But I was a hypocrite. I could be dramatic, too, to the point that my nickname from two ex-girlfriends was DQ for Drama Queen. I used to say, "Oh f*ck! I can't believe it. Oh my God" if my coffee dripped onto my shirt. A friend of mine used to mock me by rapping, "Every day I'm suffering" (her parody of the track "Every Day I'm Shuffling" by LMFAO—or maybe Rick Ross's "Every Day I'm Hustlin'"). She wasn't wrong. Every time I said "Oh no" for a shirt stain, I was *killing* the vibe, creating unnecessary suffering while disconnecting from my friend. I could have used the splash as an opportunity for a joke that would have increased connection between us.

Some SLPs in elementary schools also say "I was *dying*" often (the average frequency was 2.88 in elementary schools versus 3.18 in middle schools). In the same vein, a favorite exclamation of my ex-wife was "*Kill me now*," which I interpreted as her saying to me: "I'm superior to you, you muppet." This didn't help us to connect and reconcile our differences (but no, I didn't *kill* her). I assume that what she meant was, "I'm frustrated with you" or, more specifically, "I resent you for putting more dirty dishes on the counter instead of in the dishwasher." As with "I was *dying*," the elementary school SLPs use this more often than their middle school counterparts (2.72 in elementary schools versus 3.32 in middle schools).

When *dying* and *killing* were no longer enough for us, we started to *slay*, which is *killing [it]* but on a grander scale. It's a scale so grand that it's even changing how we conjugate verbs: "Many people may produce *slayed* as a speech error (it should be *slew*), and their listeners may tuck it away in memory as a genuine past-tense form for the verb. If that happens often enough, doublets such as *slew/slayed*… will come into common parlance. Eventually, the irregular form [*slew*] may disappear outright," says psychologist Steven Pinker in his book *Words and Rules*.

Friends who *slay* together stay together, as some say. Or in the words of Merriam-Webster: Friends who "*kill* violently, wantonly, or in great numbers"

together stay together. If that sounds *savage*, it's because it is.

"That's a *savage* drink you just made—thanks, bro." *Savage* might be slang for something that's cool, but again, I refer back to the wisdom of BuzzFeed copy chief Emmy Favilla when she says (in her book, *A World Without Whom*), "There's something about the word that makes me uneasy about applying it in this sense—the fact that it literally means violently cruel or ferocious, maybe, and it's hard to separate its slangy usage from the image of a bloodthirsty Neanderthal."

And if I look at the "top" tweets today containing the word *slaying*, these two come up next to each other:

Spencer Ackerman Verified Account @attackerman, Oct 19, 2018:

At the risk of being obvious, among the reasons the Khashoggi slaying is a big deal is because after MBS' palace coup, a young man willing to gruesomely execute a mild critic is in line to run an extremely influential & rich petrostate for, oh, 50 years.

Marie Claire Verified Account @marieclaire, Oct 18, 2018:

Let's be honest, Beyoncé has been slaying FOREVER.

One person is dead, one person is *killing it*, and the line between the two is thin and gray. Marie Claire's tweet is also an example of how to abstract and disconnect three times in eight words: First, there's *let's be honest* (let's stop lying), then there's *forever* (aka *always*) and third, season the sound bite with some *slaying*.

I admit, there is a funny side to all this death talk, but there is also a harmful side that we ignore to the detriment of our wellbeing. Regardless of whether it reflects reality, language affects thoughts, and thoughts affect feelings. When I asked cognitive psychologist (and professor) Gary Lupyan about this, he told me, "There's certainly lots of evidence that the words we use affect how we think, feel, and in some cases, what we literally see even when we're using them to ourselves rather than as part of a conversation." Normalizing the use of *I was dying*, *kill me*, *slaying*, and *killing it* reinforces and normalizes thoughts and word association (and associated feelings) of death.

Hater

Facebook and Twitter users love to call out *haters*. Not surprising, then, that we

see a spike in the usage of the word correlate with the mass adoption of social media (*hater* features in the chorus of Taylor Swift's 2014 smash hit, "Shake It Off"). At the time of this writing, the rate of *hater* tweets is 400 an hour or 6.6666 a minute. The devil and the tweet blue sea.

Matt Paciorkowski @MyNameIsMarcus, Dec 1, 2017:

Loser and hater @realDonaldTrump likes to tweet racist videos that only spread hatred, but here's some positive contributions Muslims made

You could argue that *hater* is more accurate than *loser,* but to know if it's the truth, we need to connect with what it means *to hate*.

Hate/Despise

According to Merriam-Webster, *hate* is in the top 10 percent of words used as nouns, but as a verb it's also a frequent flyer. It's often a lie: "I *hate* you"—this is rarely true. Any verb of contempt is usually an exaggeration grasped for in anger in an argument with a loved one or friend. Kids say it to parents, then hug them a few hours later. How many people do you *hate* as you are reading this sentence? Before you answer, read this definition of *hate* from Merriam-Webster: "to feel extreme enmity toward: to regard with active hostility."

Enmity made Merriam-Webster's word of the day on October 17, 2017 (three months prior to my writing this sentence). It means "active mutual ill will or deep-seated dislike."

While Donald Trump is the only person who knows how he feels about specific demographics, the one published example I could find of him using the specific words *I hate* was from the week in which I wrote this (in reference to the US government's family separation policy for asylum seekers at the US border).:

I hate the children being taken away [from their parents]. The Democrats have to change their law. That's their law.

—President Donald Trump, in remarks to reporters at the White House, June 15, 2018

Trump stopped using the words *I hate* on Twitter after he became president. He used *I hate* 24 times between 2012 and his inauguration in 2017, but not once

with an individual or group of people as the object of his hate. If language is a reflection of reality, people who hate Trump are more *hater* than he is.

Hate to Say It, Hate to Break It, Hate to Tweet It

Adam Lindgreen Verified Account @ArmadaUGS, Jan 20, 2018:

Hate to say this but no more signings/pictures etc today. Honestly feel very bad about my play and the next few hours will be really crucial to get things together. Love you all but the timing moving forward is just really bad

From *hate* to love in one tweet. Tell me, Adam, did you feel intense dislike and enmity while saying that? I'm calling two words of BS on this. Can you guess which two? If you "honestly" feel very bad about the play, does that imply that the rest of what you are saying is dishonest?

The second-to-last time Trump tweeted with an *I hate,* it was in this ego-boosting lie (lie because I'm 99.9 percent sure he didn't *hate* saying this):

Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump, Jul 26, 2016:

I hate to say it, but the Republican Convention was far more interesting (with a much more beautiful set) than the Democratic Convention!

The Macmillan dictionary offers a definition of the phrase *I hate to say it* that's more prescriptive than descriptive (and less connected to the current meaning): "used for showing that you are sorry about what you are going to say, because you think it is unpleasant or you wish it was not true."

I have a friend who often says, "I'm not being funny, but…" She uses this, too. Both statements precede a statement of ego judgment, although *I hate to say it* is often also used to pretend that you don't like to tell someone that something isn't going to happen or that you hate saying no to something: "*I hate to say it* but I don't think we are going to make it to your baby shower this weekend." I don't hate to say it. *I hate to say it* is a word-trash lie. Stop hating, just say it.

Despise

Synonyms of *hate* are also on the rise: *Despise* is in the top 1 percent of all words looked up on Merriam-Webster's online dictionary. So what does it mean? "To look down on with contempt or aversion." And guess what? *Contempt* is also in the top 1 percent of words looked up on Merriam-Webster.

You might imagine that if so many people are looking up the definition, its use would be accurate.

Okay, it may seem harmless enough because we recognize it as an exaggeration, but let's not forget the earlier study I referenced from *Emotion* magazine: "Chronic complainers are often unaware of their negativity and the emotional damage they are causing." Did you know that *detest* also has a violent side? "To feel intense and often violent antipathy toward; loathe" (Merriam-Webster). Perhaps many of us are unaware of its true meaning because (again, according to Merriam-Webster) *detest* doesn't get looked up that often: It's in the bottom 50 percent of words, but that doesn't mean its use isn't on the rise.

Enemy

As far as polarizing emotional disconnectors go, this one hits the spot. Donald Trump uses *enemy* to galvanize his pole of support.

Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump, Feb 18, 2017:

The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!

Or perhaps…

Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump, May 28, 2017:

… it is very possible that those sources don't exist but are made up by fake news writers. #FakeNews is the enemy!

As I was about to start this sentence, I was thinking to myself, *But* enemy *isn't a word that comes up a lot in everyday conversation. We are not Trump. And Twitter isn't a reflection of everyday conversation.* Then I checked Google Ngram and saw that the usage frequency increased by over 50 percent around the advent of social media (between 2005 and 2008).

OK, this doesn't prove that *enemy* comes up a lot in conversation even if it is on the rise in books and social media, but what is this increased exposure to the word doing to our ability to connect with others? I noticed, as I wrote my way through the paragraphs on *hate, detest,* and *loathe,* an increased feeling of frustration, almost anger, coming through onto the page—which I have since edited out. My ego had compelled me to write comments that could be described as *contempt,* as I mocked Twitter users. Even if we are not using *hater, hate,*

detest, loathe, and *enemy* in our speech, repeated exposure to these words normalizes them as a reflection of our reality. The more often we see or hear them, the more they appear in our thoughts, the more they create an unnecessary negative outlook, even if it is subconscious.

Monster

Let's go to one of the most common insult metaphors of our time, often used to describe people in power (yes, including Donald Trump): *monster*.

It is easier to paint a *good* or a *bad* line than to express the specifics of a photograph. But the truth is full of shades in details, and every person is a unique blend of complexity. Those we know as saints were not all *good*: St. Mary of Egypt had a reputation for corrupting young men. She once seduced a ship's entire crew and the pilgrims on board as the ship sailed on a holy—no pun intended but if it's there, why not?—trip to Jerusalem. And what about a man who kills someone? The judge, jury, and public may call him a murderer or a *monster,* but what if it wasn't his intention to kill? And is every murderer a *monster*? Case in point: In 1984, Ronnie Fields murdered Denise Taylor's 19-year-old brother Bo when Ronnie botched his attempt to rip Bo off over a small marijuana purchase: "After deciding to take Bo's money without handing over the drugs, Fields took a homemade gun from his car. He told Bo and Bo's friend to run. Bo, confused, asked: 'What?' There was a single shot. It struck Bo in the heart."[3]

If Denise and her father, Jim, had called Ronnie Fields a monster for the last 33 years, then he'd still be in prison. But Ronnie Fields is no monster. A monster is—according to Oxford Dictionaries—"an imaginary creature that is typically large, ugly, and frightening." Ronnie Fields is a man. A man who, through prison visits, became so close a friend to his victim's sister, Denise, that Ronnie listed her as his next of kin, and so close to his victim's father, Jim, that Jim offered him a place to live when he got out of jail. And the main reason he got out of jail (as well as Ronnie's own self-reform) was both Jim and Denise fought for the release of the man who had killed their brother/son. Ronnie says that when Denise and her father started visiting him in jail, "It just made me feel more human, less lost, and more civilized, how these people were looking at me."

If we had only heard that a drug dealer had shot and killed someone's son, how many of us would have declared him a *monster,* a murderer who deserved

nothing more than to spend his days rotting in a prison cell or, better still, face the death penalty? This nonmonster, human version of the murder story wasn't covered in the US media and was only picked up by the BBC in the UK. Why? The story risks breaking the mold of what sells: It's easier to reinforce beliefs that your readers and viewers find easy to believe—that killers and Donald Trump are *monsters*—than to challenge your readers' and viewers' ideas and risk losing your readership or viewers and advertising revenue.

This *monster*ing of human beings like Donald Trump and Ronnie Fields does not help us prevent murders or protect society. It generalizes opinion to abstract simplicity. It's easy to grasp for the first word our ego can find to stamp its judgment. Unfortunately, it's more bullsh*t. And I don't mean the definition of a bull's excrement. I mean "nonsense, lies, or exaggeration." That's according to Dictionary.com.

It's part of my passion and life purpose to increase the amount of human connection in this world, and one of the ways to achieve this is by reducing the amount of bullsh*t in this world. But the truth is that we come out with equally as much bullsh*t per capita as Donald Trump. Calling him a *monster* will only increase the depth of the sh*t pool we live in.

Evil

It's often used as an adjective before the word *monster,* but it's also a noun in its own right. It means (according to Oxford Dictionaries): "profound immorality, wickedness, and depravity, especially when regarded as a supernatural force."

Frank Conniff @FrankConniff, Dec 5, 2017:

There are lots of ways to mark the Christmas season, but I have to say, the GOP's decision to engulf America in a vortex of pure unadulterated evil is an odd choice.

If America is in a vortex of pure unadulterated *evil*, I didn't notice when I just went outside to buy my slice of pizza on Eighth Avenue. In fact, the service was pretty good (imagine Larry David voice). In the tweet above, Frank Conniff abstracts to reinforce polarized public opinion, helping to push the poles a little farther apart.

And here's comedian Chelsea Handler tweeting about former White House press secretary Sarah Sanders:

This woman deserves to be taken down. She is pure evil." (Dec 7, 2017)

I get that Twitter is an informal medium, Chelsea, but in informal language you know that *take down* is a synonym for *shoot*, right? Do you consider shooting politicians *evil*, too? Does that fall under the definition of *pure evil*? Not that I am a fan of Sarah's but if her "evil" were pure, surely Sarah wouldn't have worked as the campaign manager of the One Campaign founded to end extreme poverty and preventable disease. Would you, Chelsea, consider tweeting specific examples of Sarah's (pure) "profound immorality, wickedness, and depravity," rather than labeling her as *pure evil*? Because if you call her that, she's right to defend herself, and she's not going to want to talk to you—just like a kid in a schoolyard. But if you critique her actions with specifics, who knows? Perhaps you'll end up having a conversation.

Loser

This is a favorite term of 1990's American high school coming-of-age movies. Its frequency of use has doubled since the 1960s, but may have peaked in 2002. Perhaps in this new era of hyperbolic disconnection, *loser* isn't hyperbolic enough and may have already had its heyday. That said, it's still a disconnector when not used in the context of its true meaning, and, in the context of its true meaning, *loser* is a synonym for runner-up:

> **(noun)**: a person or thing that loses or has lost something, especially a game or contest.
> synonyms: defeated person, also-ran, runner-up;
> "The loser still gets the silver medal."

High school kids walk up to the kid wearing hand-me-downs and say, "Hey runner-up, did your mom forget to wash your clothes again?"

Let's juxtapose this with how *loser* is used and go back to this tweet from Matt Paciorkowski:

Matt Paciorkowski @MyNameisMarcus, Nov 30, 2017:

Loser and hater @realDonaldTrump likes to tweet racist videos that only spread hatred, but here's some positive contributions Muslims made.

Don't think this tweet works as well with *runner-up* replacing *loser*. Even though many of us don't like him, I am pretty sure Donald Trump wasn't the

runner-up in the last election, so I'm calling bullsh*t on Matt here. And, Matt, if you are reading this, first of all, thanks, and second of all, if you'd started your tweet with *Donald Trump*, you would have created a healthier connection with your audience and within yourself. Alright, alright, alright, we all know the second (yes *runner-up* to the first) definition of *loser*, which is, according to Merriam-Webster, "a person who is incompetent or unable to succeed." Many of us would say it's not difficult to find evidence of Donald Trump's incompetence, but calling him a *loser* still abstracts his specific behaviors and does little to connect us.

If someone calls you a *loser*, it's easy to dismiss it as an insult or react with anger. Either way, there's no connection to truth without any tangible, specific examples of *losing*. If you want to make it clear that someone is unfit to carry out the duties of president, you won't get anywhere by calling him a *loser*. You may connect a little more if you say he is incompetent, but without an example, that is still an abstraction. You need to be specific about why he is incompetent. For example, he criticized Germany's trade policy and suggested a new bilateral treaty without realizing that, as a member of the European Union, Germany could not negotiate one. More evidence of Trump's incompetence came when he said that South Korea had "once been part of China" (it hadn't been). It also does not reflect the competence of a president to use Twitter to call federal judges (and, by association, the constitution) "ridiculous" when they granted a restraining order against his travel ban.[4] The ban, which prevents visas from being given to people from Muslim-majority countries like Libya, Iran, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen, is an act of racism, and racism is proof enough of incompetence. A racist president is a president unfit for office. Specifics have more power because they connect with the truth (and with Trump, the voters, Republicans, and Democrats).

Ruined My Life (*Ruined, Devastated, Destroyed*)

"You *ruined* my life" were the words an ex-girlfriend flung at me, that I cannot seem to forget.[5] A mutual friend recently let me know that her life didn't, of course, turn out to be *ruined*. She got a new job, a new boyfriend, a new apartment, and new friends. A *ruin*, remember, is a relic of a building or what's left, for example, after a bomb destroys it. The verb *to ruin*, in the words of Merriam-Webster, means:

1: to reduce to ruins: **DEVASTATE**

2: to damage irreparably

If we *ruin* someone's life, we damage her life irreparably. If someone's life is irreparable, does that mean she cannot live? No! If that were true, the only way to *ruin* someone's life would be to *kill* her. And we are back to the death theme again.

Often, *ruined* is code for *changed*. "You *changed* my life" is more connected to the truth. "Hey, ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend/ex-manager/parents/friend/Netflix/COVID-19: You *changed* [but you didn't ruin] my life." Cue Mary J. Blige's "No More Drama" and embrace your five senses.

Your Loss

You sometimes hear this conversation closer when someone offers you something and you decline. *Your loss* is also our ego's retort to someone breaking up with or firing us. It's easier to say *Your loss* than it is to experience the feelings of rejection. And thus, we disconnect from our feelings and leave them unexpressed. As we express our feelings less and less often, *Your loss* has become so frequent that it now has its own hashtag (#yourloss).

I include *Your loss* in this chapter on emotional disconnectors because we associate the word *loss* with despondency, isolation, and disconnection. That's what happens when we mourn. So why bring an association with these feelings into days when we are not mourning? Why normalize *loss*? When someone projects *Your loss* onto you, it's his ego trying to remove your power supply from the outlet of existence. He pulls and strains at his own connection as he reaches for yours, and often he will unplug himself in the process.

I Can't Even

Alright, alright, alright. Is it ironic that this is the phrase that perplexed me the most when it came to whether or not to include it as word trash, or even word power? *I was like, I can't even!* I can't even begin to get my head around it. Words failed me. I was speechless. I was torn on this one because I imagine sometimes it's a cute way of saying, "*I can't even* begin to get my head around it. Words fail me. I'm speechless," and I imagine that expression can connect,

like an adorable pup. But it's also a disconnector when it's inserted arbitrarily as a filler or deflector to avoid the subject. And it's often an obstacle to a connected conversation.

> **Me**: Why don't you want to go to the store with me?
> **Her:** *I can't even.*

Emily Favilla says, *I can't even* "serves as either a dismissal of or an acutely emotional response to the conversation topic at hand; the speaker *cuts themself off* before they've even started to go into it, because it's just too taxing to think about delving into the subject or attempting to express themselves articulately. Of course, this dismissal or emotional response isn't always genuine…"

When it's used in the context of a cute *I'm lost for words,* I get it. But when it's used in a way that disconnects the conversation, it's trash.

Sympathy

After someone experiences *loss*, we send him a *sympathy* card. I blame the greeting card industry for increasing the amount of disconnection in the world. And I feel so strongly about this that I may even start a change.org petition to ban sympathy cards. We say *sympathy* because we don't know better. "What's wrong with *sympathy*?" I hear you ask. "All of us use it, don't we?" It's in the top 10 percent of words used, according to Merriam-Webster, but does everybody know what it means?

A 2015 article in *The Mind Unleashed* magazine offers one of the most concise definitions of *sympathy* I've seen: "Sympathy is the ability to express 'culturally acceptable' condolences to another's plight." *Sympathy* is harmful to connection because *sympathy* places another's problems at a distance from our own. In the words of Brené Brown, PhD, LMSW, "Sympathy drives disconnection… Someone just shared something with us that's painful and we're trying to silver line it."

What's an alternative word we can use when someone is in mourning that will drive connection? *Empathy*. *Empathy* is "feeling with people," says Brown. Regardless of whether you have experienced the specifics of what the other person is going through, no matter the depth of his feeling of loss, fear, anger— or joy—you can still empathize with some level of those emotions. Moreover, *empathy* is simply being present with the other person as he experiences his emotions, rather than trying to make him feel better with *sympathy*—often in the

form of statements containing the phrases *at least* or *cheer up*. What both of these phrases do is make it clear to the other person that you are placing his emotions at a distance from your own (think: *not my problem*), which increases his sense of isolation and separateness.

Here's an example of *sympathy*: "Your husband cheated on you? Cheer up. At least you're still married." Contrast this with *empathy*: "Your husband cheated on you? I don't know what to say right now, but I'm glad you told me and I'm here with/for you." *At least* and *cheer up* make it clear that you are *not* relating to what she is going through. *I'm here with/for you* gives the person the sense that she is not alone (in her suffering/loss). *Empathy* leads to compassion —a form of kindness that connects us as we take on and thus alleviate some of suffering/loss from the other person. *Sympathy*, however, makes it clear to the person suffering/feeling anger or loss that she is the (only) one who is suffering (and we feel *sorry* for her).

How about a line of *empathy* greeting cards? Emily McDowell Studio has already thought of that and is one of two greeting card sites now offering *empathy* cards, rather than *sympathy* cards.

RECAP: EMOTIONAL DISCONNECTORS

- Emotional repellents (*hater, pity, shame*) use associations with distress for dramatic effect, but, like every ego-driven expression, they also disconnect.

- Death talk is *slaying* our connection. We are *killing it* and, yes, it is *dying*. But no one else *ruined our life*.

- Rarely do people *hate to say it* or *hate to break it to you.* They are lying, and their ego gets boosted by saying it at the expense of their relationships.

- *Despise* = more lies.

- Repeated exposure to *enemy* normalizes the division of opinions and people.

- *Your loss* is an egotistic comment that prevents the expression of feelings.

- *Sympathy* drives disconnection. *Empathy* drives connection.

Footnotes

1 https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/05/business/media/artificial-intelligence-journalism-robots.html.

2 https://www.inc.com/betsy-mikel/elon-musks-ai-nonprofit-just-made-a-truly-alarming-announcement-it-raises-serious-flags-about-future-of-fake-news.html.

3 Katya Cengel, "My Brother's Killer Is Now My Friend," *BBC News* (September 11, 2017). https://www.bbc.co.uk/.

4 Trump's tweet: The opinion of this so-called judge, which essentially takes law-enforcement away from our country, is ridiculous and will be overturned!' This tweet looks like it could been written by a columnist at the *New Yorker.* Can you guess why?

5 This came after my ex-wife told me to kill her now. I am not selling myself as a great catch here, am I?

SMALL TALK TRASH

Introverts do not hate small talk because we dislike people. We hate small talk because we hate the barriers it creates between people.

—Laurie Helgo, psychologist and author

How's *everything*?" Now there's a greeting that is impossible to respond to with an honest answer. I hear it in the office daily. And the receptionist at the hotel I'm staying at today told me that it's part of her greeting repertoire. If you know how *everything* is, then you may also be on the run from every intelligence agency and AI project on earth. You will be hunted down for your brain. But the truth is, we don't know how *everything* is, so the next time you get asked this and you want to connect, not deflect, respond with an honest answer: "I can't answer that. I don't know how *everything* is but I am enjoying this meatball sub, thanks." You may also respond to the word-trash question with a word-trash answer and say: "This meatball sub is *everything*." No, it's not. It's a meatball sub. Either our worldview of *everything* is narrowing—to the width of a sandwich—or we're lying (or both). In the *New York Times,* Jody Rosen wrote, Everything is "a clever ploy, a word *vague* enough to appeal to all comers and too forceful for many to ignore."

Everything is an example of the vague language George Orwell warned us about in his essay, "Politics and the English Language." It's a marker of the overstatement generation. Why does it matter? Because it's disconnecting us!

How are you? is another filler of small talk that's often said—especially during cold calls—without sincerity. And the person on the receiving end knows

it's phony. If we are using this question to attempt to forge a connection with a family member, friend, or lover, it may not be insincere, but there are better ways to connect. Adding a *today*, *this afternoon*, or *right now* to the end of the question makes it more specific, easier to connect with and respond to. But it's still an abstract, vague question. Which parts of me do I include in my answer? *My foot is pain-free today, but I feel tired. I'm feeling down about not asking for the phone number of this girl I met last night.*

There's so much to how a person *is* that it makes *How are you?* an impossible question to answer. Instead, ask about a specific part of a person's life: "How was your date with Sally on Friday?" "How did you sleep last night?" "How warm was it in Miami last weekend?" Better still, drop the vague *how*, and ask a question that is easy to answer with specifics. Start your question with a *what*, not a *how*: "What did you guys have for dinner last night?" "What did the sauce taste like?" "What did you have for dessert?" Each answer will offer up more specific words—if she answers *Key lime pie*, you can ask them if she's ever been to Key West. "*When* did she go there? *Who* did they go there with?" And before you know it, you're both connected and deep into a story about gate crashing a party at Ernest Hemingway's house and waking up on a stranger's yacht off the coast of Cuba.

Well, *Excuse Me*…

Black-and-white movies, and our grandparents, would often lead us to believe that people were more polite *in the good old days*. That may be so, but it's not reflected by the usage frequency of *Excuse me* or *Apologies*. Google's Ngram Viewer[1]—which you can try with any word(s) you like—shows that in Google's corpus of nonfiction and fiction books, the words *apologies* and *excuse me* represent an increasing percentage of all word use—the frequency of *excuse me* almost doubled between 2007 and 2008 alone. Of course, these stats would be more meaningful if they also included our conversations (I keep calling the NSA, but they aren't answering), but the written word does represent our speech, and the best writers are the writers whose voice you "hear" when you read them.

So, in the absence of NSA tapes and Amazon Alexa transcripts, Google Ngram can give us a general reflection of usage (verbal and written) of a word at any point in written history up until 2008. And what Ngram tells us is that ever since an all-time low in 1973, the usage of *Excuse me* has been rising.

I go to Whole Foods an inefficient number of times a week. I also work on an

office floor where there are about 200 other people. Whether it's while I fondle organic lemons in the produce aisle or fill my cup at the water cooler, I dislike the phrase *Excuse me*. In England, I'd call it a pet hate. In the USA, a pet peeve or a bugbear. In Australia, I'd say it's bloody annoying. But the truth is it makes my body react in the same way as someone scratching his nails down a chalkboard or brushing his teeth in front of me.

I prefer *Excuse me, please,* as it's more of a request than a command. Because when a yoga-pants-wearing frowner says to me, *Excuse me*, as I'm trying to decide which citrus has the best attributes for juicing, I feel as if she's really saying, *Move, bitch. Get out the way.* Or more accurately: *Get the f*ck out of my way, sh*thead.* At least, that's how I take it. Because, often, there is no "way" to get out of: I've looked at the distance between myself and the other person, only to see that there is enough space for two more people between us. So, rather than say *Excuse me,* how about you move around me? Given a choice between walking into me and not, I'm assuming you will take the latter. *Excuse me*—at least in New York—is the pedestrian equivalent of the Indian rickshaw's *I'm-coming-and-I'm-near-you* warning toot. Now don't get me wrong, I like the noise of rickshaw tooting, and on the first day I rented a car during my year in India, I adopted the *I'm-coming-everyone* tooting approach to driving. If you have ever driven or been a passenger in India, you know it's a necessity. But *I* feel the Whole Foods/sidewalk/office *Excuse me* equivalent of it is not. Is it because I'm British? It's possible.

Lynne Murphy, an (American) professor of linguistics at the University of Sussex (in the UK), writes in her book *The Prodigal Tongue*: "*Excuse me* creates its own diplomatic crises. Americans can use it to mean either '*Excuse me* for what I've just done' or 'Will you *excuse me* for what I'm about to do?' Brits tend to use it only for the latter meaning, and so when Americans push past them with a late *excuse me,* it is seen as the worst type of forwardness."

Please, *Please* Me in Britain, Not So Much in America

I imagine some of my American readers will disagree with me on my suggestion to add the *please* to *Excuse me*. Murphy says that what *please* means to you depends on whether you are British (like me) or American: "Americans add *please* to requests about half as much as Britons do—not because they're less polite, but often because they're trying to be polite. Adding *please* to something that's already a request doubly marks it as a request: *Could you move?* is already

a request with the softening 'could you' formulation (rather than an unsoftened, Move!). Since it's already softened and clearly a request, the *please* seems redundant. Americans thus often interpret *Could you move, please?* as a marker of urgency… and that sense of urgency makes the request sound either bossy or desperate, rather than considerate."

The opposite is true in Britain, where a *Could you move* without a *please* sounds inconsiderate—and it sounds inconsiderate to me as an Englishman living in New York! To Brits, the *please* is like a polite, spoken emoji, conspicuous when missing. It's as if we Brits wait at the end of the *please*-less request for the *please* to come. And when it doesn't come, we're likely to judge you as rude or obnoxious. To quote (the American in Britain) Murphy: "Ordering at a restaurant without a *please* sounds like 'an army officer to a private' or 'a lord giving an order to his butler.'"

But it seems that going *please*-less may help me to connect better with Americans: Murphy uses the example of a study that found that (in the United States) adding *please* when taking orders for a charity cookie sale decreased the chance that a cookie would be ordered. It seems Americans reserve the use of *please* for when it is an actual *plea*, that is, a desperate situation, such as a plea from a student (to another student or a teacher) not to report him for cheating—a *Please don't!*, for example. When the cheating student added the *please* to his plea, it doubled the chance that the teacher or other student wouldn't report the cheating. That's a desperate way to connect, but it works. My recommendation is that if, to an American ear, *Excuse me, please* sounds no friendlier than a bitch-slap *Excuse me*, then we switch it up to either (per Lynne Murphy's suggestion) "Could you move?" or—and I imagine this sounds less bossy and will connect more—"Can I squeeze/get past?" But I warn you, if you say either without the *please* in Britain, you will disconnect, be considered a rude American, and offend the locals. When in royal territory…

Apologies, Sorry

Sorry and I go way back. As a child I helped out my father on the farm, erecting fences and mending machinery. I was afraid of my father. Maybe because he yelled daily when he was in his 20s and 30s (he was 18 when I was born), though he wasn't ever violent. He was a lot bigger than I was and seemed like the most powerful man in the world. I was afraid of doing anything wrong in front of the man who seemed right all the time and who'd notice and yell if I

didn't get it right. It was this fear of doing something wrong that often caused me to make mistakes. I had to adapt in order to preempt his shouting. *Sorry* became one of my most frequently used words. I started using it for trivial things, like when asking to go to a friend's house or if someone phoned the house asking for me, or if one of the neighbors wanted to play.

My father mellowed into an easygoing chap in his 40s, and in his 50s we became close as he helped me work through my life problems without judgment. He hasn't shouted at me in years, but to this day I have to stay vigilant to keep my unnecessary *sorry*s in check.

It seems I'm not alone. Professor of Linguistics Lynne Murphy writes in *The Prodigal Tongue* that Brits often say *sorry* where Americans would say *thank you*—for example, when acknowledging that someone has held the door open for you. Murphy says that British people use *sorry* four times more often than Americans do. There's more *sorry* trash blocking connections on the streets of London than real trash on the streets of New York.

My friend Brad Blanton gave me a copy of his book *Practicing Radical Honesty* in 2013. On the first page he wrote: *You don't ever have to apologize to anybody for anything.* Why does all of this matter? When we say *sorry*, it primes our listeners to think that we have done something wrong, harmful, or offensive, and thus it creates a negative association with us, which disconnects them from us. Reserve your *sorry*s for the times when you have acted in a way that causes others to suffer. Now instead of saying, "*Sorry*, can I squeeze past, please," I say, "Can I squeeze past, please?"

Can You Do Me a Favor?

(F*cking ask me already)

We may think that we are polite if we preface a request with this question, but politeness often isn't conducive to connection. Turns out that while the Americans have been doing this much longer than the Brits, the British English spelling of *favour* spiked more than the American English spelling around 2005. This virus of disconnection has spread across the Atlantic with the help of social media, but it took until 2008 for it to become as prevalent in British English as it had already been in American English in the 1940s.

Whatever specific task you were about to ask someone to help you with, you turned into something bigger than it needed to be by abstracting and generalizing

it into a *favor*. We can't connect with abstract. We can only connect with a specific connection point. "Can you do me a favor?" is like saying "Can you come do an unspecified amount of unpaid work for me?" We have no sense of the scale of what you are about to ask us, but the "Can you do me a favor?" primes us to expect something that is often more work than the specific thing you are going to ask us to help with. For example: "*Can you do me a favor…* and pass the salt?" (when I was expecting you to say "… and pick my kids up from school; look after them for the rest of the week; feed, de-worm, and walk my dog tonight; and come with me to this all-day fund-raising gala on Saturday?"). Just *ask me* already.

If You'd Like to/Would You Like to…

(do something you wouldn't want to do)

This is the opposite of empathy in question form: "*If you'd like to* take the trash out for me…" Who ever really *wants* to take the trash out? Superimposing the idea that I would *like* to take the trash out is the verbal equivalent of you trying to create the desire in me by charging me with a weak defibrillator. Defibrillating a nonexistent desire amounts to kicking the rest of me, and it's unpleasant. Here's the second part I dislike about this connection killer: The only way to answer this request without being rude is to lie. Here's why. Because you've now made taking the trash out conditional on my liking it. If I say, "OK," and take the trash out, I am playing along with the lie that I like doing it—*Taking out the trash is so much fun.* You can tell from my body language and facial expression that I don't want to do it—and I sure as hell know that I don't want to do it—but we both go along with the lie of my wanting to take the trash out, which then creates a rift of falsity between us. If I tell the truth and say, "I don't want to," it puts you on the defensive—you may judge me as selfish when in fact it's your own ego's selfish desire for control that has prompted you to ask the question that is hard for me to say no to. There is a way to request putting out the trash that builds connection rather than uses force: Ask, "Would you be willing to take the trash out for me, please?" And once it's done, follow up with a "Thank you. I appreciate you for doing that." If she replies by saying, "I love taking the trash out," call BS…

Love

Before you react to what you are about to read, I'll ask you for some patience: We will celebrate *love*, the noun, in [chapter 11](). As it was with *thank you*, so it is with *love*.

For now, I'll define *love* as "the inspiration of deep affection." We often bastardize and use it out of habit. Or we exaggerate and say *love* when we mean *like*, along with the other hyperbole of words like *amazing* that we looked at in [chapter 2](). Overstatement is so normalized that it is now built into—and reinforced by—the apps we use. Instagram converts something we click LIKE on into a hyperbolic LOVE heart. #Lovedevalued #Lovediluted. If *liking* is no longer enough for expressing *like*, then *love* is no longer enough for *love*. But there is no other word. When we say, "I *love* you," and mean it—especially the first time we say it to someone and mean it—our sense of connection to the other person and to the moment is supercharged. Often, though, we don't mean it. To know for sure if we do, we need to wait three months to notice if we're still saying it (and feeling it), according to psychiatrist and author Dr. Fredric Neuman. More often than not, we say "I *love*" as an exaggeration. We cannot love *things*, only people and animals. *I love it* is a lie that risks weakening our expression of (true) love.

You *like* it, but you don't *love* it. Indiscriminate overuse of *love* confuses and disconnects us from its meaning. When we feel *love* for someone, we may have difficulty expressing it because we've already used that word for something else. "After years of *loving* Doritos dipped in cottage cheese, I didn't know how to express my feelings to Kanye."

Commitment Deflectors: *#Maybe*

Who am I to say what I want? The introverted and some of the extroverted among you will empathize with me here: Sometimes I feel that telling someone what I want is too bold or entitled. It's that old chestnut of not feeling good enough, not worthy enough, to have one's own desires—that it's somehow *impolite* to tell someone what you want. Here's the thing: *Polite* is inauthentic, and inauthentic is a leading cause of disconnection.

At restaurants where either my boss or a family member was paying or where I knew I was going to split the bill at the end, I'd often find myself in an awkward place, familiar to all of us. I wouldn't want to order an item more

expensive than what I calculated to be the average for the table unless at least a couple of others were ordering the same dish—say, the filet mignon. Are others ordering appetizers? If a server came to the table and wanted to take my order, I'd ask him to go to someone else first. And if someone asked me if I wanted dessert before I knew if others at the table were ordering dessert, I'd say, "Maybe," to avoid speaking the truth (which is "You're damn right I want the chocolate mousse and the cheese course that follows, but I won't order it because I don't want to be the only one at the table eating dessert and I don't want others to pay for it"). This is why I dislike *maybe*: It's an empty nicety and often not true. We often say *maybe* as a way to hedge on what we want to say. Of course, in some cases the *maybe* is legitimate. If you don't know the answer to whether it's going to rain, but you can see clouds gathering, your *maybe* is your best guess at the truth. But when we know the truth, adding the *maybe* disconnects us. And that's the *maybe* I want to talk about here—the *maybe* that's interjected into a sentence that would have connected more with the recipient without the *maybe* in it. A well-known British doctor recently stated (on social media) that a tabloid journalist in the UK wasn't being held to account for nonfactual, personal comments he made in his articles about British politicians. But instead of committing to a direct and public call to action to challenge the journalist, the doctor hedged his message: "*Maybe* someone could ask him whether he takes any responsibility." Drop the *maybe*, and the call to action is stronger: "… Someone could ask him if he takes any responsibility." Or even better: "Let's ask him/Ask him if he takes any responsibility."

Among the 80 SLPs at New York University, *maybe* was the most used of the 63 words in my study, averaging 1.32 (the most frequent rating possible is 1, the least is 5). *Maybe* is on the rise: Usage is now *five times* what it was in the 1960s. I imagine people were better at commitment back then, too, even if they did embrace free love. That's in part because there were fewer choices in the 1960s. The variety of occupations available today has risen exponentially—try finding a vacant social media manager position 50 years ago. When we are not browsing jobs on LinkedIn, we can use apps to right-swipe and date a different person every day. And when we see an increasing number of our "friends" on Instagram somewhere in Colombia or at Machu Picchu—is a person who hasn't been to Machu Picchu now rarer than someone who has?—or moving to Hong Kong, Sydney, or San Diego, we wonder why we aren't moving somewhere, too. The advent of mass adoption of the internet has created a new and evolving virtual world, making it increasingly difficult for us to commit to one job, one

romantic partner, one town. So, don't be too hard on yourself when you catch yourself uttering a *maybe*. Just pay attention to it and ensure it's what you want to say.

To Be or *Kinda* Be

Another tag of noncommitment is the word *kinda* (evolved from *kind of)* and its less popular sibling, *sorta*. Rather than committing to a specific and more accurate description, we choose to abstract to a horoscope-level description of what we mean. Horoscopes cover many possible situations using a few abstract generalizations. But they are so nonspecific that they disconnect us from our reality. Instead of telling you, "I appreciate your making my car smell of caramel latte, but now I want one, too," I say, "Thanks, now my car smells like caramel latte. *Kinda* hate you. *Kinda* don't."

Kinda is also used by ego as a marker of "cool." If I drop a *kinda* when talking to my millennial acquaintances, my ego thinks it will increase my younger listeners' perception that I'm *dope*, I belong with their crew, and they might invite me back to the crib. But *kinda* doesn't connect with the specifics of what we mean or feel and, as a result, disconnects us from both ourselves and each other. Though it can sound cute, *kinda* increases the isolation we feel. It's word trash, so throw it out of the sentence and connect. Instead of saying of one song (in a collection of three), "It's *kinda* perfect because it's the balance of its two siblings," drop the *kinda*, and the *perfect* becomes stronger, the sentence becomes tighter, and it will pack more of a connection punch. Even better, throw out the *perfect*—more overstatement/hyperbole—and then you no longer need the *because*, and you can let the strength of your statement stand naked and unmuffled: "It's the balance of its two siblings."

We aren't just using *kinda* more, we are searching for it more. The Google Trends Data on the following page shows the increase in health-related Google searches containing *kinda* from 2004 to mid-2018. As *kinda* increases mental isolation, people are increasingly trying to connect with it. Sometimes it's the medicine we seek that causes our illness.[2]

Kinda usage was higher among the elementary school SLPs than their middle school counterparts (2.1 versus 2.32). If a child answers a teacher with an only partially correct answer, the child will likely feel more encouraged if the teacher replies with a *kinda* than a *wrong! Kinda* softens the blow of these statements when presenting them to young minds. But softening the blow also means

sacrificing specifics, and therefore connection. Instead of *kinda,* why not say, "Well, that's partly true. Also, this does…"

The allure of *kinda* is also in its softer sound, easier on the ears than direct specifics (or the equally nonspecific *kind of*). The open-mouth vowel *ah* sound at the end of the word is one of the easiest sounds for infants to create and imitate. Children have to force their mouths to create new consonant sounds—and, according to toddlerspeechinfo.com, *k* is one of the hardest sounds. After the effort of pushing out the consonants, the child can relax her mouth with an *ah.* It's easier to say *kinda* than *kind of.* But both are substitutes for specifics and connection. And whether it's *kind of, sort of,* or *kinda, sorta,* they are all disconnectors passed on by *Dada, Mama,* and *Gaga.*

Like and *So,* and *Like, So*

Here are two fillers, tags of not committing to saying something directly (aka disconnecting). "He said, *like,* have dinner with me and I said, *like,* no." If it was *like no,* then it wasn't *no* specifically. If something is *like* something, it isn't something. "It was *like* a cat." So,[3] it wasn't a cat. "It was, *like,* hot outside." So, it was warm?

As if there weren't enough disconnection with the use of *like* and *so* individually, they are often used together. If you wanted to parody Paris Hilton, you'd intersperse your impression of her with several *like, so*s. *It is like, so last decade.* But it's not just found in the language of the clichéd LA blonde or Kardashian wannabe. Go into any hipster coffee shop in New York and you will overhear these two words again and again. It is a marker of a lack of confidence. We are not confident enough to provide the specifics of what we mean, and *like, so* has become like, so widespread that it can seem strange not to use it. Its use is not restricted to the Americas—it's rife in Australia and the UK to a degree that the *Little Britain*[4] character Vikki Pollard personified it, along with her signature phrase *yeah but, no but.* Her character's co-creator, Matt Lucas, said in a 2006 interview, "People didn't talk like that 10 years ago, did they? People constructed sentences."

By parodying these common phrases to the extreme, *Little Britain* did help to raise awareness of British word-trash habits, but we need a new show. The last episode was in 2005, and there have been 15 years of new word-trash accumulation since. I'll make a plea here and now to any comedy screenwriters reading this to please create a new show that parodies the word-trash habits of

2020's America, Britain, Ireland, Australia, or New Zealand (or all five in one show). Some of these habits are global. I'd like to be a producer of this show. Tweet me.

Communications consultant Audrey Cronin and her colleague Phil Lam recognized the frequent use of *like* and *so* together as an audience disconnector, and created an app called LikeSo to help smartphone users train their speech against it. Here's the app description from the iTunes store: "LikeSo is your personal speech coach. LikeSo offers a fun and effective way to train against verbal habits and practice speaking articulately, confidently and without all of those 'like's and 'so's.'" Another app, Orai, offers a more comprehensive vocal coach assistant to help reduce not only *like* and *so* but also any of your own filler words. The New York SLPs may benefit from this app, too: They often say something "was *like so*" when describing past situations (averaging 2.71 among those working in middle schools).

In defense of *like* users, it's not just a filler word to avoid saying things directly—it has become a synonym for both *said* (when used with *was*) and for *roughly* or *around*: "He weighed *like* 200 pounds. And I was *like*, no." That we can connect with, but it's a stronger connection if you say, "He weighed around 200 pounds. And I said no." When one word can be used instead of two (*said* instead of *was like*), use one to connect faster. And if you find yourself saying: "He weighed around, *like*, 200 pounds. And I said, *like* no," it's trash.

Saying What You *Want to Say*

This brings me to another unnecessary phrase that's often interjected into a statement and reduces how well it connects to the listener. When someone tells you that he *wants to say* something, it's either lack of confidence or language bad habit turning him into a liar. He *doesn't* want to say it, which is why he is giving you the *I want to say* first.

> "*I want to say* no."
> "*I want to say* the coat was black, but it was a sort of navy."
> "*I want to say* parsnip, but it tasted like potato."

(These are real-life examples two of my friends shared from one day of eavesdropping.)

That Wants to Say

In French, Spanish, and Catalan, people say *that wants to say* (for example, in French: *Ça veut dire*) more often than they say *I want to say.* And the usage is more widespread and has more history than in English. Danny Lawrence is a friend of mine and a former BBC host, linguist, and documentary maker. He relocated to Spain a couple of years ago to teach English and has observed much *wanting to say*: "I have noticed that English learners in Spain say this too much, since the expression does exist in Spanish and Catalan,[5] and also in the third person, as per French, *Ça veut dire*. They tend to overuse it when wishing to clarify something."

RECAP: SMALL TALK TRASH

- None of us knows how *everything* is, so don't ask us.
- Only say *excuse me* (with a *please* in Britain) if you can't walk around someone without their moving. Better still say, "Could I squeeze past?"
- Only say *sorry* if you have acted in a way that causes others to suffer.
- Rarely does someone *like to* put the trash out.
- Don't ask someone, *Can you do me a favor?* Just ask her to do whatever it is already.
- We often say *maybe* as a way to hedge on what we want to say rather than tell the truth.
- *Kinda* doesn't connect with the specifics of what we mean or feel.
- If something is *like* something, it isn't something.
- *Like* and *So*, and *Like, so* are fillers, tags of not committing to saying something directly.
- When someone tells you that he *wants to say* something, it's either lack of confidence or language bad habit turning him into a liar.
- We cannot love *things*, only people and animals. *I love it* is a lie that risks weakening our expression of (true) love.

Footnotes

1 Google Ngram Viewer provides hundreds of years of word statistics. When you enter a word or phrase and click SEARCH LOTS OF BOOKS, it outputs a graph that represents the word use over time. Try it for yourself:

https://books.google.com/ngrams.

2 That's another true story—including that most antidepressants, with only one or two exceptions, only work (if at all) because of a placebo effect, yet they have real and harmful (chemical) side effects that create further illness—told by Johann Hari in his book *Lost Connections.*

3 You may have noticed that I have used *so* several times already in this book. The use here where it's a shorter—and less formal—synonym for *therefore* isn't harmful to connection.

4 *Little Britain* is a BBC-TV comedy series that parodies the dialects of British people.

5 In Spanish: *quiere decir.* In Catalan: *vol dir.*

EGO INTERJECTIONS

A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and,
of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see
something that is above you.

—C. S. Lewis

While the last chapter was full of disconnectors interjected out of politeness, hyperbole, or lack of confidence, this chapter is full of disconnectors interjected out of ego. Not only are the following phrases unnecessary, they serve only to boost the speaker's imagined self-importance and moral superiority, and in so doing, to repel others.

Each to His Own But… (British) / To Each His Own But… (American)

Does this disconnect us in conversation? Yes, because it is another way in which we avoid saying something directly.

"*Each to his own but maybe* you should have a sentence in your bio that you don't want comments from over-30s on your posts." The *each to his own but maybe* dilutes the message and acts as a disclaimer to the *shoulding.* Rather than pretend you are not telling someone what she *should* do, just tell her what you would do.

But there's also a more sinister history behind this phrase that you may not be aware of: The Latin origin—coined by Cicero—is *suum cuique* (to each his

own), meaning, "You get what you deserve." This evolved into the German translation *Jedem das Seine*, which became a motto that the Nazis displayed over the entrance to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Let's remember that before we start another sentence containing *each, to,* and *his own*.

Not Being Funny But

Here's another word-trash habit and ego/disconnection marker that correlates with the adoption of social media. I have a friend who uses this phrase whenever she's about to deliver a judgmental statement. When I told her about how busy I was with work and writing, she—a stay-at-home mom—replied, "I'm *not being funny but* you don't exactly have a lot to do. You try looking after kids all day." Remove the *I'm not being funny but* and you unmask the ego judgment lurking beneath the *funny*. Perhaps the frequent users of this phrase haven't seen *Frozen* yet (somehow) and thus haven't heeded the advice of its best-known song.

If I'm Honest… Can I Be Honest? Let's Be Honest… I'm Not Going to Lie…

These opening gambits, used to hook listener attention, can suggest that what the speaker has been telling us prior to this statement was dishonest. While often intended to bolster the receiver's perception of the speaker's honesty, the phrases may do just the opposite. They often come up in the workplace. When used by managers, these phrases create distrust because they are markers of superficial, ego-driven conversation. Connection is more probable if we assume that our speaking partner already trusts that we are honest, rather than telling him, "Hold on; I'm about to stop lying and tell you something honest." My friend Mark was quick to provide his own example of how this phrase had disconnected him while working for a major European electricity company: "A senior manager I worked with did this all the time and reinforced the idea that she was constantly bullsh*tting." It has the same effect at the end of sentences: *Worst thing I've seen if I'm honest*. Probably still an overstatement but a little more believable without the *honest* gambit.

#JustSaying

Just saying is a pet peeve of author Danny Wallace, and the title of one of his podcasts. Wallace says this device is more evidence that people keep getting ruder. *#Justsaying* is often used to close statements on social media. It is another disconnecting disclaimer used both as an attempt to preempt our listener from judging us for what we just said and to mask our own ego:

Amy Markstahler @Ajmarkstahler, Dec 27, 2017:

When you're throwing yourself a THIRD baby shower and comment on social media that you're disappointed that no one is responding… You seriously need a lesson on etiquette. #justsaying

Here, Amy's ego uses the *#Justsaying* to issue a disclaimer that this is only what she's saying—rather than who she is—as an attempt to preempt retaliatory comments. It's the *having your cake and eating it too* of being judgmental—being high and mighty but with immunity. It has become a novelty phrase of our time, and users flag it as such. At the time of this writing, Twitter users hashtag *#Justsaying* about 60 times an hour. It appears that social media usage has also influenced the usage in books.

When usage of *just saying* went mainstream in the '90s, it was more often than not placed at the end of sentences. We are now also using it to preface a statement à la *What's interesting is*. My friend Helga's 11-year-old son starts most sentences with *Just saying…*

Just saying is an evolution of *Can I just say*, in line with the tendency to abbreviate, shorten, and abstract language. The former editor of the *Sunday Express*, Martin Townsend, refers to this as a "misguided trend." Shortening isn't harmful to connection; it's the tendency to abstract language that is. It's *telling* us that you are saying something—rather than speaking your words—that causes the disconnection. We talked about *just* (the adverb) as a stand-alone disconnector in [chapter 2](). For now, remember that whether it's *Can I just say*, *I want to say*, or *just saying*, we already hear you talking so you don't need to *tell* us you are. Abstract *tells*. *Tells* repels. Specifics *show*.

The *Struggle* Is Not Real

Here's a phrase that could also appear in the chapter on corporate BS ([chapter 6]()). During a (corporate) workshop in London in 2017, I noticed that two middle managers, Mark and Debbie, started their sentences with *I'm struggling to understand* when addressing business analysts. I recall both Mark and Debbie

using this phrase with dry, almost scathing, London accents. What I could have said to them—and this would have injected a refreshing yet awkward dynamic into an otherwise tedious, weeklong discussion about moving from one recordkeeping system to another (in a meeting room with no windows)—would have been: "Mark, why are you turning your lack of understanding into a *struggle*? Why don't you tell Adam that you don't understand where that field appears in the new system?" And "Debbie, why are you turning your incomprehension into a *struggle*? Why don't you say to Michael, 'I don't understand what you said in your last sentence. Can you explain it to me again?'"

Debbie and Mark's egos think others will perceive them as smarter if they say, "I'm *struggling* to understand" rather than "I don't understand." *Struggle* is an ego defense to protect vulnerability, but protecting vulnerability is what disconnects individuals. Their "I'm *struggling* to understand" puts the recipient of the comment on the defensive and makes him feel as if his credibility and usefulness were being questioned—after all, he was the one causing the "struggle." Debbie and Mark could have been specific about what they *didn't* understand and left the *struggle* out of it. This would have elicited a connection and a collaborative rather than a defensive response.

My Concern Is

I put this in the same bucket as "I'm *struggling* to understand." It's another favorite of the egos of middle management. This opener puts us on the defensive because it primes us to expect condemnation: "*My concern is* how we would know of any changes going forward." You will connect more if you ask: "How will we be informed of any changes in the future?" Or just, "How will we know of any changes?" Save yourself some (at least three) words, and connect better.

Any Questions?

Any (minus the *questions*) can be a useful—if not essential—connector. In this book, there are about 40 instances of *any* that would disconnect the sentence they are in if I removed them—e.g., "*Any* one of these three sentences is more connected to my truth than a sh*tty *should*."

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *any* is the 95th most common

word in the English language (*the* is the most common), and most of the time it doesn't disconnect us. But when it's used in front of the word *questions*, it does (most often at the end of presentations or corporate meetings). In her article, "'Would You Be Willing?': Words to Turn a Conversation Around (and Those to Avoid)," *Guardian* journalist Rosie Ifould explains why: "'Any' tends to meet with negative responses. Think about meetings you've been in—what's the usual response to 'Any questions?' A barrage of engaging ideas or awkward silence? It's too open-ended; too many possibilities abound. Of course, if you don't want people to ask you anything, then stick to 'Any questions?'… Try not to use 'any' if you genuinely want feedback or to open up debate. 'What do you think about X?' might be a more specific way of encouraging someone to talk."

Conversation analysts at UCLA also looked at how doctors use *any* versus *some* as they were finishing their patient consultations.[1] They found that patients responded with more information to the question "Is there *some*thing else I can do for you today?" than if they were asked "Is there *any*thing else?" Why? Because *something* is an open-ended "one thing," and *any* is an open-ended "many things." There is no limit to the number of *any*. It's easier to connect with and respond to a request for one *something* than a more abstract *anything*. Compare "You could be onto *something* here" with "You could be onto *anything* here." Which statement inspires more confidence?

RECAP: EGO INTERJECTIONS

- Don't disconnect with a *just saying.*

- *Each to his own/to each his own* was the message on the sign above the entrance to a Nazi concentration camp. It is also a sign that your ego's doing the talking.

- *Not being funny but* is another example of the ego not being funny.

- *If I'm honest* implies that you have not been honest up until you said, *If I'm honest.*

- Be specific about what you *don't* understand, and leave the *struggle* out of it.

- It's easier to connect with and respond to a request for one *something* than a more *abstract* anything.

Footnote

1 John Heritage and Jeffrey Robinson at the University of California, Los Angeles. See http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/heritage/Site/Publications_files/SOME_vs_ANY.pdf.

CORPORATE BULLSH*T

> Never use a… *jargon* word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
>
> **—George Orwell (the fifth of his six rules in "Politics and the English Language")**
>
> ---
>
> The next time you feel the need to reach out, shift a paradigm, leverage a best practice or join a tiger team, by all means do it. Just don't say you're doing it, because all that meaningless business jargon makes you sound like a complete moron.
>
> **—Max Mallet, Brett Nelson, and Chris Steiner, "Most Annoying Business Jargon," *Forbes* (January 25, 2012)**

If it's a vague metaphor used to describe business goals or processes, it's BS. Why does this language exist? Our corporate (or political) ego uses it to (try to) enhance or disguise the truth. To bullsh*t, says Merriam-Webster, is to "talk nonsense especially with the intention of deceiving or misleading." Or in the words of the Urban Dictionary, corporate BS "looks and sounds just like English, but is actually lies and propaganda." Often, BS is just the result of laziness—a lack of effort to think of (and articulate) specifics. But just as physical laziness leads to poor health, language laziness has harmful consequences, too. I'm not sure if it was out of laziness or ego that the following words and phrases crept into business vocabulary, but I am sure that neither working relationships nor the bottom line benefit.

Moving the Needle Will Not (Increase Performance)

"'Move the needle' is a new favorite of certain senior managers at work… it means nothing, much like their endless rhetoric."

—Thomas Josling, actor

In early 2019, I was at a conference where a chief revenue officer made one of the most inspiring speeches I can remember about curiosity, kindness, and courage and how new ESG (environmental, social, and governance) data can help us save our planet. It put spirit into me. And then she ruined it with one simple, word-trashy phrase: *Move the needle*. Connection unplugged. Spark gone. Un*lit*.

A few days later I received a marketing email for a communication workshop. Here's an extract: "As our culture dive-bombs headfirst into primarily screen-mediated relationships, we lose the ability to have honest conversations and alienation grows. Many of you know this or sense it and still intellectually getting it doesn't *move the needle* forward."

God, I dislike that phrase. What the marketer wants to communicate is that getting *it* intellectually doesn't help you have an honest conversation. But nor does *the needle*. Needles are for drawing blood, administering novocaine, and other unpleasant activities.

California-based PR pro (and founder of Silicon Valley Story Lab) Giovanni Rodriguez reports how people are both "frustrated and embarrassed about the phrase, which has become one of the most prevalent and annoying clichés in the world of technology marketing. Embarrassed, because we—PR and marketing people—are so compliant to the demands of a world that requires us to be earthshaking. Frustrated, because we have moved from a dumb metaphor—earthshaking—to an even dumber metaphor—*moving the needle*—that suggests that this shaking-of-the-earth thing we do is somehow knowable and measurable. What we actually do, in fact, is measurable, but it's the instrument of measurement that we're looking at here. Yes, it's a metaphor, but it's a metaphor that grossly exaggerates our role in business."

Before we go any further, let's make sure we are clear on what a metaphor is. I'll use this definition from Google Dictionary:

Late 15th century: from French *métaphore*, via Latin from Greek *metaphora*, from *metapherein* "to transfer."
A figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is

not literally applicable.

"I had fallen through a trapdoor of depression," said Mark.

Metaphors can be useful when we're communicating an idea from one subject to someone who has had no exposure to that subject and its vocabulary. Without metaphor, we'd sometimes have as much difficulty as someone explaining Skype to a caveman. What isn't useful is a metaphor used in place of specifics that are universally understood. For example, *move the needle* when it is used instead of *sell more* or *sign up more subscribers.*

Raise the Bar

Or, "Let's not be so sh*tty next time," as my friend Melissa likes to say.

When has raising a bar—with the exception of pole vaulting or high jump—led to increased performance? In limbo dancing, performance goes up when we lower the bar. Is it not more accurate to say, "We will raise the sales target from $8,000 to $9,000 a day" or "We will ask you to work another two hours per day to provide more customer support"? Here's another popular phrase: *Set the bar too high*. We could be specific and say that the target of $10,000 is too high. Abstracting it by turning a numerical target into a high-jump bar makes it less connected to reality. You don't get better at track and field by working in an office chair.

> Average leaders *raise the bar* on themselves; good leaders *raise the bar* for others; great leaders inspire others to *raise their own bar*.
>
> **—Orrin Woodward, author and founder and chairman of the Board of Life**

Someone please tell Orrin that when Jive Communications polled 2,000 Americans for phrases that most annoy them, they voted *raise the bar* into the list of their top 25!

Circle Back and Touch Base/Take That Offline

Given the number of high school metaphors about bases, *circling back* might as well be foreplay. As far as touching base goes, groping is frowned upon in most workplaces, and *touching base offline*? How does *connect offline* or *We'll take*

this offline make sense if we are not *online* when we say it? According to my friend Melissa, *Take this offline* is code for "For f*ck's sake, stop bringing things up that aren't on the agenda." Other times, we're told to *park it*—what, next to the boss's Tesla? Why? Because we are getting *pushback*—is this a wrestling match? In "The *Independent*'s 10 Business Phrases Most Likely to Make You Scream" (based on a survey of 2,000 business travelers), *touch base offline* topped the list. Those surveyed preferred to say, "Let's meet and talk." Instead of disconnecting from sensory reality, why don't I tell my boss: "I will send you an email later" (instead of *circle back*) and I will come over to your desk (instead of *touch base*) tomorrow.

Imagineer (and Calling Yourself a *Visionary*, a *Creative*, or a *Wordsmith*)

I'm guessing this was coined by a corporate brown noser who liked the Lumineers. Fair enough, who doesn't like the Lumineers? But unless this is someone's official job title—yes, they do exist, type in IMAGINEER in your next LinkedIn search—your audience is going to think you are disconnected from the daily work of most people in the company. If you have to go there, go to *visionary*, although in the corporate context, 99 percent of the time, this word is an exaggeration. Unless you happen to be Steve Jobs.

We can all be imaginative when required—some of us more often than others—but why abstract ourselves when we know that we also spend 10 percent of the day gossiping or messaging that new Hinge or Bumble match to persuade them to have coffee with us, 20 percent of our time being clickbaited into "reading" the wannabe celebrity Instagram and Facebook posts of our "friends," and 30 percent of our time responding to emails from clients? Sure, I'm a *visionary*, a lumineer—I mean *imagineer*—10 percent of the time. That makes me more social media surfer than *imagineer*. And it would be more accurate to call me an *email responder*, which requires me to use my imagination to answer client questions 10 percent of the time during the 30 percent of my time that I spend writing emails.

Get Your Ducks in a Row

It's 2019. I probably hear this in my office in Times Square, New York, every

other day. The last time I heard it, my colleague Caroline said, "Let's *get our ducks* in a row before we go visit the client next week." Here's the Urban Dictionary's version of what this means: "This synonym for get one's act together probably alludes to lining up target ducks in a shooting gallery."

If I tell you, "I'm *getting my ducks in a row*," or if I tell you, "I'm making 29 appointments next month with a goal of selling 20 percent more fudge to 5 of my 29 customers," which one is more likely to connect and mean something? If what you seek is connection, the more specific and the less abstract you can be, the better. The next time your manager tells you to *get your ducks in a row*, tell him you are an anti-gun, animal-rights activist. So shut your *[duck] trap.*

Blue-Sky Thinking

Some consultants are good at blue-sky thinking but cannot translate that into practical change.

—Collins Dictionary

My friend Melissa tells me her managers say, "We need some *blue-sky thinking*" when they want to say, "If all of our systems and processes weren't so f*cked, we could do X, Y, & Z." *Blue-sky thinking* came second in the *Independent*'s "10 Business Phrases Most Likely to Make You Scream," similar to *thinking outside the box* (which ranked fifth on the list), meaning thinking not constrained or influenced by existing methods of working. It's another phrase that disconnects you from others because you communicated the abstract over the specific. Instead of saying, "We need some *blue-sky thinking* when it comes to our employee communication guidelines," how about: "Can you and Mike draft a 20-page communications style guide that helps our employees identify and avoid corporate jargon?"

The Bigger Picture

The *bigger picture* is that there are more *bigger picture*s now than in 1970, before which there were no bigger pictures. Also called *the big picture* or (rarely) *the larger picture,* can we be more specific about what we are talking about? Is it the entire project plan from start to finish? Is it our projected sales

five years from now? Do we mean the entire process from getting approval for a new product design through to supporting customers who buy that product? Sure, it's *the bigger picture*, but we can be more specific about what that is and help make it vivid to our listener. The next time someone tells you, "You are not seeing *the bigger picture*," ask him for a specific example of what he can see in that picture.

Pushback

According to Melissa, if someone says, "We need to *push back* on their request," it means "Someone has to go tell them they're dickheads."

Here's the definition of *pushback* from Merriam-Webster:

> the action of forcing an object backward; resistance or opposition in response to a policy or regulation, especially by those affected.

Pushback takes something specific and generalizes it into an abstraction that is harder for us to connect to.

We like to say, "Jim's team is giving me *pushback* on the new process." But why not be more specific and say: "Jim's team hasn't yet started using the new colanders for washing strawberries. They say it takes too long, compared to spreading them on the ground and using the hose."

Why? Because a term like *pushback* sounds like an act of aggression—one we associate with defensive words like *resistance* and *rejection*, which our egos will grasp for and respond to. Unlike some of the other corporate BS, *push back* and *pushback* do not seem to be disliked (possibly they are even liked), and they've also been adopted by the media, the mirror of public opinion:

President Trump's weak *pushback* to hate groups—as if he was trying not to alienate them as voters—compelled me to take up my pen.
—*New Yorker*, August 2017

TRUMP TRADE MEASURES SET OFF A GLOBAL LEGAL PUSHBACK

—*New York Times*, February 9, 2018

Pushback use has spread from the corporate world to the national (and

international) news to the local papers:

> The Browns' owner has gotten a ton of *pushback* from fans and media for keeping a
> coach off to the worst start in NFL history.
> **—Dan Labbe, *cleveland.com*, December 31, 2017**

> The Aberdeen City Council is receiving some public *pushback* over its plan to sell the
> former Moose lodge property for hundreds of thousands of dollars less than the city paid
> for it.
> **—*Baltimore Sun*, December 13, 2017**

So, tell us, what does this *pushback* look like? Is it letters of complaint, angry tweets, or a riot outside the mayor's house? Get down to specifics. They're easier to connect with and address than a tug, or *push*, of war.

Hard Stop

This is another favorite spouted by middle management in the UK, Australia, and the USA. What's a *hard stop*? A period (and that could have at least three meanings, one of which you wouldn't be able to delimit to a specific time)? A full stop? Slamming on your brakes? OK, that's enough of me being facetious toward middle management, but please MM, cut out the *hard stop*s and just tell us that you need to leave five minutes before the end of this meeting, since you have a more important call. Don't pretend that you need to find a wall to walk into at 2 p.m.

Going Forward aka Moving Forward

After your middle manager has walked into the wall at 2 p.m., he may consider *going forward*. Instead of saying, "In the future…" *The Office Life's Business Jargon Dictionary* defines *going forward* as: "two words of unnecessary filler that are often used to shift focus from negative past results to bright future possibilities." A survey by the Institute of Leadership & Management revealed that *going forward*, *thinking outside the box*, and *let's touch base* were the top three most overused pieces of jargon. "<u>Going forward</u> From Monday on, we'll need to ensure that all client <u>interactions</u> meetings and phone calls are <u>captured</u>

added as activities in Salesforce." Be specific, or you won't be.

Let's reduce the amount of unnecessary filler <u>going forward</u>.

Harness/Leverage

Here are two more of the 105 verbs included in the corporate BS generator app:[1] *harness* and *leverage*. What we mean here is *use*. We substitute these two words for *use* to make sentences sound more impressive (to our egos), but in the process we disconnect from reality and from each other. They are also words that can be used to mask that human beings are being *used* (read: exploited). They are examples of the political language George Orwell warned us against (see the extract from Orwell's "Politics and the English Language" at the end of this chapter). Instead of saying, "We will *harness staff resources using narrative*" (yes, people do say this and you can find it in tweets), we say, "We will motivate people by detailing how the work they do is used by others in the company to do X, which creates Y."

> We will *harness* and *leverage* staff and accept there may be some collateral damage.

We *harness* a horse and *leverage* capital. Do you want to be considered as either?

Instead of saying, "We will *leverage employees' soft skills*," say, "We will give employees the chance to use their social and communication skills, drawing on their character and personality traits, and attitudes."

Singing from the Same Hymn Sheet/Singing the Same Tune

Or, as Melissa describes it, "Let's make sure our bullsh*t stories match."

This one comes in at number 8 on the top 10 most hated jargon phrases. First, religious metaphor and the workplace don't mix. Second, if saying the same thing is something we do in spite of our differing opinions, then it's dishonest. Third, homogenization of speech and opinion is the opposite of diversity, which is critical to the exercise of curiosity and to workplace connection and happiness. The bottom line (said facetiously) is that *singing from the same hymn sheet* is not good for business or people. Take the advice of the former CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch: "What a huge problem it is. Lack of candor basically blocks smart ideas, fast action, and good people contributing all the stuff they've

got. It's a killer. Forget outside competition when your own worst enemy is the way you communicate with one another internally. Candor works because candor unclutters."

I'll Take That On Board

Or, as my friend Fiona would say, "I haven't listened to a word you've said."

What if I *take that on board* while I *onboard* the client and you *onboard* the new hire? Does that mean we are putting all three on a boat? Whose boat? Is the ship sinking? "No, what I mean is I appreciate that you've given me some feedback, but I disagree and will ignore it."

Hit the Sweet Spot

You'll like this one if you (1) think it sounds sexual; (2) like baseball or cricket; (3) both of the above. Why can't you say the optimum or ideal amount (e.g., of staff for the team) instead?

In the sentence, "Here's how to ensure that you *hit the sweet spot* of putting the audience first by offering useful, informative content, and making marketing conversions," the *sweet spot* could be a doughnut hole. Delete the metaphor and connect better. You're telling people how to make content marketing conversions by putting the audience first and offering useful, informative content. Good! Don't dilute, distract from, and disconnect your audience from that message with a *sweet spot*.

Game Changer

"The phrase *game changer* gets thrown around by suppliers in my industry a lot. What sort of game? Pretty sure my work isn't like a game."

—Rowan Shaw, arborist and owner of Treewise

Ross Cooper @RossCoops31, Nov 12, 2018:

As a principal, I use Google tools every day. Even at a basic level, it's a game changer. #edtechchat

Is education a game? I wish it was when I went to school…

A lot of people call politics a *game*—a worrying analogy when human rights and lives are at stake. But, according to the GOP (and Fox News journalist Kayleigh McEnany) the players can be *game changers*, too.

GOP Verified Account @GOP, Nov 12, 2018:

The reason for Republican success is undeniable: President Trump proved to be our closer and our game-changer, making a quantifiable difference in key races across the country.—@kayleighmcenany

Has Trump *changed "the game"* or is he playing his own?

But most often a *game changer* refers to an object rather than a person. For people who have an impact on the game, we sometimes call them *blue chips…*

Blue Chip

This piece of BS has its origin in the blue chip used in poker (the blue chip has the highest value). In sports, it means athletes with excellent prospects (and it's the name of a 1994 basketball movie). Excellent, because they will be a good return on investment. We want a *blue chip,* not a human being. What value is a human being? This type of metaphor applies in both sports and corporate settings and equates humans with "collateral" (or human capital) and considers people as "assets," as if they were stocks in a portfolio. It's easier to manage and dispose of assets (and deal with collateral damage) than it is to fire people (and connect with people's feelings and your own humanity). It's language that feeds the materialistic, profit-driven ego—the greed for the most valuable poker chip. It's the same ego that wants to know your net worth instead of your values and life purpose.

Drink the Kool-Aid

Cult leader Jim Jones gave Kool-Aid to 918 of his followers. Agreeing to drink his Kool-Aid (which was mixed with cyanide) is what got them killed. Don't be another victim. At the office where I worked in 2019, we had a team lunch where a couple of those in attendance had previously worked for a competing media company. One of them made the comment that while at said media company they were forced to "*drink the Kool-Aid* daily." It turns out that what

they meant by *drinking the Kool-Aid* was, more specifically, conforming to the norms of arriving at the office by 7 a.m. (even if, officially, people don't start work until 8:30 or 9 a.m.) and not leaving the office until 6 or 7 p.m. *Drinking the Kool-Aid* also meant (passively) agreeing to receive text messages asking why they were away from their desks even if they had gone to the bathroom. They mentioned that another mutual friend of theirs was a colleague who "refused to *drink the Kool-Aid*." At this point in the lunch, our global head (my boss's boss's boss) joked, "Don't worry we have some *Kool-Aid* planned for you here, too." Kool-Aid was invented in 1927. Sales didn't rise 500 percent in the first decade of this millennium, but its usage as a metaphor did. You may be noticing by now that political BS and corporate BS are excrements from the same vocabulary asshole. But if we want to find more of the corporate kind, LinkedIn (not Twitter) is the social media of choice.

Deep Dive

In other words, says Melissa, "I've got no f*cking idea what you're talking about… I'll need a week to look it up (aka have my people work it out)."

A grandparent might wonder why more of us haven't had the bends (decompression sickness). Merriam-Webster is tracking its usage but has yet to include the nonliteral sense of "a thorough investigation" in its dictionary. A less-BS alternative is to use that definition or "a detailed look/we'll look at X in detail." Often, you'll hear *deep dive* from the mouths of trainers (or "facilitators") in corporate training sessions. More than once I've heard those cringe-worthy words: "After lunch we'll have a breakout session to *deep dive* some of the ideas in our groups." I want to reply with, "No thanks, I prefer to snorkel this one."

M-W's comments on whether *deep dive*'s corporate BS sense will stay around long enough to warrant inclusion in the dictionary are as follows: "Prognosticating which newly-arrived English words will survive is, like gambling on the ponies and betting on which of your friend's marriages will first end in divorce, a fool's endeavor. However, given that there is always a certain lag time between when a word begins being used and when it manages to end up getting defined in a dictionary, we like to write about words which are being watched, but are not yet included. One such example is *deep dive*… Both the noun and the verb forms of *deep dive* are now among the words we are watching (along with thousands of others). It is exceptionally difficult to guess with any

accuracy a new word's chances of remaining in use, so we urge you not to bet on any one word against another. If you want to engage in a wager in which you have a chance of winning, we recommend betting on the races or your college roommate's marital woes." And you thought dictionaries were boring.

Lean This Out, Be Lean, Lean Thinking

Lean thinking is a recognized process methodology, based on how Toyota does business. It's also another disconnecting buzzword middle managers use. They probably haven't even read the Wikipedia page for what *lean thinking* is. It's often used as a euphemism for getting rid of or reducing something, like the number of slides in a presentation or the number of staff on a team. So let's say something more specific instead: "Can we make this more concise/get this down to 200 words/reduce the number of people on the team to five." If we can posit that *be lean* can be interpreted as a discriminatory comment against obese employees, it adds weight (pun intended) to the argument for eradicating this BS phrase from the corporate world. If overweight people get rich suing, and that leads to more disposable income for personal trainers, they can show middle management what it means to *be lean.*

Give Me Some Color/I'm Trying to Get Some Color

What you mean is: "Can you give me some more specifics and the context to those specifics?" Oh, the irony. Often in responses to online articles (such as one I read recently about the evolution of media "platforms"), you will see comments along the lines of "Could you please provide *some color* on this topic? I want to make sure I understand you properly." Do you mean examples? Statistics? Stories? I want to make sure I understand you properly, too.

Run It Up the Flagpole

I'll run the Wikipedia definition up the flagpole here: "'Let's *run it up the flagpole* and see if anyone salutes it' is a catchphrase that became popular in the United States during the late 1950s and early 1960s. It means 'to present an idea tentatively and see whether it receives a favorable reaction.' It is now considered a cliché."

Courage and honesty, not tentative communication, build connection, so I recommend you take those flagpoles down. And if you want a salute, join the army.

Tee Up (Prepare, Schedule)

We're organizing a meeting, not preparing to launch your balls onto the green.

"Hey buddy, can you *tee up* a conference call at 3 p.m.?" No, but I can send an Outlook invitation for one.

A few years ago when I worked in the UK, Dave took over as my new manager after my previous team leader was fired. After a couple of months, Dave stopped asking me to send Outlook invitations for calls and instead started asking me to "*tee up* a call for this afternoon." I'm confident he learned this from his manager JB—before Dave came along, JB had regularly asked me to *tee up* calls—and I'm confident JB learned it from his New York–based manager, Tom. Where Tom learned it from is another question, but I heard them all use it regularly, and the person who said it most awkwardly was Dave. He grimaced when he said it. He learned it from JB, and he lip-serviced JB with it, and JB, who was a seasoned *tee up* user, gave it back to his boss. It was an old boys' club, lip-service lingo that separated the country club members from the rest of us. And it was a club (and a language) that made Dave visibly uncomfortable. My teammates and I watched as the three of them *teed up* their higher-level conversations about low-hanging fruit and quick wins in a real-life version of *The Office*.

Higher Level

My friends feel strongly about this one. "This one is my pet hate," says my friend Maria. "They always tell me this when I start to try to explain to project managers some important (in my opinion) detail of a project they are managing. They are, of course, operating at that nebulous *higher level*, so "Shut up, Maria, and don't you dare to try to get to the subject matter in a meeting." And my friend Huda: "It's the most condescending BS I've heard in any organization!"

I recommend substituting uses of *higher level* with *general* as in *a general conversation. General*, defined by Merriam-Webster means, "involving, applicable to, or affecting the whole."

Throw Some Ideas against the Wall and See What Sticks

Think *running multiple things up the flagpole*, but not tentatively. It's more specific and connects more with my audience if I say: "I want to try X, Y, and Z [substitute with specifics] and see which one works best for you." I am a manager, not Banksy.

Soft Land

"One of my favorites was a management request to *soft land* a project, and the project manager who had to follow up that request had no idea what they meant," says my friend Mark. (Presumably, "Wrap up the project in a controlled manner so that it could be restarted at a point in the future if needed.")

This is another case of a middle manager (in Mark's example) misusing a corporate BS term from project management. In project management circles, *soft landing* is (according to Starthubcenters.com) "a controlled launch of your business into a new market during which less cost and risk are incurred." However we use it, it's a vague and cloudy term that George Orwell would have advised us to avoid.

Drive Results (or Drive for Results)

When you're not *park*ing ideas, you're expected to *drive results*. Are you dropping the results off at school or taking them to the prom? "We *drive results* with call-back timeliness." What is a less abstract, more specific, way of saying what we want to say? "Calling customers back within five minutes of their inquiry email leads to 50 percent more product sales than calling an hour later."

My Outlook calendar doesn't understand corporate BS, and, like any fortunate human who hasn't been exposed to it, takes it literally. For example, tomorrow I am scheduled to be in a workshop called "Driving Customer Success." Outlook saw that the title of the following calendar entry had the word *driving* in it, so it assumed I'd be *driving* somewhere in a car and assigned the car image just as it assigns the image of a plane when it sees I have a flight scheduled in my calendar.

Hit the Ground/Market Running

Hit the market running is a recent variant on the *hit the ground running* idiom, but with a word substitution that sounds cheesier than a pickup line from the 40-year-old virgin. I challenge you to find a definition of this variant anywhere. I imagine it means "to already have preorders before a product goes live" or it could mean "to have a lot of sales on the first day that it becomes available." Or, in the context of starting a new job, it could mean that you are able to do your job without any training from day one. Use any of these more specific (read: connecting) sentences instead and avoid ambiguity. Whatever your explanation is of what this means, say that instead.

Entering the On-Ramp at Maximum Speed

Says my friend Pete, "My all-time favorite from some executive board member: *entering the on-ramp at maximum speed*. I think I know what he was trying to say, but, to my mind, it was downright careless and reckless behavior."

It's more driving, and this time it's driving fast. I cannot find any published instances of this phrase, but it illustrates that corporate BS takes many forms—not just the common clichés. If it's an example of cloudy vagueness, often a metaphor used to describe business goals or processes, it's BS. All it "drives" is ego and disconnection (fast).

Vertical

This is a favorite of project managers and business analysts (often referred to as PMs and BAs). This term originates from the more specific term *vertical market*, where products are offered to specific markets (rather than broad, *horizontal* markets). Instead of this BS, how about you tell us what the specific markets are and make your message vivid. The original BS meaning of *verticals* has also been bastardized by middle management, PMs, and BAs as ego-boosting code for reporting lines: "This project is important because look who the bosses are." Go take a walk off a vertical.

Pivot

Ugh. I remember when the only pivot in the office was in Excel. What we mean is: "Stop what you are doing, and start doing something else instead, if you are

not meeting the target." Merriam-Webster defines the verb *pivot* as "to turn on or as if on a pivot." So what's a pivot? "A shaft or pin on which something turns." In short, if you *pivot*, you're either shafted or pinned. I recommend that you stop *pivoting* and start doing something specific instead.

Low-Hanging Fruit

If there were *low-hanging fruit*, I'd grab them if they were ripe and organic and put them in my mouth. The first fruit that comes to mind is juicy, plump cherries.

When I worked in an office—similar to *The Office*—in England, managers often substituted this phrase with its less fruity friend: *quick wins*. What we actually mean is this: "actions we can take now that don't require a lot of effort." Can you be more specific? I can't get those juicy cherries off my brain. I'd better take a thought shower…

Brainstorm/Thought Shower/Ideation

Here's a rare corporate BS phrase that wasn't created in America. According to the editor of the *Observer*, Henry McDonald, the staff at the Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Investment in Belfast, found the word *brainstorming* offensive to people with brain disorders. So, they created the term *thought showers*. What followed was ridicule from people *with* brain disorders:

> Hello,
> As an epileptic I find this whole idea ridiculous (and reserve the right to use the term *brainstorm*). General excessive PC ideas aside, could they have come up with a more insipid term for what should be a dynamic and energetic exchange of ideas?
> —Gillian Steele

Yes, Gillian Steele, and "a dynamic and energetic exchange of ideas" holds more meaning than *thought showers*. But it also holds more meaning than *brainstorming*. Let's be specific about what we will do: We'll each spend five minutes writing down ideas on Post-It Notes for how we can make it possible for everyone to work from home. Then we will have everyone call their ideas out as one of us writes each unique idea on the whiteboard.

The Merriam-Webster definition of *brainstorming* is "a group problem-solving technique that involves the spontaneous contribution of ideas from all

members of the group; also: the mulling over of ideas by one or more individuals in an attempt to devise or find a solution to a problem." To me, that definition makes much more sense than a *thought shower* or *brainstorming.* If you want a short description for it, call it *group problem solving.* Also, say no to *ideation.* "It's currently all about *ideation* (new word for *brainstorm* [yes, another one])—let's hold an *ideation* session; we need to submit this for *ideation*; let's *ideate* this; we'll flesh it out post-*ideation,*" says my friend Beej.

Go take a *thought shower* and come back to me once you have rinsed off all the BS.

Reach Out

We talked about this. Come on, office groping? Send me an email, give me a call, message me, come over to my desk, but don't *reach out* (or around) for me.

Agile

"Ooohhh, *agiles* are big right now," says Beej. "Most big companies have employed procurement teams or cost-cutting teams who are pretending to be 'resource efficiency' gurus, and it's all about making the workplace *agile*. So, hot-desking, *agile* meetings, extra levels of management and reporting, tons of micromanagement, and millions of KPIs [key performance indicators]. All of which mean a less efficient workplace, of course, but it's called *agile* so it sounds cool?!"

"We need to be *agile*—meaning we need to rush into something without a plan, or any idea what we want to achieve, says another friend, Philippa.

At this point I may retract my earlier comment that you don't get better at track and field from working in an office chair. Maybe you do if you become leaner and more *agile*. OK, OK, OK, *agile* does also refer to the name of a type of project management process—usually with software development—but when it's used to refer to something other than project management in the corporate world, it's BS.

Crystallize Results

"Still no idea what this means," says Philippa.

Another attempt by middle management to make what they are saying sound more intelligent, and, in the process, doing the opposite, further disconnecting us from what they are saying. This phrase would make sense if we were in the business of introducing particles into a solution so crystals formed around the particles. That's what salt does. Are we making salt?

Deliverables

This could be literally anything. Yes, it could be anything shipped by DHL, USPS, FEDEX, or UPS. Not specific and therefore difficult to connect with.

Bandwidth

"*Bandwidth* is my bugbear," says my friend Elise. "Just testimony that the corporate world thinks of its employees as machines, not people. So glad to have left it behind, and all I need to do with my blue skies is appreciate the fresh air."

I keep trying to get 4G between my ears, and it's just not happening. What is wrong with the phrase *I don't have time* (instead of *I don't have the* bandwidth)*?* And even that is often code for *I'm not interested.* Let's stop euphemizing each other, save everyone some time, and increase our connection speed without having to upgrade our broadband…

Step Change

"A *step change*… so much better than a plain old *change,*" says Jeremy.

You'll often see LinkedIn posts and tweets from management consulting companies with messages along the lines of "This new wave of technology is an opportunity to drive a *step change* in productivity and capture strategic business value." It's an example of saying a lot of nothing—and if you are looking for a source of corporate BS, management consulting companies are in the business of selling it. But *step change* is also one of the rare examples of corporate BS that has made Merriam-Webster's dictionary. A term borrowed from mathematics, it evolved from *step function,* which M-W defines as "a mathematical function of a single real variable that remains constant within each of a series of adjacent intervals, but changes in value from one interval to the next." Maybe I'm dumb, but the word *change* makes more sense to me than that definition.

Put a Pin in It

Put a pin in it means "hold onto that thought/idea and we'll come back to it later." You might assume that it comes from tacking an idea to a bulletin board, but in fact it actually comes from a World War II reference to a hand grenade —*putting a pin in it* so you can save it for later. If your boss tells you to *put a pin in it,* she's telling you to hold onto a grenade. But, hey, at least you can *pivot* around a pin.

Same Page

Is this a book club? Or is this code for *hymn sheet*? How about you just ask me if I agree.

SLPs use this as often (average 2.58) as anyone in the corporate world, although with SLPs there is also a chance they are talking about a page in a child's book.

Delta

Here's how to disconnect with the layman in one word while trying to make yourself sound smarter in the process. Unless you are boarding a flight. Or trading options. Or talking about rivers. This is a math term for *variation* or *difference*. In options trading, the *delta* is a ratio that tells you what the corresponding option price change will be relative to the underlying (stock) price change. Let's limit our use of *delta* to conversations about math, rivers, options trading, and flights if we want to connect with our audience. And if you are having a math or options trading conversation, good luck to you. That's the difference (not *delta*) between me and you.

Check In

I know you are my boss, but that doesn't mean I'm going to a hotel with you. Once we've *checked in*, you will *reach out* and *touch base*, and I'm not comfortable with that!

Kindly Revert on the Same

Chances are *revert* won't elicit a defensive reaction, but it disconnects when it's used in a way that doesn't reflect its meaning. In an article on his website priyanksharma.com, Priyank Sharma, head of design at Hotstar (a video streaming channel), says that *revert* is used instead of the word *reply* or the phrase *get back* in day-to-day business communications by almost everyone in India:

> The correct meaning of the word *revert* is essentially to return to a former habit, practice, belief, condition, etc. Generally, this is used in the software world to represent application roll-back to a previous version: "Due to critical bugs in version 1.2, they *reverted* the software to version 1.1."… "I will *revert* to you later" is grammatically correct, but the meaning is not what you think. The meaning is "sometime later I will become you or change back to you. Also implies that "sometime back I was you." "*Revert* to me with the details" literally means "I'm asking you to carry those details and become me."

All this time I've been wondering what help desk staff meant when they said, "Kindly *revert* on the same," when all along they wanted me to change back into something. I wonder if Clark Kent says this to Superman. Now I just need to figure out what *the same* means.

Does That Fit Your Personal Brand?

"In other words: That'll make you look like a complete arsehole," says Melissa.

If you search the web for a meaning, you'll notice the consensus is that a *personal brand* is what distinguishes one person from her competitors—the Richard Bransons from the Elon Musks. When it's used in the office in the context of what distinguishes you from your colleague, it implies that your colleague is your competitor. That may be if we are both applying for the same promotion, but many of us are not looking for a new job.

Let's say you advocate flexible working hours and like to speak about cross-company well-being initiatives during team meetings. When team leader Adam asks you, "Does that fit your *personal brand?*" it's a euphemism for "Don't be yourself." What is touted as authenticity is used to promote conformity. A personal brand helps Richard Branson gain followers on Twitter and readers for his autobiography, but a personal brand in the workplace can be an obstacle to diversity, candor, and connection. Instead of *personal brand*, I recommend using "what distinguishes you/me/them." And instead of asking, "Does that fit your *personal brand*?" I recommend asking, "Is that something you want to be known for?"

But *personal brands* aren't the only brands that create obstacles to diversity, candor, and connection—clothing brands do it, too. In Marie Kondo's book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, she has a section titled "Don't Underestimate the Noise of Written Information." Name dropping or walking around with labels on clothes can disconnect you from how you feel. Instead, it turns you into a walking billboard. That's OK if you connect with the meaning of the words you wear. But how many of us only buy the black and white sneakers just because of the white swoosh? What does the word *Nike* mean to you? OK, maybe *Nike* is a bad example because *Nike* was a winged goddess in Greek mythology, and the swoosh represents speed and movement. If you consider yourself a winged goddess who moves with speed, perhaps you are very connected to the meaning on your athleisure gear. But then again, perhaps not.

Jessie Bowen @JessieBowen_ Nov 24th, 2018

New Calvin Klein bra & panties set make me happy

Would a bra and panties set by any other name sound as sweet? Jessie, what if you tweeted: *My new bra and panties set makes me happy*? Or, is it the *Calvin Klein* part of that statement that makes you "happy"? If so, define *happiness*.

You may, however, want to give thought to the meaning of *Hollister* before you project it to the world from your chest in 100-point-size font. Apparently, it means "whoremonger." Or "brothel-keeper." That's according to several dictionaries, including Oxford University's *Oxford Reference*. That would make sense because if Hollister is the brothel-keeper, by letting it cover our body, we are its brand whore. Only this brothel-keeper doesn't pay us. The only cut we get is a piece of cloth that's tagged with our brothel-keeper's name to advertise to, and recruit, other brand whores.

But why is this a problem? Because the brand masks who we are. We don't need to pay fashion pimps. We can be independent operators, masters of our own dress. And our dress can be an extension of how we see ourselves and who we want to be—free from and not limited by the most popular brands. Sometimes the brand does more than just mask our identity. It can be noxious enough to alienate us from others. In her book, *No Logo* Naomi Klein says, "Like so much of cool hunting, Hilfiger's marketing journey feeds off the alienation at the heart of America's race relations: selling white youth on their fetishization of black style, and black youth on their fetishization of white wealth."

Why would we submit to a brand to grow their identity at the expense of our own? We grow brand identity at the expense of our own for two reasons: ego and materialism. Ego feeds off materialism and materialism feeds off brands.

But what if brands make us happy? In fact, they are more likely to do the opposite. Happiness expert and University of Illinois psychologist Ed Diener straight up says that materialism is toxic for happiness. Using two measures of subjective happiness, a study by W. B. Russell in *Advances in Consumer Research*, found that materialism is negatively correlated with happiness. That is, the more materialistic you are, the less happy you are. Even more sinister, materialism correlates with serious psychological issues, such as depression, narcissism, and paranoia, a correlation brought to light by researchers Tim Kasser and Richard Ryan, who published their findings in a 1993 article, published in the *Journal of Personal and Social Psychology*, titled "A Dark Side of the American Dream."

I recommend—as Marie Kondo does—buying only those clothes that you connect with or that bring you joy when you hold them up to your chest. Like peacocks showing off their feathers, it's natural that we want to look good, whether it's to attract a mate or for our own self-esteem and confidence. But we can do that with authenticity by not selecting clothes based on whether they have a swoosh or a brand name spelled out across them. By doing so we also support independent artists working in clothing design rather than supporting brands that sell mass-produced, homogenized items made by factory workers for a subsistence wage, often in unethical conditions.[2] The most beautiful birds don't need brands to connect. Nor do we.

Socialize

Phaedra Boinodiris @innov8game, May 11, 2018:

Well, the easiest and maybe one of most important things we can do is socialize this idea to as many influencers as we can. Including policy makers. My 2 cents.

Phaedra, do you have a fear of commitment to specifics? If so, that would make you a politician. It means more if you *tell people* what you mean rather than *socialize* ideas. How about you change your tweet to:

> It's easy and important for us to tell our congresswomen and congressmen about this idea, and other public figures with influence. Write to them or tweet them now.

Socialize and the other corporate BS examples in this chapter are also markers of *political language*—described by George Orwell as "euphemism and cloudy vagueness." The corporate world has become full of it at the expense of human connection. Not only the corporate world but the education system, too: Even the 80 SLPs working in the New York public education system say *check in* daily (with an average score of 1.105). Yes, we enjoy mocking these phrases, but there's a more sinister side to their prevalence in the workplace.

I will end this chapter with a warning from Orwell's "Politics and the English Language":

> Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging, and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called pacification. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called transfer of population or rectification of frontiers. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called elimination of unreliable elements. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them.

RECAP: CORPORATE BULLSH*T

• Replace euphemism and cloudy vagueness with specifics.

• *Singing from the same hymn sheet* (or *the same page*) is bad for business. So is *drinking the Kool-Aid*. Lack of candor blocks smart ideas.

• When a manager asks you, "Does that fit your *personal brand*?" it's a euphemism for "Don't be yourself." What is touted as authenticity is used for conformity.

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1 If you have an appetite for roasting more buzzwords of jargon, I recommend that you play with this corporate BS generator: https://www.atrixnet.com/bs-generator.html.

2 "Nike workers in Vietnam earned between $0.61 and $0.89 per hour in 2016, based on a working week of 48 hours.… However… it's not uncommon for the employers to withhold some money (wage-theft) and to force overtime which decreases the wage per hour which workers would effectively take home." https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/nike-workers-pay-kaepernick/.

Part Two

WORD POWER

In the broadest sense possible, writing [and speaking] well means… there's an electricity about it.

—**David Foster Wallace, *Quack This Way***

Pow! If *word trash* is the plastic crap that insulates and disconnects, *word power* is the wire that connects. At this point in the book, if you have been following and paying attention to your word choices, you have now tidied up your word trash and created space in your life for some words of connection. Calling words out and talking about their meanings rather than using them out of habit, acts as our "earth connection" and grounds us. Some words use both "negative" and "positive" terminals to connect. Some words have a positive power of their own. It's now time for us to use them and get charged.

VERBS THAT MOVE

Never use the passive where you can use the active.

—George Orwell (the fourth of his six rules in "Politics and the English Language")

Verbs are what bring sentences to life. Without the *bring,* there'd be no life in that sentence. Without action, there is no movement. And without movement, there is no connection. Even moving our eyes is an action. What follows is a short list of verbs that connect us best.

Resent and *Appreciate*

Resentment and *appreciation* are like the negative and positive terminals on a power supply. Oftentimes, an honest expression of resentment will restore peace and create a current of appreciation that flows between people. In 2013 I saw and heard this firsthand during an eight-day Radical Honesty workshop in Greece. Author and psychotherapist Brad Blanton provided real-time feedback on the words couples were using in arguments, helping them find connection by focusing on the resentment they felt and were trying to communicate. When they made the connection, they unleashed a flow of emotion. As they experienced their emotions with their senses and described how they felt—e.g., "I feel a tightness in my stomach and tension in my forehead"—they allowed for the release of other resentments until they had purged them all. Then came tears of joy accompanied by the expression of new appreciation that they had hidden

underneath unexpressed resentments.

OK, but where's the action here? Think of *resenting* as "resending"—or "sending back to" someone—what Merriam-Webster defines as the "ill will" you feel. What's *ill will*? No, it's not me after I have eaten a stale oyster. *Ill will* is a noun in the bottom 40 percent of word usage, according to Merriam-Webster, which defines it as "unfriendly feeling." So, when you *resent* someone, you are sending back the *unfriendly feeling* at them. While resenting may seem counterintuitive to connection, it's mostly used in situations where there is already a disconnection. "I *resent* you for calling me useless" was a sentence I said to clear my own *ill will* and open up a connection to new appreciation with a family member. I went from *ill Will* to *well Will*. On the other side of the coin, to *appreciate* is to send back *goodwill* in response to *goodwill* you have already felt from another person. In both senses, if a relationship *appreciates*, it *grows* in value (and *goodwill*).

To connect, say that you *resent* and *appreciate* someone for something specific. That is, don't say, "I *appreciate* it" or "I *resent* it." Say instead, "I *appreciate/resent* you for the way you looked at me last night when I was talking at John's house." Don't say, "I *appreciate* the fact that" or "I *appreciate* it when" or any variant on that. Say instead, "I *resent* you for" or "I *appreciate* you for [insert specifics of what] [insert specifics of when]."

Here's a bullsh*t, aka disconnected, statement you might overhear in an average relationship: "You're always making stupid comments." The honest version? "I *resent* you (i.e., I'm sending back the unfriendly feeling you gave me) for saying that Kim Kardashian's butt is so real and lovable in those billboard photos, while you had your hands on my butt in bed last night." People, it does not get any more real than that. It channels the negativity of disconnection and creates a new connection from it. If I am sending specific words back at you that express my unfriendly feeling accurately, I am connecting with you. We are afraid to resent, but fear is the opposite of connection.[1] *Love* and *courage*, whether they take the form of *appreciation* or *resentment*, are the opposite of fear and generate the strongest of connections.

Thank (You)

It seems that we are better than we have ever been at expressing thanks. This is in part due to the mainstream influence of applied positive psychology in best-selling books, TED talks, and social media. Even the company I work for has an

"appreciation day" where cards and balloons are made available to personalize and give to colleagues we appreciate.

But the rocket-rise in *thank you* use has more to do with habit than it does with the sincerity of a connection with a feeling of gratitude. In 2016, Merci Chocolates (hopefully you remember enough French to understand that name) ran a poll and found that Americans say *thank you* about 2,000 times a year but don't mean it more than half the time they say it. If you aim to say what you mean and connect with what you say, pay attention to the following two situations:

1. When you say *thank you,* are you feeling gratitude? I feel a flow of warmth in my stomach and chest and interpret it to be gratitude. But is it? Well, it turns out that warmth in the body could be caused by something that happens when we express gratitude (usually by saying *thank you*) that scientist and psychophysiologist Rollin McCraty calls "psychophysiological coherence." This is something that regulates our heart rhythms, lowers our blood pressure, and makes us feel more relaxed. In more scientific terms, what McCraty says happens when we express gratitude is "increased synchronization between the two branches of the ANS [autonomic nervous system], a shift in autonomic balance toward increased parasympathetic activity, increased heart-brain synchronization, increased vascular resonance, and entrainment between diverse physiological oscillatory systems."[2] Expressing gratitude not only connects us with others, it actually improves the connection between our brain and our heart.

But if you don't feel grateful, don't say *thank you* out of habit. I am especially guilty of this language bad habit—I had *please* and *thank you* drilled into me at the dinner table by my parents. Up until a couple of years ago, whenever I went out to dinner, I said *thank you* to the waiter probably a dozen times. But wait a minute! I'm going to tip this guy $20, it's his job, and I don't *appreciate* him coming over to the table and topping up my water every two minutes, so why the hell am I saying *thank you* every time he does? If the constant water pouring didn't already disconnect me from the waiter, then my constant stream of *thank you*s surely did. I'd prefer that my conversation not be interrupted—especially if the date is going well. It's time to ask the waiter to leave the bottle on the table. Because the truth is that I *don't* appreciate him coming over to the table so often and pouring my water. I prefer to pour it myself. If our waiter does provide us with great service and I feel gratitude, I will be able to thank him and mean it at the end of the meal.

2. When you *appreciate* what someone has done, does it move you to say the words *thank you*? Do you convert appreciation into the expression of gratitude? This second point is an opportunity for more connection: Forty percent of the people Merci Chocolates questioned said they were too busy to say *thank you* for things they knew they were thankful for. Almost a third said they forgot to say *thank you*, while 30 percent said their minds are often on other things so they don't say *thank you* at times when they could say it and mean it.

Accept

To *accept* is, in the words of Merriam-Webster, "to recognize as true." Just because you *notice* something doesn't mean you have to *accept* it: "I *notice*/acknowledge that you said, 'I will make America great again,' but I don't recognize that as true, i.e., I don't *accept* what you are saying." To *accept* and to express that you do *not accept* are both acts of power. That power comes from connection with the truth. *To accept* can also be an act of courage when you recognize the truth that you have fears: "I *accept* that the unknown is uncertain. I *accept* that I have fears about being alone."

Imagine

Most of the time the things we say we *notice*, we *imagine*. Being clear on the distinction between what we *notice* and what we *imagine* helps us to connect both with the present moment and with the person we are talking to. In a workshop I ran at New York University, I asked attendees to write down a sentence that started with the words *I notice.* One of the attendees said, "*I notice* that my eyes are dry because of the light coming in the window." So I said, "You can *notice* the light coming in and you can *notice* that your eyes are dry, but you are *imagining* that the light is why your eyes are dry." Any interpretation of causation uses imagination.

Someone else in the group said, "*I notice* a red shirt" and I said, "Where?"

It turned out that the shirt was a sweater. Elementary school SLPs use *notice* daily, whereas middle school SLPs use it only sometimes (average of 1.74 versus 2.21). This aligns with greater use of sensory verbs (especially *to see*) among elementary school SLPs.

In an average (to poor) relationship, you might hear: "I *notice* that you got home late again tonight." This is also *imagination*: *Late* and *again* are judgments based on abstractions like *early, on time, late,* and memories of past arrival times, all recalled from imagination. You can't *notice* time, you can only notice

the time. "*I notice* you coming through the door and it's 8 p.m." is about as far as you can go while maintaining a connection to truth.

Reserve the use of *I notice* only for those specifics that you can notice with your five senses right now in this moment. You *notice* this word on the page *now*, the sounds you can hear wherever you are *now*, the sensations of the floor pressing against your feet or the feel of this book against your fingers or the taste of coffee in your mouth if you just took a sip. For everything else, there's *I imagine.*

Donald J. Trump Verified Account @realDonaldTrump, Sep 12, 2012:

Libya is selling its oil to China—I notice the Chinese Ambassador is very safe.

No, Donald, you can't *notice* that he's safe, let alone *very* safe. You can *imagine* that he is. If you were standing in front of a giant safe and you saw the Chinese ambassador get into said giant safe, then you could say, "I *notice* the Chinese Ambassador getting into a safe," and it wouldn't be a lie. But *safe* as an adjective (and *safety*, the noun) is an abstract interpretation, i.e., a creation of your *imagination*, not something you have *noticed* with your senses.

In your next conversation today or tomorrow, start every sentence with either the words *I notice* or *I imagine.* Restrict the use of *I notice* to what you can *notice* right now, using your five senses. Be aware of the difference between what you can *notice* and what you *imagine*. The rule here is that unless you can *notice* something specific (with one or more of your five senses), like a red ball or individual words the other person is saying at that moment, then you start your sentences with the words *I imagine*.

WHY BRITS *ARE* BETTER THAN AMERICANS

To be or not to be, that was the question posed by the Englishman credited with creating—or at least *championing* the use of (and, yes, Shakespeare was the first to turn the noun *champion* into a verb)—anywhere between 400 and 1,700 words of today's English vocabulary. But the answer to Shakespeare's question is *circumstantial*—and, yes, he coined that word, too. And for some collective nouns, it will vary depending on whether you are American or British:

Americans say, "The Army *is* in Iraq."
Brits say, "The Army *are* in Iraq."

Americans say, "Our team *is* resting."

Brits say, "Our team *are* resting."

The irony is that the country best known for celebrating the individual—and the pursuit of the (capitalist) American dream—is the country that sounds most communist, as it *blankets* (another invention of Shakespeare) the individuals within that team under a singular conjugation of *to be.* What sounds friendlier: "Manchester United *are* playing tonight" (UK) or "Manchester United *is* playing tonight" (US)? What conjugation of *to be* connects more with the idea that there are multiple human beings: "The British Army *are* pulling out" (UK) or "The US Army *is* pulling out" (US)? With some exceptions, Americans follow the grammar logic of singular noun = singular verb, but I'd argue that the singular verb dehumanizes and disconnects from the people it represents.

The US has one of the highest public opinions of their own military, with around 90 percent of people being in favor—language has a role in hiding that there *are* individuals affected, because we only hear that the group *is* affected, i.e., the singular unit idea is an easier pill to swallow than the idea of hundreds of thousands of individuals. *Is* conveys a blanket of cloudiness, the kind found in political language that George Orwell warned us against. If you are reminded by the verb conjugation that there *are* people in this group, perhaps you'll be more sensitive to the idea that it *is* not only a single group, but many human beings. Perhaps, then, not quite as many people would be so pro-military. In the UK, where the Army *are*, not *is*, more than half of the public *are* opposed to military intervention overseas. And there *are* many more human beings in the US military than in the British: The US has five times the population of the UK but almost ten times the military (1.5 million in the US armed forces as opposed to only 150,000 in the UK military).

Verbing Nouns: Separating the Trash from the Power

New verbs derived from nouns (think *fast-track* it, *table* it, *calendar* it, *workshop* it) often irritate people because they feel that their language is being messed with. In her book *The Prodigal Tongue,* Lynne Murphy—who is also a professor of linguistics at the University of Sussex—says the new verbs derived from nouns that *least* irritate people are verbs that express something specific. She gives the examples of *to skateboard, to google, to pepper-spray.* These verbs connect well because they convey the idea of a specific noun with the action of the verb itself. If you ask me how to make pizza dough and I tell you to *google it,* I've told you to look up (action) pizza dough recipes using the Google website

specifically—that's a lot of specific information conveyed by two words. If you *skateboard,* that calls up the action of moving on a *skateboard* specifically—with just one word. Let's go back to the words of George Orwell: "If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out."

Specifics connect, and the fewer words to express the specifics, the stronger the connection. It's like having six yards of cable between two people or one yard. The less distance direct current has to travel, the less wire resistance, and the stronger the voltage when it reaches what it's connected to.

By contrast, new verbs that most annoy and disconnect people are—à la corporate bullsh*t—abstract: Murphy gives the word-trash verb examples of *to leverage* and *to action,* both of which have the two characteristics of corporate bullsh*t: euphemism and cloudy vagueness (*leverage* is a cloudy, vague euphemism for *use*; *action* for *do*).

Thought Verbs: Disconnectors in Disguise

Don't rely on a single device to create an atmosphere that you could instead create in context, with a chorus of other words and punctuation marks.

—Ben Blatt, author of *Nabukov's Favorite Word Is Mauve*

Thought verbs include *know, want, think, understand, realize, believe, desire, love,* and *hate.* They are similar to adverbs in that they tell rather than show. When you *look,* your eyes move. When you *think,* nothing moves. You could argue that thinking is an action. But I'd argue that we don't choose our thoughts—where is the action when we're thinking? Connection needs movement.

Chuck Palahniuk, the author of *Fight Club,* recommends against using thought verbs: "Instead of characters *knowing* anything, you must now present the details that allow the reader to know them. Instead of a character *wanting* something, you must now describe the thing so that the reader wants it" (emphasis mine).

In Palahniuk's essay, "Nuts and Bolts: 'Thought' Verbs," he provides several examples of how to describe without thought verbs and instead let the reader—not the character—do the thinking. In one such example Palahniuk writes, "Instead of saying: 'Adam knew Gwen liked him,' you'll have to say: 'Between classes, Gwen was always leaned on his locker when he'd go to open it. She'd

roll her eyes and shove off with one foot, leaving a black-heel mark on the painted metal, but she also left the smell of her perfume. The combination lock would still be warm from her ass. And the next break, Gwen would be leaned there, again.'" Palahniuk acts like a lawyer, providing detailed evidence so that we think Gwen likes Adam, without being told that she does.

Specifics connect; thought verbs disconnect. This holds true for conversation as well as writing. Instead of saying, "I *realized* that it was 4 p.m.," I say, "My phone screen showed 4 p.m." Instead of saying, "I *think* you're hungry," I say, "I can hear your stomach rumbling and I see that you are looking at that loaf of bread and licking your lips."

OK, yes, there are more words involved in that second sentence, but which creates more vivid connection? "I *think* you're hungry" could elicit a defensive "No, I'm fine," but it's hard to argue with sights and sounds. Each sensory specific is a new and short, direct connection. The more specifics, the more connections, the higher the power.

Speak, Don't *Talk*

To *speak* is more specific than to *talk*. Why? Because *talk* is often abstract and associated with other things than just moving your mouth and tongue to make words come out. Elizabeth Stokoe, professor of social interaction at Loughborough (UK) University, says there are several idioms associated with *talk*. She gives the examples: "You're all *talk*; *talk* is cheap; you *talk* the *talk*, but don't walk the walk." Stokoe and her colleagues found that, in some contexts, requests to *talk* are much easier to resist than proposals to *speak*: "We observed this when looking at interactions between police negotiators and suicidal persons in crisis… Persons in crisis would often respond with something like: 'I don't want to *talk*, what's the point in *talking*?'"

When the verb was *speak*, the person was more likely to open up to conversation. In her *Guardian* article, titled "Would You Be Willing?,"[3] Rosie Ifould recommends saying, "Can I *speak* to you about this?" instead of "Can we *talk*?" if you want to form a connection with the person you're addressing. If you don't, by all means continue saying, "Can we *talk*?"

RECAP: VERBS THAT MOVE

- To *resent* is to *send back* unfriendly feeling (ill will). To *appreciate* is to send goodwill. If I am sending specific words at you that express either my unfriendly feeling or my appreciation accurately, I am connecting with you. Often, an honest expression of resentment will remove obstacles to appreciation.

- To *accept* is to recognize something as true. To *accept* and *not accept* are both acts of connection.

- Only say *thank you* when you feel gratitude. But say it every time you do.

- *I love it* is a lie. We can *like* Doritos; we can *love* people and animals.

- Most of the things we say we *notice*, we *imagine.* Any interpretation or judgment uses imagination. Restrict *I notice* to what you can notice with your five senses.

- Specifics (details) connect; thought verbs disconnect. Show by submitting evidence. Don't tell someone how (you think) they're feeling.

- Verb nouns where the verb conveys the idea of a specific noun with the action of the verb itself. So *skateboard* and *google*, but don't *workshop.*

- *Speak,* don't *talk*.

Footnotes

1 Another reminder here (from chapter 2) that trust and confidence was voted the best definition of happiness—connecting well—by the 700 people I polled.

2 Rollin McCraty & Mike Atkinson, "Psychophysiological Coherence," Boulder Creek, CA: HeartMath Research Center, Institute of HeartMath, Publication No. 03-016 (2003).

3 https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/dec/04/would-you-be-willing-words-turn-conversation-around.

EAR CANDY AND ONOMATOPOEIA

> Touch comes before sight, before speech. It is the first language and the last, and it always tells the truth.
>
> **—Margaret Atwood**

English vocabulary is full of abstractions and generalizations, yet there is a scarcity of words that relate to the senses. Do you know the sound equivalent of the word *visualize*? A word for this wasn't invented until 1975, when someone finally came up with *aurelate*—which hasn't caught on and is still not recognized by my spell checker.

What if we could come up with a word like *visualize* for imagining the feel of something? The taste? The smell? I vote that we add some new words —*tactillate* (imagine the feel), *aromize,* and *savorize*—and start using them to imagine with our senses.

But why do we need these imaginary-sense words? Why visualize when you can explain? Because visualizing lets you see with your senses, even when your eyes can't. We *visualize* how a fireplace or a paint color will look in our living room when we're staring at a blank wall, or we *aurelate* what we are going to say to someone before we meet him.

In a guided meditation, you could say you *see* the light coming out of your head and you can *feel* the energy flowing to your fingertips. However, to stay connected to the present, it helps to distinguish between what sensations you use your imagination to create as opposed to those from the physical world. Remember the *I notice* versus *I imagine* distinction in the previous chapter. Your brain may not distinguish real from imaginary, but forcing yourself to make that

distinction in your speech will help you stay present and connect with others. These *visualize* equivalents for the other four senses help make that distinction clear.

Imagine the…

1. sight—visualize
2. sound—aurelate
3. touch—tactillate
4. smell—aromize
5. taste—savorize

But for the strongest connections of all, we need to ditch our imaginations for our senses.

Verbs of the Senses

Our senses do more than anything else to connect us to the present moment and to each other, so it makes sense to keep our words connected to our senses:

I *hear* you.

I *see* you.

I *smell* you.

I *feel* you.

I *taste* you.

See how easy it is to get excited when we connect our language to our senses? It also keeps us grounded and present, out of our minds in the best possible way. *See* was the most frequently used word for elementary school SLPs in my study, and that makes sense: Children learn to be themselves using their senses before they learn all the abstractions that disconnect them from their senses. "*See* the bird? I *see* it!" Elementary school SLPs are more exposed to the sensory words and therefore use them more than their middle school counterparts. I also wager that elementary school teachers are—on average—happier than middle school teachers.

There is no substitute for sensory experience when it comes to connecting

well: "This fish sauce *tastes* sweet. Your hand *feels* warmer than mine. I *smell* your perfume from over here. I *hear* the music coming out of your headphones. I *see* your pupils getting bigger." These types of sentences come about only when we pay attention, when we notice what's happening now. Talking like this is its own meditation. When I pay attention to what someone says—not just the words, but the sounds coming out of a person's mouth—even over the phone, I feel grounded, present, and connected. Sometimes the conversation turns into a conversation about how the other person speaks. This happens with my friend Lacie, whom I talk to over the phone because she lives in Detroit. Of all my friends, she is the one I seem to have the most connected phone conversations with, no matter what we talk about. Often, the subject of our conversation is a specific word—I notice that she often uses the words *should* and *always*—or the pronunciation differences between us. When a word-trash word becomes the subject of a conversation, rather than a bad habit in that conversation, you will find connection.

I encourage you to have conversations about all the words discussed in part one, because the more we talk *about* those words (rather than use them out of habit), the more aware of them we will be, the more primed to notice their effects, and the more empowered to switch them off (rather than them switching our conversations off). This is the practice of talking with your senses rather than your ego. And it's your senses that reward you with pleasure. Anyone for chocolate?

Euphonious Euphony (Aural Chocolate, Ear Candy, or *Cinnamon* Words)

Merriam-Webster defines euphony as:

> pleasing or sweet sound; especially: the acoustic effect produced by words so formed or combined as to please the ear.

There's another reason I like the phone conversations with Lacie, and it's not only because she has a soft, warm, American accent. I like that the words she uses sound pleasant, i.e., they bring pleasure, a little aural chocolate—or ear candy, if you don't eat chocolate. One of my favorite aural chocolates that Lacie offers me is the word *darn*.

> **Me**: My coffee machine is broken.
> **Lacie**: Darn.

Other authors have their favorite *cinnamon* words that appear in at least half of their books. Ben Blatt documents a list of *cinnamon* words for many well-known writers in his book *Nabokov's Favorite Word Is Mauve.* (Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov was a Russian-born American novelist.) The term *cinnamon word* was coined after author Ray Bradbury's favorite word (*cinnamon* is also a *cinnamon* word of authors Toni Morrison and Khaled Hosseini). J. K. Rowling's *cinnamon* words include *wand*, *wizard*, and *potion*. *Dorm* is a *cinnamon* word for several female authors, including Alice Sebold, especially because it sounds warm. The closing, nasal vibration of *m* is also found in the sound of *om*, used in meditation. Indeed, paying attention to one or two cinnamon words that center you and make you feel present offers some of the same benefits as meditation.

Words that are a pleasure to listen to help us connect. Yes, this means that if you are fond of a certain accent, it is possible that you will derive more aural pleasure—I said *aural*—and resulting connection from talking to some people more than others. I know what an aural crush feels like. I thought I was falling in love with someone over the phone because of her words, but when we finally met in person and added the visual and touch senses, we lacked a full connection. And the relationship went no further.

The good news is that if people aren't beautiful enough for your sensory stimulation, words can be. Linguist Robert Beard, the founder of Yourdictionary.com and alphadictionary.com, wrote a book titled *The 100 Most Beautiful Words in English.* For him (I am summarizing), the beauty of a word is found in the rhythm derived from the emphasis of syllables within that word: "Each [beautiful] word has an accented syllable that stands out from the unaccented ones." Most of the 100 words in his list contain more than one syllable—and he's not including my *darn*, darn it. If words were people, accented syllables would be the jawlines, cheekbones, eyes, and mouths of the beautiful. Beard also mentions that words with many vowels can be "lovelier" because they involve unobstructed airflow and rounded lips. He suggests that the amount of lip action a word requires may correlate with how beautiful the word is "because the lips are so involved in expressing love."

Here's a teaser of five of the words that made his list:

1. **Ailurophile:** A cat-lover
2. **Assemblage:** A gathering
3. **Becoming:** Attractive

4. Bucolic: In a lovely rural setting

5. Dalliance: A brief love affair

I recommend that you say all 100 of his most beautiful words (also published on his website[1]) out loud and feel which ones involve the most lip action. I got a little excited writing that. You're welcome…

Rodrigo Niño used the second word in Beard's list in 2017 when he founded the coworking-space company *The Assemblage,* a name that is as enticing as it is evocative. If Niño had called it *The Assembly,* I imagine it wouldn't have had as much of a draw. I have visited The Assemblage, and the beauty of its name is reflected in the beauty of the building's interior and in its decorations, paintings, and ornaments.

But we don't all have Rodrigo Niño's talent for using beautiful words: The New York SLPs' usage of a sample of the words in the list was almost nonexistent (their average score was 4.61 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being not at all). It seems there is an opportunity once again for beauty in our words, something Shakespeare understood. Beauty or not beauty—that is the question. So how about we try to find the connection to the *evocative* and the *onomatopoeia.* Pick one or two words at a time from Beard's list of beautiful words. If you love them, keep them and use them to connect. With a little attention, you'll discover opportunities to connect that you didn't know existed. *Serendipity,* see?

Yes, there are some adjectives in the list, but a commonality of these 100 words is that they are specific—not your average *good* or *bad* descriptors. There's another word I would like to add to this list. I am convinced that it is a word that has made a food item popular—especially in New York—only because of its name. I imagine that if this food item went by the name *rhododendron,* it would be about as popular as seaweed, not even close to *ceviche,* and a universe away from *sushi*. What am I talking about? The rise of the *poke* (pronounced poh-KAY) *bowl. Poke* (not a Facebook notification) used to be a word and food found mostly in Hawaii. But in 2016, *poke* went from word to buzzword to having its own brand. *Poke* is only *poke* because the word became *cool.* It's raw fish with sesame oil and salad. You could describe it as sesame-sashimi salad. But Hawaiians and Japanese call it *poke,* and people like to poke.

Data from Google Trends shows how fresh this word popularity is: Searches have been climbing since the beginning of 2016, and Google's relative interest

score for *poke bowl* went from only 15 in January 2016 spiking to 100 only a few months later in July.

Another word that has done this to a lesser degree is the Brazilian *açai* (pronounced AH-SIGH-EE). (Again followed by the word *bowl*—perhaps the word *bowl* is also not to be underestimated.)

> "Let's do another bowl, dude."
>
> "Yeah, *poke*."
>
> "That *poke* is dope."
>
> "That's *açai,* man."

Ah, remember, is the easiest sound infants (and adults) can make while relaxing the mouth. It's the soothing sound of mouth relaxation.

And do people enjoy smoking *shisha* pipes or do they just like saying the word *shisha* so much that they can't resist putting it in their mouth?

Onomatopoeia

The word itself is one of Beard's beautiful words, but it also defines words that immediately create connection through sound. Vocalizing *onomatopoeia* is free cognitive behavioral therapy. A common CBT exercise is to have you pay attention to five sounds you can hear now. Vocalizing *onomatopoeia* both creates and shifts attention to the sounds. The sound is the meaning. No ambiguity. So, *crack* your fingers, listen to the *thud* as you drop your books on the rug, and *ring* the bell. Merriam-Webster defines *onomatopoeia* as follows:

> the naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it (such as buzz, hiss); the use of words whose sound suggests the sense.

Beep beep. Takes me back to living in India, where truck owners paint the words *sound OK Horn* on the backs of their trucks to request that other vehicles notify them of their presence. The request is unnecessary. Almost all drivers, from rickshaws to roadsters, beep every few seconds to notify everyone nearby that they are on the road. If you don't understand why, then I recommend some international travel.

What follows is a list of onomatopoeia that can probably be understood wherever you are in the world (for an extensive and evolving list, have a look at

the Wikipedia entry on CROSS-LINGUISTIC ONOMATOPOEIA). With the exception of *haha*, most of the words on this list are not used at all by the New York SLPs (average 4.46). That implies daily missed opportunities for connection—probably missed because their egos perceive the words as childish. But children are often better at connecting than adults. When a sound communicates what a (non-onomatopoeic) word cannot—such as the *beep beep* of car horns (as opposed to the *sounding* of car horns), use the sound, and you will evoke what people can understand with their senses, not just their minds. This has the effect of grounding you both in the present, even if the word itself does not have other meanings or uses. Think about the *om* sound in meditation. (also found in the increasingly popular, **om**akase). It doesn't have wide conversational use, but it still connects people to the present when it is used because of how it vibrates in the body. The next time you are stuck for conversation at a party, try forming a sentence with one of the following, and pay attention to how engaged your conversation partner becomes:

Bang

Count how many *bangs* you hear today (sounds, not words). The most frequent *bangs* I hear are from people letting their apartment doors *slam*. Sometimes I hear *bangs* that sound like gunshots, but they're from a Dumpster being dropped on the street. And sometimes the *bangs* are fireworks going off. Many things—and people—*bang.* Remember that the next time you *bang* into something or hear the drums in a song. "Do you hear her *banging* those drums?"

We're *banging* more than we used to. That's healthy!

Moo

Not the easiest word to work into a sentence at your party, but not impossible: "I miss hearing the sound of cows *mooing* when we stayed next door to the dairy farm." Instead of an insipid "I miss hearing the sound of the cows…"

Vroom

"Our son loves to rev up our car outside our house before he drives anywhere. *Vroom, vroom, vroom.*"

Glug

True, a real-life *glug* often sounds more like an *ug* than a *glug*, but a *glug* says far more than *drink*, and it brings the attention to the throat and makes the conversation visceral, not just mental.

Hum

Hummingbirds *hum*. Washing machines, air conditioners, and dishwashers *hum*, but people don't articulate this sound often, and when they do it's often as a typo version of *hmmm*. Not a lot of *hum* in our speech, *hmmm*?

 Noise is nonspecific and abstract, but it's often used instead of the word *hum*, which gives you the sound as you communicate it. No need to aurelate when you can hear it.

Tick-tock

Tick-tock is the sound of the clock, and it's often used to quickly communicate that time is running out for the recipient of a communication. Saying it makes you conscious of time, just as a metronome would (and a metronome also *tick-tocks*).

Boom

If you are trying to describe the sound made by the canons that fire across the harbor every night in Havana, why describe that with several words when you can *boom* in one?

Meow

Who says, "The cat was making *a sound typical of cats*?"

Click

Click your mouse button now and listen to the sound. The keys on my laptop are the shallow/thin ones that *click* more than the laptop keys that stick out more (that you *tap*).

Quack quack

And *rap rap* (Danish); *mak-mak* (Albanian); *prääk prääk* (Estonian); *coin coin* (French); *háp háp* (Hungarian); *bra bra* (Icelandic); *qua qua* (Italian).

You know ducks are around without having to say they are.

Beep

Beep beep was the sound heard on almost every Mumbai street.

Nom nom

My first reaction to *Nom nom* was that it was just millennial cool talk. Something the hot, too-popular-for-me girl would comment on Instagram under an image of the poke bowl she bought more with the intention of photographing than eating. But no no, *nom nom* sounds close to the noise I make when I am showing appreciation for delicious food without opening my mouth as I chew on it. Evocative it is.

In an article for Eater.com, Dana Hatic explains how it became a written word: "Classified as 'an onomatopoeic adjective,' *nom* is taken from the larger phrase *om nom nom*, based on Cookie Monster's happy eating sounds. [Cookie Monster is a character in the American (children's) TV series, *Sesame Street.*] It was first defined on Urban Dictionary in 2004. It can be ascribed to something a person wants to eat ('Wanna go get some *noms*?'), a specific food item, the process of eating ('That jerk *nommed* all my pizza'), or, more typically, the sound of eating itself."

Achoo

You could say *sneeze,* but with this you evoke the volume and (almost) the feeling of a sneeze.

Ow

The sound of pain. We don't need to tell people, "That hurt." They already know it did as soon as this sound comes out of our mouth.

Haha

A double-bounce of mouth relaxation (the *ah* sound)—no wonder it's the sound of laughter. People make the *haha* sound when they laugh with a relaxed, open mouth. Just seeing the word is often enough to activate our mirror neurons—and we'll talk more about those in chapter 10, for us to aurelate the sound, and to feel some of the (relaxation) benefits of that laughter. Season the ends of your funny sentences with it in writing, and don't be afraid to laugh in conversations. You'll help everyone relax.

Mwah

(And you'll discover later that *kissing* is the 42nd happiest word in the English language.) Why is it the word for kissing? Why does it evoke some of the sensations of kissing? Say it now, and feel how much lip action (which Beard talked about) is involved. Even if we can't kiss in times of Covid-19, making this sound will at least give us some of the sensations. You're welcome. *Mwah*.

Woof

Add some friendly feelings when you are talking about your or someone else's dog(s)—and who doesn't have or know someone with a dog? When a dog makes a sound that's not a bark, it's often a friendly *woof woof*. This is the sound of doggy approval—yes, I want to go for that walk, or yes, I want that treat. It's also the sound of approval made by some human dogs in response to seeing a very attractive man or woman. Whether the *woof* of a human or a dog, it's a sound that connects us with a friendly feeling of approval:

> **Person A:** How is your dog holding up since you've been in self-isolation?
> **Person B:** He's doing well. He still *woofs* at me when we're watching *BoJack Horseman* on TV.

Clop

My favorite sounds when going for an evening horseback ride on the back lanes of Cornwall are the *clip-clops*.

Roar

Lions and tigers can make the *roar* sound because of the flexibility of their loose vocal cords. The low frequency resonates deep within us and tells us to run like

hell. Perhaps that's why, when we hear loud, "throaty" engines *roar* past, it can give us a fright. Using *roar* sparingly is a surefire way to grab attention and make the sentence sensory. "I thought I was going fast on the highway, but this BMW *roared* past me at least 30 mph faster."

Buzz

There used to be more bees, and therefore more *buzz* in America. But go for a summertime country drive and start munching something sweet on your picnic blanket and the *buzz* is sure to come. Unfortunately, there's also a good chance it will be from a wasp or flies rubbing their wings together. But the b-word means more than that. Merriam-Webster defines the noun as both "a flurry of activity" and "speculative or excited talk or attention relating especially to a new or forthcoming product or event." It evokes the feeling of a lot of movement and a lot of activity—so use this word to convey this meaning, but with all the (grounding, instant sensory-connection) onomatopoeic benefits.

Croak

From Vocabulary.com:

> A *croak* is the low, hoarse sound a frog makes. Crows and people with sore throats can *croak*, too. It's also a slang word for *die*. When people *croak*, they need either a glass of water or an undertaker.

If there's a word that quickly brings attention to the throat and connects to the here and now, this is it. "You have a bit of a *croak* this morning. Big night last night?"

Hiss

As soon as I saw this word in front of me, it triggered an image and a sound of a hose with a hole that *hissed* as the water escaped and sprayed a fine mist. It's not just snakes that *hiss*: It's the sound you hear when you have a puncture in your bicycle or car tire, or that flamingo you are floating around the pool on. It's the last sound you want to hear when you are in an inflatable kayak two miles off the coast. In most cases, a *hiss* is a warning sound, prompting us to act fast. It's a sensory word that gets people's attention fast as they hear the air *hiss* between your teeth and tongue. Say it now and you'll feel what I mean.

Pop

You can also make this sound by closing your lips together until you create a seal, suck a little to create a mouth vacuum, then open your mouth—yes, more lip action, *popping* the seal. But didn't you just bring your attention back to—and connect with—your body?

Ring

"Please *ring* my doorbell, but don't bang on my door or let it slam."

Tut-tut/tsk-tsk

> *Tut-tut* is a great word.
>
> **—Emmy Favilla, BuzzFeed copy chief**

It's the sound of disapproval. What connects better: "She looked at him disapprovingly" or "She looked at him and made a *tut-tut* sound"?

These words represent a large portion of the vocabulary of children—and *nom* became recognized as a word thanks to children's television. This makes sense, because onomatopoeia represents the most common *sense* vocabulary of all. Small children, who have not yet been exposed to generalizations and abstractions, are more sincere than adults. Children learn to be themselves by using their *senses* before they learn to speak the ego's language of bullsh*t. But, for adults, where there's no opportunity for us to *buzz, bang, ring, haha,* or *nom nom,* we can connect more with beautiful words, which by their very sound engage our senses. Let's make *euphony* and *onomatopoeia* words of the 21st century, but, most of all, let's connect with the vivid and speak with our senses.

RECAP: EAR CANDY AND ONOMATOPOEIA

- When imagining, speak with the senses: *visualize, aurelate, aromize, savorize, tactillate*.

- Where possible, ditch *imagination* and pay attention.

- Our senses connect us to the present and each other: I *hear* you. I *see* you. I *smell* you. I *feel* you.

- Have conversations about words and their pronunciation differences. The more we talk about specific words, the more aware of their specific effects we become.

- Some words (for me, *darn*) are aural chocolates, or ear candy. Savor them (and the cinnamon).

- Lip action is *becoming* and *comely* and may correlate with the beauty of a word.

- Pick one or two words from the list of beautiful words and find opportunities to use them to connect.

- Euphonious words include *poke*, *shisha*, and *açaí*.

- Onomatopoeias connect with the senses (*bang, glug, hum, tick-tock, nom nom, ring*). Vocalizing onomatopoeia is free cognitive behavioral therapy.

Footnotes

1 https://www.alphadictionary.com/articles/100_most_beautiful_words.html.

GET SPECIFIC WITH IT

It's the specifics of a story that make it really ping.

—Sara Zarr, writer

The road to hell may be paved with adverbs, but there are some rare adverbs found on the yellow brick road that can help us to connect to moments and each other. If something can help us connect *well*, *well now…*

When, *Where*, *Well*

When will you come?

When adverbs define timing to connect moments. I'm talking about *after*, *annually*, *before*, *daily*, *weekly*, *today*, *tomorrow*, *yesterday*, *monthly*. But the most connecting adverb of all is *now*. A *now* is a camera shutter clicking as it captures a moment. Advertisers use *now* (often at the end of copy to prompt action) because it's proven to create a connection with a potential buyer. In *Mastering Amazon Ads*, Brian Meeks writes that he tries to work "four words into each ad: *you, because, now, instantly.…* The results were clear that they did improve the click-through rate." How many ads end with the words "Try it *now*"? Remove the *now* and the number of clicks (and sales) drops.

You can use *now* to create more connection (and action!) in your (potential) relationships, too. Which of the following two sentences is more likely to result in a date?

1. "Do you want to have coffee with me *sometime*?"

or

2. "Would you have coffee with me *now*?"

And which is most likely to result in your child taking action?

3. "Can you clean up your room?"

or

4. "Can you clean up your room *now*?"

We spend an increasing amount of time on our phones or social media, planning the future or posting the past. But we are using the word *now* less now than we were in the 1800s. Our current struggle is to stay present. The good news is that the more we use the word *now*, the more we pay attention to the present. Today, the word is an anchor to *now*, the present. That's the only time we exist and the only time we connect.

Where Are You Now?

As with *when* words, *where* adverbs and adverbial phrases help us to connect through specifics: *at home*, *here, in, inside, out, outside, there, underground, upstairs.* These are also some of the first words we learn in a foreign language— although in German the location description that I found easiest to remember was *am Bahnhof*, meaning "at the train station." The train station (noun) is more specific than the adverb *there.* Compare "I'm *at the train station*" with "I'm *there*" in terms of ambiguity. Adverbs are no substitute for nouns, but they can make nouns more specific when we use both in combination: "I'm *downstairs at the train station*" or "I'm *inside* (or *outside*) the train station."

Well, Well, Well

Connecting with *well* isn't just for connecting *well*. For such a little word, it sure has a lot of meanings, depending on the context. In fact, Merriam-Webster offers no less than 15 definitions of *well*, each with up to three different context senses. In many of these uses, *well* could be replaced by a more specific word. Instead of saying, "He spoke *well* of your idea" (the sample sentence used in Merriam-Webster's second definition of *well*), a more specific phrase would be "He praised your idea (for its ____ [insert specifics]." *Praised* says in one word what *speak well of* takes three to communicate (with more ambiguity despite the extra

two words). *Praise* is a verb specific enough that it requires no adverb.

But *well* does a better job at connecting when the four letters mean (and take the place of) many words: "He paints *well*" instead of a clunky "He paints with skill and aptitude, and with a high degree of quality."

And then there's another (connecting) use of *well*, where the word itself can't be defined, as an acknowledgment tool. If my friend Sam asks me, "Why did the Swiss man speak to you in Italian?" I could be gracious and reply with a, "*Well*, they speak three languages in Switzerland, not just French and German." The *well* doesn't mean anything, but it does something: It flags that I've acknowledged what Sam said and I'm about to give him my take on why the Swiss man spoke Italian. In *Words on the Move*, John McWhorter writes that "You use *well* that way to politely acknowledge a previous statement, usually before expressing some view counter to it.… With *well* you convey, of all things, a gracious *attitude*.… *Well* allows us to indicate *our take* on what we're talking about; in this case, wanting to amend what someone has just said but without causing offense."

Decently Connected

Outside of the *whens*, *wheres*, and the *well* (although this one is also a synonym of *well*), there's one more adverb I want to add to the connecting collection: *decently*, meaning to an acceptable or satisfactory standard, meaning that it brings satisfaction. Who doesn't like a little satisfaction?

And I like *decently* most of all because it is another speech marker of my aural chocolate phone pal Lacie. I encourage you to take note of the speech markers of the people you are fond of—perhaps it's the words you make fun of them for because they use them so often. I'm not talking about the *like, so*s of conversation ("He was *like, so* rude"), but I am talking about the habit words of friends you like. For Lacie, it's *decently* and *darn*. For your friend Maryam, it might be *listen, kombucha,* or *charm*. These markers help you connect to the individuality of the speakers. So, acknowledge them, talk about them when you hear them, and connect.

Adjectives

This goes for adjectives as well as adverbs. Only use an adjective if it brings

specifics to the conversation and helps you connect your listener with a vivid picture. Otherwise it puts plastic in the way of connection. All of the colors used as adjectives—the *red* wire as opposed to the *green* and *yellow* wire—are the most common adjectives that connect. Others are less common: *Cruciferous* is one example. Here's an extract from *Gardening Know How*: "*Cruciferous* vegetables belong to the Cruciferae family, which mostly contains the Brassica genus, but does include a few other genuses. In general, *cruciferous* vegetables are cool weather vegetables and have flowers that have four petals so that they resemble a cross." Of course, unless you want to identify the entire family of vegetables, it would be even more specific to list broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, etc. But if you're not sure yet, you could say, "Can we have something *cruciferous* with our chicken tonight?" OK, OK, I get that *cruciferous* isn't a word you use often, so what are some examples of everyday adjectives that help you connect better? Here is a list.

Enough

Back to Merriam-Webster for a definition:

> occurring in such quantity, quality, or scope as to fully meet demands, needs, or expectations: *enough* food for everyone

Quality and quantity that *fully* meets demands, needs, or expectations sounds pretty good to me: That's *enough* hand sanitizer to last for the rest of the month. That's *enough* chili oil on the pizza. Do you have *enough* time to go for a swim now? Is that *enough* milk in your coffee? That's *enough* work for today!

Enough is not to be confused with the disconnecting phrase *That's enough*, which is a statement of intolerance. It's also a lie maker. For example, consider a situation in which my imaginary kids (I don't have any kids yet) and I are outside playing in the garden around the kiddie pool. I receive a phone call and I can't hear the person on the line because of the shrieking, laughing, and splashing of my kids. I cover the phone's mouthpiece with my hand and say to my kids, "*That's enough.*" That's a lie: There is no *enough* when it comes to play because there is no minimum *quantity, quality, or scope as to fully meet demands, needs, or expectations.* Play just is. All a judgmental *That's enough* can achieve is a cut-off to a connection.

Attractive

Who doesn't like this word? It's biological and it gets me excited. And the Merriam-Webster definition excites me even more: "arousing interest or pleasure; an *attractive* smile." After being aroused, it's hard to move your gaze away. There's no shorter way of saying that someone attracts—whether they want to or not—than using this adjective. "You're *attractive*." So why are we using it less than we ever have before? Why is its popularity in Merriam-Webster's bottom 50 percent? We didn't notice, but that stranger over there smiled at us while we were texting, checking out the profiles of 200 people on Tinder, or Instagramming a photo of that cupcake. Is it because our gaze is on the screens of our phones that we miss out on noticing a real cupcake searching for eye contact?

Abstract or Specific

Notice it to name it. If it's not *specific*, it's *abstract*. By acknowledging that something is either *abstract* or *specific*, we connect awareness to our language. Our awareness watches to keep that connection alive. I say, "Dogs are *bad* for your dating life." You say, "*Bad* is *abstract*. Can you give me a *specific* example of what you mean?" Don't be afraid to tag the *abstract* in your conversation partner's words. Ask him to be (and appreciate him for being) *specific*.

Willing

"Of or relating to the will or *power* of choosing," says Merriam-Webster. That's some word power. Elizabeth Stokoe, professor of social interaction at Loughborough University, discovered that *willing* is one of the words that has the power to change the course of a conversation. Stokoe and her colleagues studied thousands of hours of conversations. In many of these conversations, people had said *no* when asked if they would like to attend a meditation session. Then Stokoe found that the same people often changed their minds when asked, "Would you be *willing* to come [to a meditation session]? Stokoe says, "As soon as the word *willing* was uttered, people would say, 'Oh, yes, definitely'—they would actually interrupt the sentence to agree."

Willing had the same effect in different settings, whether it was used by cold callers or by doctors (trying to persuade people to go to a weight-loss class). In her *Guardian* article, titled "Would You Be Willing?: Words to Turn a Conversation Around (and Those to Avoid)," journalist Rosie Ifould

recommends using *willing* when you've met with resistance. She offers the sample sentence, "I know it's not your first choice, but would you be *willing* to meet on Friday?"

I recommend using *willing* to create a connection when asking anyone to do anything, regardless of whether you've already met with resistance, and regardless of whether it's "Would you be *willing* to go on a date with me on Friday?" or "Would you be *willing* to publish this book?"

Try this word experiment at home:

> Week 1: Ask your partner or family member to take the trash out using the word-trash question we looked at in [chapter 1](#): "Would you like to take the trash out?"
> Week 2: Ask your partner or family member, "Would you be *willing* to take the trash out now?"

Both times you ask, pay close attention to his facial expression and his reaction, whether it be in words or actions. Does he take the trash out? How much time elapses in between your asking and his taking the trash out? Tweet me your results @Will_I_AM_J.

Woke

Woke originated in US street slang, from the past participle of the verb *to wake*. I'm including it here as it connects with a new sense of awareness. *Woke*'s new definition has now made it into Merriam-Webster: "aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)." And in *A World Without Whom*, Favilla offers a more nuanced definition: "to have a heightened awareness—of situations that may not accurately reflect the truth."

It's the "awareness that something may not reflect the truth" meaning of *woke* that connects the most, and that's something Merriam-Webster has missed. *Woke* people know when not to take statistics or political rhetoric at face value. *Woke* people know that the real motivation of most big pharma companies is not to help people get well (no matter what their ads say). Author and journalist Johann Hari knows this, and he knows that the war on drugs made the drug problem worse. He knows that depression, anxiety, and addiction are caused more by the way we live than they are by a preexisting chemical imbalance in the brain. He knows that the cure to these problems is not antidepressants, but making changes in how we connect with others. Johann Hari is *woke*.

But let's go back to the (main) connotation and context of *woke* use that has been around since the term was first coined. Namely, being *woke* when it comes to "issues of racial and social justice." Here is a particularly *woke* passage from the book *Stay Woke: A People's Guide to Making All Black Lives Matter* by Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Candis Watts Smith:

> If we are poor, live in housing projects or trailer parks, we have rights. [.…] If you say you stand for justice and cannot envision yourself defending the civil and human rights of society's most marginalized people, then you need to rethink just what it is you stand for, because it isn't equality. It's all of us or none of us.

This passage is *woke* because it heightens awareness that some of us may not be as just or as pro-equality as we think we are. It's *woke* because it's conscious of the forms of (often unacknowledged) discrimination that still exist in today's United States.

Some prescriptive traditionalists say *woke* is a marker of poor grammar. My response is that *woke* is a new word whose connection is more *lit* than old grammar.

After I wrote the previous two paragraphs and began finalizing this book with the publisher at the end of 2019, into 2020, a new word trend began to emerge. And it was a trend that disguised the true meaning of *woke* until it came to mean something *unwoke*. That trend is the surge of the sarcastic use of *woke* in the phrase *woke culture*.

By the beginning of 2020, and after a period of only three or four months, *woke* had all but lost its original meaning as it was eclipsed by the sudden rise of the term *woke culture*. What does *woke culture* mean? As I write this on February 1, 2020, it's still such a new phrase that it hasn't even made it into the Urban Dictionary (let alone an actual dictionary). But the new *unwoke* definition of *woke* is "very pretentious about how much you care about a social issue." *Woke culture* is a term that has come to represent a culture of didactic and elitist über political correctness, now often associated with Hollywood celebrities. People who are now labeled as *woke* are those considered as pretending to be *woke*, i.e., not *woke* at all. As a result, very few people now want to be *woke*. What caused this change? If you look at the January 2020 headlines, you might say the surge in the use of the phrase *woke culture* can be attributed to one person, namely, Ricky Gervais:

AT THE GOLDEN GLOBES, RICKY GERVAIS EXPOSES HOLLYWOOD'S 'WOKE' CULTURE

RICKY GERVAIS SLAMS WOKE CULTURE'S STRANGLEHOLD ON COMEDY ^{**2**}

CONSERVATIVES PRAISE RICKY GERVAIS AFTER HE TAKES 'MASSIVE DUMP' ON HOLLYWOOD'S 'WOKE' CULTURE ^{**3**}

And you might think the same if you were an active Twitter user. But, as it turns out, Ricky Gervais hasn't even used the phrase *woke culture*. All he did was call out actors for pretending to be *woke* during his 2020 Golden Globes speech:

> Apple roared into the TV game with *The Morning Show*, a superb drama about the importance of dignity and doing the right thing, made by a company that runs sweatshops in China. Well, you say you're *woke* but the companies you work for in China—unbelievable. Apple, Amazon, Disney. If ISIS started a streaming service, you'd call your agent, wouldn't you?

Gervais only used *woke* in the sense of its original (nonsarcastic) meaning. He attacked Hollywood for pretending to be *woke*. In truth, it is not Gervais who has caused the anti-*woke* backlash. Mainstream and social media have co-opted Gervais and his use of *woke* to perpetuate the sarcastic use of *woke* and *woke culture*. But why does this matter? Because it discredits the word *woke* and what it means to be *woke*. It silences the idea of *wokeness*. The *Guardian* goes a step further and names those behind the discrediting and silencing. It says *woke* has been "weaponized by the right… For those who would broadly consider themselves woke, the word has been weaponized against them… today we are more likely to see it being used as a stick with which to beat people who aspire to such values, often wielded by those who don't recognize how un-woke they are, or are proud of the fact."[4] Another *Guardian* story, from January 30, 2020, has the headline T̲ʜᴇ 'A̲ɴᴛɪ-W̲ᴏᴋᴇ' B̲ᴀᴄᴋʟᴀsʜ I̲s N̲ᴏ J̲ᴏᴋᴇ—A̲ɴᴅ P̲ʀᴏɢʀᴇssɪᴠᴇs A̲ʀᴇ G̲ᴏɪɴɢ ᴛᴏ L̲ᴏsᴇ I̲ꜰ T̲ʜᴇʏ D̲ᴏɴ'ᴛ W̲ɪsᴇ U̲ᴘ.

Being *woke* isn't synonymous with being a member of the Hollywood elite. Being *woke* means having an awareness that something may not reflect the truth. That maybe that plant-based burger isn't healthy after all; maybe that antidepressant's benefits don't outweigh its side effects; maybe there are some alternative non-pharmaceutical treatments; maybe that candidate's agenda is more nuanced than black and white. As we acquiesce to the media's encouragement to become less *woke* and more critical of *woke culture*, we will question all our media less. We will label less news as "fake news." We will

accept unquestioningly the narratives we are fed. Well, doesn't that sound like *1984* (or *Westworld*). No, thanks. So I'll leave you here with a plea: F*ck (the use of) *woke culture*, but stay *woke*.

RECAP: GET SPECIFIC WITH IT

- *When* adverbs define timing to connect moments *(after, before, today, tomorrow, daily)*.
- *Where* adverbs help us to connect through specific places (*at home, here, inside, upstairs*).
- Unless an adjective or an adverb brings specifics to the conversation, it gets in the way of connection. But colors and specifics in adjectives promote connection.
- *Enough* can be a powerful connector. *That's enough*, said in judgment of another's behavior or words, is a cut-off to connection.
- *Attractive* is a biological word connector arousing both interest and pleasure.
- By acknowledging that something is either *abstract* or *specific*, we connect with awareness.
- Ask *would you be willing* to make it more likely that the person you're asking will say yes.
- *Woke* is *woke*.

Footnotes

1 J. Stepman, *Daily Signal* (January 6, 2020). https://www.dailysignal.com.

2 P. Bois, *Daily Wire* (January 2, 2020). https://www.dailywire.com.

3 L. Blair, *Christian Post* (January 6, 2020). https://www.christianpost.com.

4 S. Rose, "How the Word 'Woke' Was Weaponized by the Right," *Guardian* (January 21, 2020). https://www.theguardian.com/.

NOUNS THAT GROUND

> You gotta call it out first; it always has to be called out when we need social change, but this is how social change happens: you call it out.
>
> **—Debra Granik, filmmaker**

Just as we noticed to name the adjectives *abstract* and *specific*, there are also nouns we can notice, name, and acknowledge, and by doing so, connect more awareness to the words we choose. What follows is a list of those nouns better called out than left unspoken, to keep conversation partner connected and in the present.

Ego

> The need to be better than, more than, recognized for, far past any reasonable utility—
> that's *ego*.
> **—Ryan Holiday (in *Ego Is the Enemy*)**

> [*Ego* is] a conscious separation from [everything].
> **—Early member of Alcoholics Anonymous**

You may be wondering why *ego* is appearing in the chapter on nouns of connection. *Surely* ego *couldn't help me connect? My* ego *is getting frustrated*

with you taking a long time right now because it wants to reach the end of this chapter. I hear you. However, articulating that your *ego* is in play depowers your ego so that you and I can connect better.

For instance, let's say I carelessly say the following to a girl I'm dating (who hasn't once offered to pay for dinner) about her daily stream of Instagram photos of expensive-looking food from restaurants around New York: "You must get a lot of guys to take you out for dinner. You seem to like eating out a lot. No surprise seeing as you get to eat these delicious-looking dishes without paying a dime for them. Do you know that Instagram feeds make many people unhappy because of the correspondence bias? I mean, what's your life purpose? What good are you doing in the world? What value does taking photos of restaurant food bring to humanity?" That's going to cause a disconnection. If I can catch it in my head and say to myself, *Will, that's your* ego, before I say it to her, that's great. If not, then the best I can do is to say, "I'm sorry. That was my *ego* judging you for not paying for dinner and not being a famine-relief aid worker in South Sudan."

Of course, in real life, if your intuition tells you that you don't have values in common with someone or any sense of mutual purpose, you might want to be more discerning about who you date or have dinner with. And if you do have dinner with her, you can be *woke* enough to discern why she might post what seems to be a nonstop stream of fine-dining photographs. Perhaps you discern that she is passionate about food excellence and she aspires to be a chef. Perhaps you discern that her posting is driven by a desire for belonging and acceptance in a social media–saturated world. Then we can ask questions, go deeper into why she posts photos of food, and create an *ego*-less connection with her.

But often our minds are so busy, tired, or distracted that we forget to be discerning or to listen to our intuition. Our *ego* takes over and we spout out a judgmental statement. Without flagging that *ego* has taken control of what's coming out of our mouths, we won't be able to take control of the words coming out of our mouths and we won't be able to connect.

Ego awareness through articulation may have peaked in the 1950s and has been slipping since the '70s. The less we call *ego* out (by using the word), the more *ego* takes over our relationships unnoticed, and the more disconnected our relationships become. Ten years ago, very few of us took a selfie (let alone gym pics). The success of Instagram and Facebook is due to a rise of *ego* over the last 15 years. But ego doesn't have to rule the 'gram: Its power is inversely proportional to how often we tag it.

How about we start an #egopost challenge and add the hashtag whenever we notice ego in our own or others' (as a comment) posts. Tweet me your challenge suggestions, for how we can tag ego to strip it of power, to @Will_I_AM_J. If *ego* is the Night's King, calling it by its name is to stab it with the blade of Arya Stark.[1]

Bullsh*t

As it is with *ego*, so it is with *bullsh*t*: Name it to recognize it to restore or create connection. A reminder here that most—not all—abstract, generalized, nonspecific language and corporate-world metaphor is bullsh*t. Let's name it as such. Don't "*reach out* and *touch base* on *the same*." That's bullsh*t. Send me an email today. Just because we are using the word *bullsh*t* less than we were 10 years ago (according to Google Trends and Ngram viewer) doesn't mean it isn't on the rise. If you only use 20 words, make this one of them and make the usage spike again. Be like Professors Carl Bergstrom and Jevin West, who run a course entitled "Calling Bullshit" at the University of Washington in Seattle. Call *bullsh*t* and connect.

But sometimes the word *bullsh*t* itself *is* the *bullsh*t*. Whenever *bullsh*t* does not apply to someone's words, but instead abstracts or generalizes a situation, event, person or thing, it is *bullsh*t* bullsh*t—yes, you can also call BS on BS. For example:

Donald J. Trump Verified account @realDonaldTrump, Jan 1, 2014:

This very expensive GLOBAL WARMING bullsh*t has got to stop. Our planet is freezing, record low temps, and our GW scientists are stuck in ice

Acceptance and Acknowledgment

To *accept* is, in the words of Merriam-Webster, "to recognize as true." Why might you recognize less truth in what you read or hear now than you did before we embraced social media en masse in 2007? We know there's been an increase in hyperbolic language, in superlatives and overstatement. And whether you believe Donald Trump or not, fake news fills our feeds. Almost every day I see a YouTube notification that the Yellowstone supervolcano is about to blow. It makes sense that we are not able *to accept* as much now as we did in the 1970s and '80s. But we aren't expressing an *acknowledgment* that we don't recognize

things as true, and that failure to express disconnects us. By not acknowledging, we are withholding our wokeness. "Withholding is the most pernicious form of lying," said the man I consider to be the world authority on honesty—my friend, mentor, and author (and founder) of *Radical Honesty*, Dr. Brad Blanton.

SLPs do not use the word *acceptance* (and the verb of connection, *to accept*) often (average: 3.2), which reflects a wider trend: Use of *acceptance* is now less than half what it was in the 1980s. That's according to Google Ngram.

Acceptance doesn't come only before the word *speech*. Whether it's "I can't bring *acceptance* to ___" or "I can bring *acceptance* to ___," it's the expression of either that creates the connection (to your truth) so critical to happiness. Indeed, in 2014, psychologists at the University of Hertfordshire in Hatfield, England, ran a study that found that the one habit (of 10) that correlated most with being happy—and overall life satisfaction—was *acceptance*.[2]

I remember reading: *If you cannot bring joy or* acceptance *to what you are doing, stop*. A useful question of connection is this: *If I'm not enjoying this, can I bring* acceptance *to it?* For example, I'm not enjoying getting up for a weekly 7 a.m. meeting, but I can *accept* it—recognize it as my truth—and I am still connected with my words and what I'm doing, even if I'm not happy about it. I feel more relaxed in my chest and stomach once I *accept* it, rather than resisting it with a frown and a complaint: *I hate getting up early. Screw them. I'm not going*. The best way to *accept* something is to be aware of the word *acceptance* and bring *acknowledgment* to it. Say it out loud: "I'm in denial that I'm dating two people at the same time. I can't *accept* that as my reality so I will stop dating one of them." If it's not your truth, you cannot bring *acceptance* to it. These are not words to use sometimes or rarely. They are words we can use daily for healthier connections.

Truth

We can't connect without it. So why are we using the word 50 percent less often than we were 150 years ago? If you switch the *h* for an *s*, *truth* is an anagram of *trust*. If we increase the use in one, we increase our attention and connection with them both. Though their etymological roots may be different (Old Norse *traust* as opposed to Old English *tr owth* [fidelity]), the words have evolved to be only a letter apart. They have grown from different seeds straight up into trees whose branches interlock. And I say *straight up* and *trees* for a reason: As John McWhorter explains, "*True* and *tree* developed from the same ancient word:

Millennia ago, English speakers saw trustworthiness in the straight-up quality of trees. The rest was history, which has that famous way of repeating itself: Today people are feeling the same trustworthiness in the expression *straight up* itself."

Balance

The word sounds like it feels—a syllable seesaw. The *bal-* swings down and the *-ance* comes up. Aside from helping us not to fall over, *balance* is a concise way to express the point between having enough and not having an excess of anything.

We strive to *balance* how much we work against how much we relax, how much we relax against how much we exercise, how much we play against how much we sleep, how much we eat of one thing against how much we eat of another. Some associate a *balanced diet* with a restrictive sense of *moderation*.

Moderation—what does that mean? To oversee and be aware of and make choices to maintain *balance*. *Moderator* is defined as "an arbitrator or mediator." *Balance* positions us as the *arbitrator* and *mediator* in our lives. That sounds more empowering than restrictive to me. By using the word more often, we can help direct our attention to find more *balance* in our everyday lives.

Mirror Neurons

This phrase may sound scientific, but it's a conversation connection-starter that you wouldn't have heard of before 2000, and one that has been connecting our behavior since before we were monkeys. If you ever wonder why you pick up your glass from the table at the same time as someone else, sneeze or yawn when someone else does, start laughing when you hear laughter, or wonder why you are able to anticipate when someone is about to say they are leaving the party before they even get up off the barstool, it is often because your mirror neurons are firing. What are they?

From the American Psychological Association (October, 2005): "Mirror neurons are a type of brain cell that respond equally when we perform an action and when we witness someone else perform the same action." In a study, published in *Science* (Vol. 286, No. 5,449, pages 2,526–2,528) neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni and his colleagues demonstrated that *mirror neurons* discerned whether another person who was picking up a cup of tea planned to drink from it

or clear it from the table. *Mirror neurons* also fire when we empathize. The next time you know how someone feels, say to him, "My *mirror neurons* are firing," and notice how connected your conversation becomes.

But mirror neurons can be double-edged swords: They don't just fire when we see—they also fire when we *hear*. "*Mirror neurons* can link to auditory input… One aspect of language for which the mirror system may be responsible is the repetition of pronunciation and words. It may also be a foundation for word acquisition, in which repetition is a relatively stereotyped performance," says Christine Kenneally in *The First Word*: *The Search for the Origins of Language*. While, on the one hand, they help us to learn new words and languages by imitating sounds, on the other hand, they also make us (unconsciously) susceptible to imitating word-trash habits that disconnect us. We can mitigate against word-trash imitation by paying more attention to our word choices, but also by talking about—and therefore raising our awareness of —*mirror neurons*.

Connection

What would a book about word *connections* be if it didn't talk about the words *word* and *connection*? As we talk about an individual word as the subject of the sentence, rather than using the word out of habit, we bring objectivity and awareness to it. We can then use that awareness to be more conscious about how we use the word from that point on. And why do we say that *point*? Connections need connection *points*. Merriam-Webster defines *point* as "a distinguishing detail." The red wire connects only to the red wire. The USB male to the USB female. Earth to earth, positive to positive, negative to negative. We can be human electricians, i.e., you and I connect when I take a distinguishing detail from your sentence and use it in my sentence. You use the word *coffee* in your last sentence. I use *coffee* in my responding sentence. What is a distinguishing detail? Specifics, specifics, specifics. The opposite of the abstract, the generalized, the exaggerated, the superlative. The opposite of *always* and the opposite of *never*. That is connection, and that is *now*.

If someone keeps starting new sentences with none of the distinguishing details from what you just said to her, call her out (for not listening) and ask, "What's the *connection* with what I just said?"

Word

"A *word* is an arbitrary association between sound and meaning," says Christine Kenneally in her book *The First Word: The Search for the Origins of Language.*

"They tell you a word is a thing, when it's actually something going on," says English Professor John McWhorter in his book *Words on the Move*. When we talk about the word *word* (which I can't remember doing prior to this exact sentence), then *word* becomes the connection. But why do rappers drop this midtrack? Urban Dictionary says it's because it's short for "*My word is my bond*, which was originated by inmates in US prisons. The longer phrase was shortened to *word is bond* before becoming *word*, which is most commonly used. It basically means *truth*. Or *to speak the truth.*" For example, in Eminem's 2018 track "Fall": "Went from addict to a workaholic, *word* to Dr. Dre in that first marijuana tape."

This meaning connects and respects *word*. But so does *word*'s more general meaning (a group of letters used as a symbol of meaning). Ask, for example, "What's a more specific *word* for that?" if you feel as if one of your words isn't connecting. Having a conversation where speakers articulate that the conversation is about one specific *word*—its use, sound, and associated meanings—raises our awareness of how we connect to one another. It's common sense. And our senses are what we have in common, so let's not underestimate those, either…

Idea

Another way to bring awareness and connection into conversation is to distinguish between what we notice with our senses and what we imagine. When we create this distinction, we remain aware that we are either talking with our senses or talking with our imagination. *Idea* is a marker of imagination, so noticing the word helps flag to us that we are in our imagination. We can then continue to use imagination as a tool rather than it (or our ego) using us as its tool. The idea is to keep the *idea* as the object of the conversation rather than us becoming its object.

Let's say we are having a conversation about the pay differential between employees of a media company and those of an investment bank. We could talk about the *idea* that the bank pays more than the media company. It's an *idea* we can stand back from. Rather than letting our thoughts take a sh*t on us for not

earning enough money (*I should be earning more at my age*), and take a sh*t on us so we go and work for the bank, we say that we have a better *idea*, which is that we want to work for a company that aligns better with our life *purpose* and values.

Thought (and *Thinking Links, Associations*, and *Attractions*)

A word often said in meditation, naming *thoughts*, grounds us. Think of saying the word as our "earth connection" if we were wiring ourselves up to a wall in the world. When we see them for what they are—"Nesli, I'm having a *thought* about speed dating"—we are able to break our *thinking links* rather than being pulled into a train of one thought after another, chained together by *associations* and *attractions*, and the order of our memories and our senses. Rather than finding ourselves at a speed-dating event where the women want to know the size of our package (this is real—it's called "hung speed-dating"), we can relax at home reading *The Little Book of Hygge* on a Wednesday night.

RECAP: NOUNS THAT GROUND

- *Acceptance* is *recognition* of truth. *Acknowledgment* is an expression of that recognition.
- If you cannot express *acceptance* of something with an *acknowledgment*, stop doing it because it's disconnecting you.
- Increased use of *truth* or *trust* will increase our connection with both.
- *Balance* strengthens our connection with *enough.*
- The next time you know how someone feels, tell her your *mirror neurons* are firing and notice how connected your conversation becomes.
- As we talk about an individual word as the subject of the sentence rather than using the word out of habit, we bring objectivity and awareness to it.
- *Connections* need *connection points*; that is, specifics or distinguishing details. You use the word *coffee* in your last sentence. I use *coffee* in my response.
- *Word* means *truth.*
- *Idea* is a marker of imagination and helps flag it as such.
- Naming *thoughts* raises awareness of *thoughts* and grounds us with an earth connection.
- If you use only 20 words, make *bullsh*t* one of them. Call *bullsh*t* and connect.
- Call your *ego* out before your *ego* outcalls you.

Footnotes

1 Arya Stark is a fictional character from the *Song of Ice and Fire* books portrayed in the *Game of Thrones* TV show. Arya saves humanity from being wiped out by the undead "White Walkers," led by the "Night's King" by stabbing the Night's King with her tiny sword. In the novels, the White Walkers are referred to as the "Others." Otherness, i.e., being apart from, is a hallmark of ego. It's conceivable that the White Walkers are a metaphor for the threat ego poses to humankind and that Arya's small sword (called "Needle") is a metaphor for either the truth, a pen, or a needle that sews together the fabric of humanity.

2   https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/201403/10-keys-happier-living-based-self-acceptance.

HAPPY WORDS

Most of my inspiration, if that's the word, came from books themselves.

—Shelby Foote, writer

Inspiration and *happiness* are linked in feeling, meaning, and origin: *Happiness* is *eudaimonistic*, which means "of good spirit" (*eudaimonia* is a 2,500-year-old word, still used to this day as the word for *happiness* in Greece). *Spirit* also forms the basis for the verb *to inspire*—meaning "to put spirit into."

My definition of *happiness* is "connecting well (with trust and confidence) to put spirit into, or receive spirit from, others and creations." Happiness is to connect well, to inspire and to be inspired. In other words, happiness is inspired. Some words connect us, and some words connect us with emotion or *spirit*. The latter are the subject of this chapter.

In 2012, researchers at the University of Vermont in Burlington identified an emotional spectrum of language that they detailed in a paper titled "Positivity of the English Language." They did it by ranking the top 10,000 most frequently used English words across Twitter (TW), Google Books (GB), the *New York Times* (NYT), and music lyrics (ML) for happiness or "psychological valence." The researchers asked participants to rate their happiness in response to each word (the average score for all participants appears under the "havg" column): 1 = least happy, 5 = neutral, and 9 = most happy. Here are their top 50 words for eliciting happiness:

h rank	word	havg ha-	TW rank	GB rank	NYT rank	ML rank
1	laughter	8.50 0.9313	3600	–	–	1728
2	happiness	8.44 0.9723	1853	2458	–	1230
3	love	8.42 1.1082	25	317	328	23
4	happy	8.30 0.9949	65	1372	1313	375
5	laughed	8.26 1.1572	3334	3542	–	2332
6	laugh	8.22 1.3746	1002	3998	4488	647
7	laughing	8.20 1.1066	1579	–	–	1122
8	excellent	8.18 1.1008	1496	1756	3155	–
9	laughs	8.18 1.1551	3554	–	–	2856
10	joy	8.16 1.0568	988	2336	2723	809
11	successful	8.16 1.0759	2176	1198	1565	–
12	win	8.12 1.0812	154	3031	776	694
13	rainbow	8.10 0.9949	2726	–	–	1723
14	smile	8.10 1.0152	925	2666	2898	349
15	won	8.10 1.2164	810	1167	439	1493
16	pleasure	8.08 0.9655	1497	1526	4253	1398
17	smiled	8.08 1.0660	–	3537	–	2248
18	rainbows	8.06 1.3603	–	–	–	4216
19	winning	8.04 1.0490	1876	–	1426	3646
20	celebration	8.02 1.5318	3306	–	2762	4070
21	enjoyed	8.02 1.5318	1530	2908	3502	–
22	healthy	8.02 1.0593	1393	3200	3292	4619
23	music	8.02 1.1156	132	875	167	374
24	celebrating	8.00 1.1429	2550	–	–	–
25	congratulations	8.00 1.6288	2246	–	–	–
26	weekend	8.00 1.2936	317	–	833	2256
27	celebrate	7.98 1.1516	1606	–	3574	2108
28	comedy	7.98 1.1516	1444	–	2566	–

h rank	word	havg ha-	TW rank	GB rank	NYT rank	ML rank
29	jokes	7.98 0.9792	2812	–	–	3808
30	rich	7.98 1.3169	1625	1221	1469	890
31	victory	7.98 1.0784	1809	2341	687	2845
32	christmas	7.96 1.2930	138	3846	2097	599
33	free	7.96 1.2610	85	342	393	219
34	friendship	7.96 1.1241	4273	3098	3669	3980
35	fun	7.96 1.3087	110	4135	2189	463
36	holidays	7.96 1.2610	1204	–	–	–
37	loved	7.96 1.1599	465	2178	890	517
38	loves	7.96 1.3696	780	–	–	653
39	loving	7.96 1.0093	947	4396	230	527
40	beach	7.94 1.0577	573	3596	551	1475
41	hahaha	7.94 1.5572	428	–	–	–
42	kissing	7.94 1.1323	–	–	–	2052
43	sunshine	7.94 1.1678	2080	–	–	950
44	beautiful	7.92 1.1753	266	1159	1754	467
45	delicious	7.92 1.2591	1565	–	–	–
46	friends	7.92 1.1925	258	658	347	321
47	funny	7.92 1.0467	358	–	3194	755
48	outstanding	7.92 1.1400	4468	4721	1797	–
49	paradise	7.92 1.3974	3096	–	–	1146
50	sweetest	7.92 1.2911	–	–	–	2232

*
—

Laughter

Laughter is the shortest distance between two people [and the fastest way to connect two people].

—Victor Borge

There's not enough *laughter* in the media world. According to Merriam-Webster, *laughter* is in the bottom 40 percent of words used. It doesn't make the top 5,000 most frequently used words in either Google Books or the *New York Times,* but it did make it into the top 5,000 Twitter and music lyrics words. That's why it was included in the study. And just as well: It was rated higher than any other word for eliciting a feeling of happiness, even higher than the word *happiness.* One of Merriam-Webster's definitions of laughter is "a *cause* of merriment." We now associate *laughter* more with the result of merriment than the cause, but which came first—the *laughter* or the merriment?

Try saying *laughter* out loud without smiling. Somehow the sounds and the rhythm of the long syllable followed by the short strikes our funny bones. While Twitter is often used for negative venting, it also spreads *laughter.* A quick check on North Carolina University's tweet visualization engine confirms that as of August 3, 2018, there are about 500 tweets an hour (or one every seven seconds) containing *laughter.*

Thank you, Twitter. There has also been an increase in studios offering laughter yoga[1] in the last decade, and social media has helped to promote its growth. A quick Google search for LAUGHTER YOGA NEW YORK returns 10.9 million results!

Love

Many of us search for the meaning of *love.* No, literally. *Love* is one of the most looked up words—in the top 1 percent of lookups—on Merriam-Webster's online dictionary. It turns out that it's not only *happiness* that's a synonym for *inspiration.* Did you know that the Merriam-Webster definition for being *in love* is "inspired by affection"? Does that make *love* the *inspiration* of affection? As I write this now, this is the closest I have been to understanding *love, happiness, spirit,* and *inspiration* (and *trust* and *confidence* and *courage*), and how they link and morph into one another. Only the words *happiness* and *laughter* elicit a greater emotional response than the word *love.* I feel warmth in my chest when I focus on it, read it, or say it out loud. It was the third most frequently used word in my SLP survey with elementary school SLPs, who used it 16 percent more often than middle school SLPs. Sometimes it does feel like the amount of love we give and receive diminishes as we grow from baby to child to adult.

But the next time you feel inspired by affection, be sure to express it with *love* for the ultimate feeling of connection.

Warmth

1: The state, sensation, or quality of producing or having a moderate degree of heat; an agreeable warmth in the house.

2: a. Friendliness, kindness, or affection; human warmth. b. Excitement or intensity, as of love or passion; ardor.

3: The glowing effect produced by using predominantly red or yellow hues.

—The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language

When I say it or read it, I feel it. The long *mm* brings my attention to my mouth and its warmth. We can express *warmth* not only by touch, but also through colors and even sounds: According to writer Alex Rowe, "*Warm* headphones and speakers tend to sound *comfy*, *musical*, and *pleasant*." But *warmth* is in the bottom 40 percent of words by popularity, which means that there's an opportunity for us to increase our connection with this long, single syllable. "I want to feel some *warmth* from you on the couch tonight. I'll pick up some candles after work to add some *warmth* to the living room."

Gratitude

According to Dr. David Hamilton, exercising *gratitude* alone can make you at least 25 percent happier. My theory is that the more often you use the word, the more you will think of it, and thus the more you will be primed to practice it and reap that 25 percent happiness gain.

The state of thankfulness when a *thank-you* is felt, not just said, is something we can connect with by writing a *gratitude* letter to someone for anything, even if it was for taking us on a bike ride when we were a child.

If you feel the *warmth*, rather than offering a plain old "Thank you," why not say, "I feel *gratitude* for you doing such and such for me." In her book *The How of Happiness*, psychologist and author Sonja Lyubomirsky suggests that we each keep a *gratitude* journal. Lyubomirsky says that people who write down five things they're grateful for each week are happier, more optimistic, and more connected to others.

The influence of popular psychology books has spilled over into social media, taking the form of daily *gratitude* challenges on Facebook. This has

created a surge in the usage of the words and phrases *thank you, appreciate,* and *grateful* and is another example of how we can use social media as a tool for connection.

But the word *gratitude* itself is in decline. Type GRATITUDE into the search box on Twitter and you will find many abstract statements that fail to connect because they are not specific. If you are going to connect with and express *gratitude,* make it specific by adding the word *for* followed by what it is you are grateful for. That is:

> **Vague:** "I feel so much *gratitude* since I met you."
>
> **Specific:** "I feel a lot of *gratitude for* you sitting down to chat with me on the couch when I have been feeling anxious in the last two weeks. And *gratitude for* you helping me shop for a new outfit for my upcoming job interview and for feeding my cat while I was away on vacation."

Smile

Say goodbye to the RBF. The 349th most used word in song lyrics is the 14th best word at eliciting a feeling of happiness, according to the researchers at the University of Vermont. It's in the bottom 50 percent of words looked up on Merriam-Webster. And when I checked M-W's definition, I realized that I was missing most of the meaning from my own. Here's theirs:

> 1: a facial expression in which the eyes brighten and the corners of the mouth curve slightly upward and which expresses especially amusement, pleasure, approval, or sometimes scorn
>
> 2: a pleasant or encouraging appearance

I would have missed the *eyes brightening.* And when I read it, I felt excitement and *warmth.* It's a language of the senses. I also would have missed the *amusement, pleasure,* and *scorn.* But there are two other meanings to *smile,* which create two connections to happiness: *approval* and *encouraging.*

Approval means that what we are doing is *recognized*—that's connection number 1: Another person *recognizes* us and what we are doing, and connects her *recognition* with the pleasure she shows in her smile.

But it's the *encouraging* meaning of *smile* that connects most with our happiness. *To encourage* means to put *courage* into. There are some parallels

here with *inspiring.* A smile can *inspire* action as much as it can *encourage* it. You are on a second date. You know you are attracted to the person sitting across from you and you notice that his hand is midway across the table. You want to take a risk and show him physical affection. You reach across the table and put your hand on his. Your eyes dart up to his, then to his mouth while your hand is resting lightly, ready to spring off again. But then he *smiles, encouraging* you to continue, and you *smile* and slide your hand into his and squeeze. I am tempted to switch genres to erotica, but let's get back to science: When we see someone *smile*, it activates our mirror neurons and we automatically—yes, as automatically as we breathe—smile in response. We don't have to see someone *smile* for the neurons to activate. Reading or hearing the word can do it, too. So if you do *smile* on that date, say, "Thank you for making me *smile*," and see what happens. We are the Pavlovian *smile* dogs and the word is our bell.

Kissing

Mwah. The *smile* led to the *kiss*. Who doesn't like to daydream about *kissing*? I feel the same excitement and warmth that I have felt since elementary school when I'd fold up a note and ask the other kids to pass it along to Sadie with the words *Will we kiss? Tick box with answer:* Yes No. And then receiving the note back with a check on *yes* (alas Sadie and I did not kiss). Is the word more exciting because of the *sss* sound that brings attention to our mouths? Say *kiss* and *kissing* out loud now. Can you feel the air *hiss* between your teeth as your lips move apart? Here is a word that, when said, brings attention to both how your mouth feels and to the idea of using that mouth for pleasure. Hearing someone else say *kissing* has almost the same effect. Just like the *smile* bell, *kissing* unlocks our associations with the word and brings our focus to our lips. And is there any greater connection than mouth to mouth? What else, if not the *kiss* of life, can bring someone back to life? And what else, if not the *kissing* sound, can bring orangutans to bed?[2] The next time your partner asks you what the two of you are doing tonight, tell her, "*Kissing* in bed."

Respect (Find Out What It Means to Me)

> Respect yourself and others will respect you.

When you say, "I *respect* you for doing that" to someone, how do you feel? What do you mean? It's more than just an *acknowledgment* of the other and what she is doing. It's often a verbal *recognition* that someone else is staying *true* to either her purpose or to her authenticity. "I *respect* you for joining the protest march, even though you risked being arrested." *I respect you* doesn't just evoke *I see you.* It's more "I see you and I recognize you for being you/doing what you're doing." Often, there's also an implicit "even though we're not the same and I wouldn't do that myself"; that sometimes leads to an implicit "but I admire you for who you are and what you do." *Respect* empowers us to connect in spite of our differences. In tribute to the late Aretha Franklin, I am including this because it's a word that has changed how I look at people. When I catch myself compulsively staring at a woman's attractive figure or face, I say to myself, *Respect,* as I look at her. I feel a little warmth rush around my chest as I am released from my ego's desire to control, label, and sexualize. Saying *respect* as I look at her also releases my silent shame (and wanting to hide) for sexualizing her. I am no longer sexualizing but *respecting* her existence as a human being. This silent or quiet *respecting* also works when I look at men: When I make a snap negative judgment—*That guy's an asshole*—because he's not smiling or he's covered in tattoos and wears a white undershirt (I dislike men's sleeveless undershirts because they expose underarms, and there's nothing quite as repulsive to me as another man's armpits), I say *respect* while looking at his face. It releases me from my ego's snap judgment and connects with the warmth of my spirit.

You can also think of *respecting* as looking twice—ignoring your first impression—or looking at someone as if you were applying the benefit of hindsight from an imaginary future. *Looking back* at him. And if you have an interest in etymology, you will find that "to look back" was, in fact, the original meaning of *respect*. The Latin prefix *re-* means *back* and the *-spect* part comes from the Latin *specere,* meaning "to look at." Together they formed the Latin *respicere,* which means "to look back at, regard" (and we still sign off emails today with *regards* as a marker of respect). The Latin verb *respicere* led to the creation of the Latin noun *respectus* and the rest, as they say, is history.

But the part of Merriam-Webster's definition of *respect* that I most connect to is this: "to refrain from interfering with." To me, *respect* is about keeping my ego in check. If I stop my ego from interfering with my peace of mind with a

snap judgment, I stop my ego from disconnecting me from the people I am coming into contact with. *Respect*.

Honesty and *Trust*

It's a raw connector, independent of emotion. It's a solid, bare wire to the truth. It's also the first of the five muscles (or connections) for happiness that I wrote about in *The Happiness Animal*. It's *honesty*, and it connects people with a feeling of *trust*. Pay attention and look for opportunities to include these two words in everyday conversation. Articulating *honesty* and *trust* primes you to connect with more of both, as long as it's not in the form of *If I'm honest* or *Can I be honest* statements, but more in the form of *I appreciate you for your honesty*–type statements. The good news is that the frequency of use of both these words has been rising since the early 2000s. This is one of the pros of social media: It's easier to articulate words (and associated feelings) that people found it harder to talk about premillennium. With social media, we can take a minute to craft and edit what we want to say before we communicate it, without the pressure or worry of it being evaluated and judged in real time as each word comes out of our mouth.

Kindness

> For attractive lips, speak words of *kindness*.
>
> **—Audrey Hepburn**

This is the second of the five connections for happiness in *The Happiness Animal*. While its usage now is far from its peak in the 1820s, social media is helping to spread a *kindness* revival. Facebook, more than Twitter, has become a platform for nominating friends for challenges, such as sharing three things they are grateful for each day—yes, *gratitude* is a form of *kindness*. For example, the ice-bucket challenge that raised millions of dollars for ALS research or spreading the word on Random Acts of Kindness Day. Facebook is making *kindness* cool.

Curiosity and *Wonder* (the Third Connection to Happiness)

Curiosity might have killed the cat, but I haven't heard of it killing a dog or a human. *Curiosity*'s usage correlates with usage of *kindness*, which makes sense because curiosity is the antidote to *intolerance.* And the opposite of intolerance is also *kindness* (as well as open-mindedness).

Wonder is *curiosity*, only more attractive. *Wonder* can stop you in your tracks in an inspiring moment of disbelief that something you thought wasn't possible, is. Or that something you didn't know existed, does. Or that something you knew before is *inspiring* again or for the first time.

The appetite and the market for *wonder* appears to be growing. In 2017, the movie *Wonder Woman* was released just before the Julia Roberts and Owen Wilson movie *Wonder.* As of this writing, *Wonder Woman* is the top-grossing superhero origin movie at both the domestic and worldwide box offices. In May 2018, my friend Amber Rae published a now best-selling book, *Choose Wonder over Worry.* *Wonder* is also now one of the main categories in Arianna Huffington's *Thrive Global* magazine. The next time you are feeling inspired with more than just everyday curiosity, don't hold back. Instead, say, "That movie/painting/story filled me with *wonder*."

Courage and *Vulnerability*

Courage is about putting our *vulnerability* on the line. If we want to live and love with our whole hearts and engage in the world from a place of worthiness, our first step is practicing the *courage* it takes to own our stories and tell the truth about who we are. It doesn't get braver than that.

—Brené Brown, PhD, LMSW

It looks like a myth began circulating in 2008, stating that *courage* and *vulnerability* are opposites. As the usage (according to Google Ngram) of the word *courage* spiked, the usage of the word *vulnerability* dropped.

The divergence of the use of *courage* and the use of *vulnerability* represents an increasing disconnection with the greatest *courage* of all: to show ourselves —and connect with others—without the protection of a job title, MBA, university name, or Instagram filter. "The greatest fear in the world is the opinion of others," wrote Osho. Yet how much you show your *vulnerability*—

through your individuality—to the world is the most accurate measure of *courage*.

As Brené Brown, PhD, LMSW, puts it: "The root of the word *courage* is *cor*, the Latin word for 'heart.' In one of its earliest forms, the word *courage* had a very different definition than it does today. *Courage* originally meant to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart. Over time, this definition has changed and today *courage* is more synonymous with being heroic. Heroics are important and we certainly need heroes but I think we've lost touch with the idea that speaking honestly and openly about who we are, about what we're feeling, and about our experiences (good and bad) is the definition of *courage*."

Coders and programmers have a lot to answer for by using the word *vulnerability* only to denote *weakness* (in software or hardware). Let's petition programmers to substitute their use of *vulnerability* with the word *weakness* to help keep our *vulnerability* connected to *courage*. Make both words part of your daily vocabulary (outside the context of programming) and pay attention to how they affect how you connect.

> **Less:** "We are releasing an emergency software patch this weekend to address a *vulnerability* in the web framework."
> **More:** "If you want this relationship to work, you need to drop your tough-guy act and show me some *vulnerability.*"

Vulnerability opens connection, and connection gives us *purpose*.

Purpose

From Merriam-Webster:

> on purpose: by intent: INTENTIONALLY

Your ego wants you to *be* somebody. Your *purpose* wants you to *do* something—something that matters to you. Osho wrote, "Personality is bogus, but individuality is substantial." I prefer "Ego is bogus." *Purpose* is substantial. How your individuality connects with the world is what inspires your *purpose*. Ego is driven by fear (of a lack of recognition). *Purpose* is driven by *courage* to do what matters (regardless of recognition). Your *purpose* is what you are here to *do*, not what you are here to *be*.

In his book, *Ego Is the Enemy*, Ryan Holiday writes that in order to know if

you are acting with *purpose*, you have to ask yourself the following questions: "Does this help me to do what I have set out to do? Does this allow me to do what I need to do? Am I being selfish or selfless?" Holiday adds, "It is not, 'Who do I want to be in life?' but 'What is it that I want to accomplish in life?' Setting aside selfish interest, it asks: What calling does it serve? What principles govern my choices*?*"

The individuality of your *connection* (to others) is what gives you *purpose. Purpose* connects you to *courage*, *courage* connects you to your *truth*, renewing the individuality of your connection to others. You create purpose only through connection.

For example, let's say that until you connected with other recovering Oxycontin addicts, you were an addict yourself. Now you sense that your purpose is to help rid the world of addiction and depression by raising awareness about their causes and cures. At a family event, you overhear your uncle's new girlfriend say, "Those junkies next door need to be locked up for life. They are evil criminals." Because your *purpose* of raising awareness about the causes of addiction is strong, your *courage* is, too. You are compelled to speak up for the truth that addiction is a disease, a symptom of a disconnected society, and that addicts need compassion—not persecution that will make their addiction stronger.

So, connecting with your individuality, you say, "You know, I disagree with you on this. What do you think causes addiction, depression, and anxiety? Do you know that they are all linked?" And you then engage in a conversation without succumbing to your ego's temptation to exaggerate with words such as *always* and *never*, and insult metaphors—words that would both make your uncle's girlfriend angry, and that she would easily be able to defend herself against. Instead, your courage connects you to the truth—specific facts about addiction that your uncle's girlfriend won't be able to dispute. Finally, your connection to both the addicts and to your uncle's girlfriend strengthens and renews both your individuality and your sense of *purpose*.

As I write this, I imagine that my *purpose* is to write books that increase our sense of connection. What's your *purpose*? If you can't articulate it right now, don't worry. Every new connection with others will renew your individuality and evolve and grow your sense of purpose. Choose the words you feel the strongest connection with, and your purpose will find you—even if you just meditate or pray to a higher power or the universe for a few seconds a day and ask for guidance on what your purpose is. That's what I do almost every day. If

you are still struggling to articulate a *purpose*, author Phil Laut, in his book *Money Is My Friend*, created an exercise for defining your life purpose (which I used as an exercise for building *courage* in my first book, *The Happiness Animal*). If you can't wait, and want to do the exercise now, financial coach Melyssa Duldulao has published a short version of the exercise on her website, yesfinanciallyfree.com

The Last *Darn* Word of This Chapter

To *darn* is to mend with yarn. But in the 1700s, *damn* (from *damnation*) and -*tern-* (from *eternal*) combined to form *tarnation*, *darnation*, and then *darn*. It's also a way of expressing frustration in an endearing way. This is a word that triggers *warmth* in me. I associate it with both my grandmother, who would say it in acknowledgment that things weren't going according to plan (or if she dropped an egg on the kitchen floor), and it's also a marker of speech of my ear-candy phone pal, Lacie.

But when I ran a poll, it turned out that most people don't have the same warmth from *darn* that I feel—80 percent said they didn't. Whether you're fond of it or not, the word is making a comeback.

Is there another word that gives you the warm and fuzzies? A few of my friends' are *roast*, *toast*, *Inverness*, and *frock*. Tweet me yours.

RECAP: HAPPY WORDS

- *Inspiration, happiness*, and *love* (and *courage*) are closely linked in feeling, meaning, and origin.
- *Happiness* is *eudaimonistic* (of good spirit). To *inspire* is to put *spirit* into. *In love* means "inspired by affection."
- The happiest word is *laughter.*
- *Warmth* can be expressed in the context of touch, colors, and sounds. It's also a synonym for *affection*.
- To connect with *gratitude*, make its expression specific (gratitude *for* the hug today).
- The word *smile* relates to many positive feelings: *recognition, amusement, pleasure, eyes brightening, encouragement, inspiration*, and *approval*. The word triggers the action.
- *Kissing* brings our attention to our mouths.
- Saying *respect* while looking at people can release us from ego and judgment.

• *Honesty* connects *trust.* Word use of either connects you to both.

• *Curiosity* is the antidote to intolerance and correlates with the use of *kindness.*

• Use *awareness* to gain it.

• The greatest *courage* is *vulnerability.*

• Cultivate a list of words that give you the warm and fuzzies, *darn* you.

Footnotes

1 Laughter doesn't just release endorphins, it also relieves pain. See https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/07/health/laughter-yoga-sw/index.html.

2 "Some orangutans make kissing sounds when they bed for the night." —Christine Kenneally in *The First Word: The Search for the Origins of Language.*

UNTRANSLATABLES THAT SPELL CONNECTION

It seemed other-worldly: bigger, stranger, and fuller than the words we use every day. It was a word for a feeling I'd felt, but had never been able to name.

—Yee-Lum Mak, author of *Other Wordly*

The title of this book is *Word Wise*, not *Emoji Wise*. But I decided that it would be remiss of me not to discuss emojis here. My first thought may have been the same as yours: *Emojis aren't words—right?* I let this question simmer in my thoughts for about a month. Then I discovered that emojis are both searchable by hashtag, and—this was all the endorsement I needed—an *emoji* was Oxford Dictionaries' 2015 Word of the Year. It was the "Face with Tears of Joy" emoji. I also discovered that my idea to make a quick buck by writing *An Emoji Dictionary* came too late, when I stumbled on https://emojipedia.org/.

Even if you don't agree that emojis are words, they are symbols that represent meaning, and doesn't that define language? It doesn't matter whether you believe that language evolved from pictures, hieroglyphics, or clicks.[1] All that matters is the symbol's *connection* to meaning, regardless of whether the symbol is a word, a sound, or a picture.

Y tho? One emoji takes up less space than one (non-emoji) word—the average length of English words is 4.5 characters—but says at least five. Ever wonder why more and more companies now ask you to select an emoji face—or touch an emoji button at an airport restroom—rather than use words when

responding to a customer satisfaction survey? Even then the full meaning of one emoji doesn't translate exactly into non-emoji words. You could say *frustration*, *irritation, anger, sulking, disdain*, but you still wouldn't be able to fully express what the face with steam from nose emoji can.

Emojis say much more than adjectives and adverbs. They do what non-emoji words cannot, and bring the body to language. Literally. They have the same effect on us as IRL body language: A Flinders University study in Adelaide, Australia, proved that our brains now activate when we see a :-) in the same way our brains activate when someone smiles at us for real. And that's an emoticon —the stick man equivalent of an emoji. Looking at a smiley-face emoji (or emoticon) can activate our mirror neurons and make us smile. That's some word power.

Untranslatables

Some non-English words or phrases, such as *je ne sais quoi*, have a connection that cannot be expressed in one English word. In these cases, the connection is stronger if we don't try to translate but instead incorporate. We can *feel* what the foreign word means even if we can't express it in our own language. What follows is a selection of words that better connect with meaning when left untranslated.

Imagine that you are on a round-the-world trip and you are about to go word shopping. Since you saved an infinite amount of energy from discarding the word trash that disconnects you (throwing out the word *should* alone has saved you a fortune), you now have an unlimited word budget. Now go spend some of it on whatever you like from the following connection selection.

Hygge
(Danish, Pronounced HOO-ga)

This is my new favorite word. A "connection to coziness" is my best attempt at a definition in English, but what it means cannot be distilled into one or two words. So, I am sticking with *hygge*. If you had *hygge*, you might have candles, Edison-bulb lamplight, a crackling fire, and family or close friends gathered around the wood table breaking into laughter, eating slow-cooked food, or drinking hot chocolate, with aromas of baking or roasting filling a cozy cottage up to its wood beams. When I go out to dinner, I am not only tasting the food but

also feeling the *hygge*—or *getting hygge with it*. I'm paying attention to the lighting, the candles, the furniture, the coziness, the warmth, the laughter, because *now* I have the word *hygge*, which has connected me to a new appreciation of my surroundings. Rare are the words that trigger me to notice things with my senses and connect me to the present. I will savor this new word.

Google Trends data shows that in October 2016, *hygge* was a word that barely anyone asked about. Cut to three months later and it's a word that 10 times as many people wanted to know about. I notice that more and more people are aware of *hygge* this year, compared to last (when I asked them if they know the word), and we can thank an increasing number of articles about why Denmark is the happiest country as well as author Meik Wiking's *The Little Book of Hygge*. But as of August 2018 (as I'm writing this sentence), it is still not a word included in Merriam-Webster's dictionary.[2] If we all use it a little more, we can make an entry in M-W and in our lives as we make the world a *cozier* place, one conversation at a time.

Gemütlichkeit

(German, pronounced guh-MYOOT-lik-KYT)

Think the Austrian/German equivalent of *hygge*, but with added good vibes, cheer, and friendliness. *Gemütlichkeit*'s feeling of coziness and sense of belonging is less dependent on physical surroundings (and candles or firelight) than *hygge*'s and is more dependent on people's warmth towards one another. Merriam-Webster defines it as cordiality and friendliness. It's derived from the word *Gemüt*, which means soul, heart, mind, and temperament. But like *hygge*, *Gemütlichkeit* can also be used with reference to the warm atmosphere of a specific place: the motto of the Wisconsin town of Jefferson is "the *Gemütlichkeit* city." The Wisconsin Department of Tourism even offers up its own definition of *Gemütlichkeit* on its website: "*Friendship, warmth and good cheer. The feeling you get when visiting Wisconsin.*" The chances of you feeling *Gemütlichkeit* are perhaps higher if you visit Jefferson in September. The city has been hosting an annual, three-day Gemütlichkeit Days festival for the last 50 years. So, the next time you think of Wisconsin, don't just think cheese. Think cheer. Think *Gemütlichkeit.*

Raðljóst

(Icelandic, Pronounced rath-ljoust)

(Icelandic, Pronounced rath-ljoust)

This word means just enough light (at dusk, from the moon or light pollution) to be able to follow a trail through the woods. If you are staying at a friend's house, it's enough light from your phone screen to navigate the mysterious obstacle course of his furniture, doors, and corridors on the way to the bathroom at night. Come to your senses with enough light to find your way. *Raðljóst*.

Hoppipolla
(Icelandic, Pronounced hope-E-pol-lah)

Jumping into puddles. Splash. It's a word that sounds to an English speaker a little like what it means. *Hop*p *i(n) polla* (like a toddler trying to say *hop in puddle*). *Hoppipolla* is also the title of a song by the Icelandic band Sigur Rós, which is used as the theme music for the BBC series *Planet Earth*.

Many of these *untranslatables* evoke the senses and connect you with the present. When you think of jumping in puddles, you think of how the water feels under your boots as you land, the splash all around, the sound, and the feeling of jumping in the air. If you want to feel some of that without getting messy, I recommend you listen to the "Hoppipollia" song instead, whether the Sigur Rós original or a string quartet version (available on YouTube). Introduce the word to your friends the next time you are out for a walk together and you spot a puddle, or add the song to your playlist as a reminder.

Komorebi
(Japanese, Pronounced KOH-MOH-REHB-i)

> **Rêve-Ree @ReeDwithaBee, Jan 15, 2018:**
> It was coincidence, perhaps. Every time the Garden girl fell asleep in full sun, the nearest tree would gracefully extend a branch to shade her in a parasol of gold-edged silhouetted leaves. And her dreams were illuminated in komorebi and shivelights.

The light filtering between trees is captured in this word that creates a vision of trees, light, leaves, and space. On a day at the desk in New York City, this word creates a sensory escape to the forest. And when in the forest you may feel…

Waldeinsamkeit
(German, Pronounced VALD-ein-sam-kite)

The feeling of being (happily) alone in the forest and connected to nature. Literally translated it means "forest loneliness." But that would imply that is an unwanted feeling. This is a desirable feeling of being connected to the forest— alone but not lonely. According to Rosetta Stone blogger Celinne Da Costa, the feeling can morph into something deeply spiritual: "*Waldeinsamkeit* is not a one-day thing. It's the search of a spiritual attitude. It's about changing your life with solitude, of finding yourself and your spirit in nature… to find that awareness, you have to get away from everything and everybody."

Dwaal
(South African, Pronounced DWAHL)

I'm in a *dwaal* today as I'm writing this. I didn't feel refreshed when I woke up and still don't feel that I am fully awake at 4:40 p.m., even after three double-shot coffees. It's as if there's a cloud of sleepy grogginess in my head. Somehow being able to give my mental state a name (and to express it) is reassuring and has made me feel a little better already. A *dwaal* is a dreamy, drifting drowsy state, which can sometimes also be…

Dormiveglia
(Italian, Pronounced dor-mE-vel-ya)

The period between being asleep and waking up. If you have a Fitbit, sometimes this period counts as light sleep, even though you feel as if you were (half) awake. It's that extra half-hour from when you first wake up, close your eyes again, but can't get back to sleep, check the time again, and realize that 30 minutes have gone by. Then you get up. Or is it just me that this happens to? *Dormiveglia* can also happen when you take naps on planes and trains, but hopefully not in automobiles if you're driving.

> **Stefano Morello @steomor, Nov 15, 2018:**
> Crazy as it sounds—I miss the dream-like panic of waking from the dormiveglia (twilight sleep) of a subway nap.

Saudade
(Portuguese, Pronounced sah-oo-DAD [Portugal]/sow-DAH-djee [Brazil])

A bittersweet feeling when thinking about something—often a relationship—that

is no more. It could be a home, a business, a hobby, or a country where you used to live. It evokes both the feeling of pleasure from the *gratitude* for the memories and a (slight) sinking feeling—for me in my stomach—of loss. It's a word with meaning that you feel in sensations. Saying it aloud may help to articulate what you are feeling, appreciate it, and process it rather than lingering on it and letting it get you down.

Yūgen

(Japanese, Pronounced YOO-gehn)

Definitions vary from "profound grace" to "the feeling that the universe as a whole has a deep and mysterious beauty." If you are looking at snow-covered mountains that you know are 50 miles away, their presence is not immediate, but you can *see* and *sense* the immensity of their beauty. The same feeling comes to me from lying on my back staring into space, seeing too many stars to count on a clear night. Say *yugen* to remind yourself of the infinite beauty of existence.

Duende

(Spanish, Pronounced DWEHN-day)

By now you have undoubtedly noticed that *spirit* is a common theme in words that connect. This word means a "ghost" or "*spirit* of energy" that induces a heightened state of emotion from a dance recital, musical performance, or a work of art. In recent years—and as the word has entered the English language —it has come to mean "innate charm," but the real meaning goes deeper into a sense of *spirit*.

> The *duende* seizes not only the performer but also the audience, creating conditions where art can be understood spontaneously with little, if any, conscious effort."
>
> **—Marian Kennedy, writer and theater critic**

Querencia

(Spanish, Pronounced keh-REHN-syah [Latam]/key-REHN-thyah [Spain])

This refers to a temporary base where we can go to rejuvenate and gain inspiration and strength. It could be the hairdresser's, a coffee shop, or a bench

by the seashore. My *querencia* when I shared a house with roommates was a room with an earthen floor under the building that opened onto an overgrown garden. At other times it's been a garage where I stored my belongings, and, when I was driving around Australia, it was my Toyota Land Cruiser. During the writing of *The Happiness Animal*, it was the Don Adan café in Sydney, Australia. I rode my bike there every day for two years to get the inspiration to write. I imagine it was Elizabeth Jakubiw, a 40-something artist who worked at the café and often supplied me with free pupusas, cakes, and coffees that made Don Adan a *querencia* for me.

I also associate *querencia* with Elizabeth because in 2015 I found myself without a place to stay in Sydney, and she offered me a temporary home for a week and helped me find my energy again for my next run. The association between *run* and *querencia* also extends to the world of bullfighting. In the ring, the bull will find himself a *querencia* to which he will return to gather his energy before the next charge. Where's your *querencia*?

querencia: The place where one's strength is drawn from; where one feels at home; the place where you are your most *authentic* self. The verb *querer* means "to desire." *Querencia* is a favorite spot, *fondness*. Being home on vacation time is the ultimate recreation and *spiritual housekeeping;* it is my *oasis*, my *querencia*.

—Freya Radhararti, on UrbanDictionary.com

Fika
(Swedish, Pronounced FEE-ka)

Not just a New York coffee shop chain, this term represents a break from work that people take no matter how busy they are, not to discuss work but to chat and get to know people from all levels in the company. It creates a sense of community around a hot beverage. *Fika* is part of the reason community is so healthy in Sweden. Connection to community correlates with well-being, which is why Sweden (along with Denmark, Finland, and Norway) consistently appears among the top five happiest countries in the world in the UN's "World Happiness Report."

When Swedes say *fika*, they connect. Why don't we adopt the term and initiate *fika* breaks in our workplaces? My friend Fiona liked this word so much she named her company *FIKA* (www.wearfika.com). She adds, "*Fika* is not just a coffee break with friends, but more. It's taking a moment to pause and

appreciate the good, simple things in life."

Vade mecum
(Latin, Pronounced WAH-day-MAY-kum)

This phrase means "go with me." It's a book that you can connect with as a guide throughout your life, whether it's your own diary or reference guide. For me, it's the music of Bob Dylan, Stephen King's *On Writing, The Happiness Animal*, or Brad Blanton's *Radical Honesty*. Open up another connection by asking your friends for their *vade mecum*. What's yours?

Iktsuarpok
(Inuit, Pronounced EET-soo-AHR-pohk)

You know that feeling you get when you know someone is coming over, so you keep looking out the window to see if she is outside or if her car is pulling up? That's *iktsuarpok*: the anticipation of imminent arrival that compels you to *look* —yes, the majority of these untranslatables involve the senses. "I had *iktsuarpok* all day today waiting for my grocery delivery."

Forelsket
(Norwegian, Pronounced f'-REL-skit)

The box of untranslatable words, compiled by the School of Life (founded by British philosopher and author Alain de Botton), describes *forelsket* as "the euphoric feeling at the beginning of love." Wouldn't you want to distill that into one word? Well, it turns out there is. I feel a flow of lightness from released tension in the upper stomach into the rib cage that tingles across the chest into the throat as if some liquid euphoric drug were flowing around my body. But without any of the unpleasant side effects. Unexpectedly, another person and I created an intimate connection of energy flowing between us. And now I call that *forelsket*.

Eudaimonia
(Greek, Pronounced YOU-day-MOAN-E-a)

I want you to finish this book in good *spirits*. Or with a word that means "of

good spirit" (*daimon* is Greek for "spirit"). The closest English word is *happiness*, but the Greeks don't have another word for happiness. They just say "of good spirit." *Eudaimonia*, per Merriam-Webster, is "having a good attendant or indwelling spirit." *Eudaimonia* also appears in the School of Life's box of untranslatable words, where it is described as "the deepest kind of fulfillment."

The first time I heard this word was in 2012 as I began my research for *The Happiness Animal*. I don't think I have heard anyone else use it. Even though it's a word that has existed for thousands of years, we didn't use it in English until the 21st century. Its usage does appear to be growing, albeit if its frequency is still less than one in 5 million words. But it is the *spirit* at the heart of this word —and in many of the word-power words in this book—that is the magic at the heart of connecting well with our words.

RECAP: UNTRANSLATABLES THAT SPELL CONNECTION

- Even if you don't agree that emojis are words, they are symbols that represent meaning. That is a definition of language.

- One emoji takes up less space than one (non-emoji) word but often conveys the meaning of at least five.

- Some non-English words say what cannot be expressed in one English word. In these cases, the connection is stronger if we don't try to translate but instead use the non-English word.

Footnotes

[1] "An odd but interesting line of inquiry into the prehistory of language is the work done on click speech sounds that are found in many African languages. Some researchers contend that clicks are extremely ancient in origin and that click languages of today all descended from one of the oldest, if not the first, human language."—Christine Kenneally in *The First Word.*

[2] Update: While editing this book, I checked Merriam-Webster again in September 2019, and *hygge* is now a word M-W is "watching," but it is still yet to be added to the dictionary.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ESSENCE (NOT EGO)

Humans *need* to connect. That is not one of the false necessities highlighted in chapter 1. This is a *need* slap-bang in the middle[1] of Maslow's hierarchy. It forms the love/belonging central layer that supports the top two levels of needs, which include self-esteem, creativity, and self-actualization. In short, your need to connect supports the needs that define who you are—your essence.

The origin of the word *essence* is the Latin *esse*, meaning "to be." To connect, you need to use your mind as a tool to select the words, colors, materials, or music that resonate with what you feel or sense. Individuality creates authenticity. If you know how to speak or write, you have the power to inspire—that is, "put spirit into"—others and increase how connected we humans feel. And we need to feel that connection now more than ever before, as we increasingly substitute screen time for real connection. Without connection, our spirit becomes depleted. Without *spirit*—the *daimon* in *eudaimonia*—we cannot feel happiness. Without connection, we fall into depression. That's why the advent of cell phones and social media—both substitutes for real connection—coincides with higher rates of mental illness and depression. And it's why Johann Hari titled his groundbreaking book on depression *Lost Connections.*

Instead of clinging to your cell phone to get that "amazeballs" photo of a mushroom risotto filtered and tagged on Insta to get enough likes, to attract enough followers, to boost your ego—and no amount of followers will ever be enough for your ego—choose words that resonate with what you sense and what you feel.

The individuality of your *connection* (to others) is what gives you *purpose. Purpose* connects you to *courage, courage* makes it easier to stay connected to —and to speak—your *truth,* renewing your connection to others. It doesn't matter if your purpose is to speak the truth as you see and sense it about food or

pharmaceuticals, social media or crystal meth, sleep or guns, the weather or words. Your purpose *is* connection. Connect what you see and sense with what others see and sense so that we may see and speak together to better understand (and connect) with one another. If the capital fear is disconnection from life—death—the capital *purpose* is connection. When you connect well, your human connection morphs into a connection to *spirit* (that lifts your spirits), which, whether it be through *inspiration* or kindness, is a connection to happiness.

Often our minds are so busy, tired, or distracted that we forget to be *discerning*, to listen to our intuition or pay attention to our senses and our feelings. Our *ego* takes over and we spout a judgment—a *should*, an exaggeration, an *always* or *never*, an insult metaphor, an *evil monster*—or lie. Without flagging that *ego* has taken control of what's coming out of our mouths, we won't be able to take control of the words coming out of our mouths and we won't be able to connect.

If I could offer you only one piece of advice from this book for your future, it would be this: Become a student of your own words. It is not the variety of your words that helps you connect, but rather the specificity in the selection of the ones you already use. Learn to pare down your (ego's) instinct for more words and for exaggeration. Focus on feeling the words you do use to ensure that they express the specifics of what you feel. Be discerning with your word selection and the words of others. Be word wise.

Footnotes

1 *Slap-bang in the middle* is a British phrase that means "directly in the middle." Instead of using the muffling adverb *directly*, connection here is created with a double onomatopoeia of *slap-bang*.

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To all the New York–based speech-language pathologists (SLPs), thank you

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Will Jelbert is the best-selling author of *The Happiness Animal* and a series of children's books. His books have been translated into multiple languages worldwide. He is also a journalist and a public speaker on connection and happiness. He grew up on a fourth-generation family farm near Penzance in Cornwall, England—yes, the Penzance that made the pirates famous. He has lived and worked in England, India, France, Germany, and Australia, and is now based in New York.

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR
WORD WISE

"In this original take on why and how we use the words we do, Will Jelbert is a Marie Kondo for language: challenging our worst habits and offering a way through the clutter and laziness."
—**Kate Riordan,** *The Guardian,* **(and best-selling author of** *The Heatwave* **and** *The Girl in the Photograph)*

"Our words matter in creating our happiness and success. Just as we clutter our homes through neglect and habit, Will Jelbert illustrates how we often clutter our minds and relationships with unhelpful language. More importantly, he brilliantly shows how mindful word selection can spark powerful connections and joy. This book is an essential guide for a social-media–saturated generation."
—**Michelle Gielan, best-selling author of** *Broadcasting Happiness*

"One of the most personally influential books that I've read in my life—not only will it transform your day-to-day communication skills, but all your relationships around you as well. This is not a book that you read once and put down, but one that you pick up and reread over and over again."
—**Fiona Fong, founder and CEO, FIKA, and former speedskating Olympian**

"This book will make you more conscious of your words. It will make you more honest. It will help you build genuine connections with the people in your life who matter most. And it will make you laugh out loud."
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—**Francisca Garcia, Ms. Latina International 2018**

"Just as the common poisonous phrases of polite conversation employed in lying and self-deception for the sake of a phony 'peace' are the source of most human conflict, divorce, and all the many forms of social breakdown—phony diplomacy is the very essence of what causes war. [Here are] a few words that might help, in the pell-mell rush to genocide, for the whole human

race."
—Brad Blanton, PhD, author of *Radical Honesty, The Truthtellers*, and *Radical Parenting*

"Will takes an approach to words and phrases that is refreshingly jarring and different than any other I've seen…. [Keep this book] handy to spark inspiration."
—Max Stossel, founder of Words That Move; award-winning filmmaker and poet; named by *Forbes* as one of the best storytellers of 2016

"Word Wise is a refreshing, intelligent, and much-needed polemic against an increasingly dystopian world—*Fahrenheit 451* meets *1984*—which rejects discourse and logic, and twists language to fit ideology. *Word Wise* celebrates Logos and helps cut through the nonsense for clear and precise speaking and, therefore, thinking."
—Patrick Fagan, former lead psychologist at Cambridge Analytica, and lecturer in consumer behavior at Goldsmiths

"This book demonstrates how powerful one's vocabulary is at determining how individuals make connections with others, view the world, and how one's level of happiness can vary based on simple word choice."
—Jean Marie Gunshanan, CCC-SLP, speech-language pathologist, New York City Department of Education

"Brutally honest, but also eye-opening, because I am a culprit of using probably 100 percent of word trash."
—Yesenia Capalbo, editor, *Reuters*

"I find myself laughing a lot. I think a lot of New Yorkers can relate to the day-to-day behavior of people in the city—I know I did!"
—Jharonne Martis, director of consumer research, *Reuters*

h rank: 1
word: laughter
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.50 0.9313
TW rank: 3600
GB rank: –
NYT rank: –
ML rank: 1728

h rank: 2
word: happiness
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.44 0.9723
TW rank: 1853
GB rank: 2458
NYT rank: –
ML rank: 1230

h rank: 3
word: love
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.42 1.1082
TW rank: 25
GB rank: 317
NYT rank: 328
ML rank: 23

h rank: 4
word: happy
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.30 0.9949
TW rank: 65
GB rank: 1372
NYT rank: 1313
ML rank: 375

h rank: 5

word: laughed
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.26 1.1572
TW rank: 3334
GB rank: 3542
NYT rank: –
ML rank: 2332

h rank: 6
word: laugh
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.22 1.3746
TW rank: 1002
GB rank: 3998
NYT rank: 4488
ML rank: 647

h rank: 7
word: laughing
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.20 1.1066
TW rank: 1579
GB rank: –
NYT rank: –
ML rank: 1122

h rank: 8
word: excellent
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.18 1.1008
TW rank: 1496
GB rank: 1756
NYT rank: 3155
ML rank: –

h rank: 9
word: laughs
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.18 1.1551
TW rank: 3554
GB rank: –
NYT rank: –

ML rank: 2856

h rank: 10
word: joy
*h*avg *ha*-: 8.16 1.0568
TW rank: 988
GB rank: 2336
NYT rank: 2723
ML rank: 809

h rank: 11
word: successful
*h*avg *ha*-: 8.16 1.0759
TW rank: 2176
GB rank: 1198
NYT rank: 1565
ML rank: –

h rank: 12
word: win
*h*avg *ha*-: 8.12 1.0812
TW rank: 154
GB rank: 3031
NYT rank: 776
ML rank: 694

h rank: 13
word: rainbow
*h*avg *ha*-: 8.10 0.9949
TW rank: 2726
GB rank: –
NYT rank: –
ML rank: 1723

h rank: 14
word: smile
*h*avg *ha*-: 8.10 1.0152
TW rank: 925

GB rank: 2666

NYT rank: 2898

ML rank: 349

h rank: 15

word: won

*h*avg *ha-*: 8.10 1.2164

TW rank: 810

GB rank: 1167

NYT rank: 439

ML rank: 1493

h rank: 16

word: pleasure

*h*avg *ha-*: 8.08 0.9655

TW rank: 1497

GB rank: 1526

NYT rank: 4253

ML rank: 1398

h rank: 17

word: smiled

*h*avg *ha-*: 8.08 1.0660

TW rank: –

GB rank: 3537

NYT rank: –

ML rank: 2248

h rank: 18

word: rainbows

*h*avg *ha-*: 8.06 1.3603

TW rank: –

GB rank: –

NYT rank: –

ML rank: 4216

h rank: 19

word: winning

word: winning
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.04 1.0490
TW rank: 1876
GB rank: –
NYT rank: 1426
ML rank: 3646

h rank: 20
word: celebration
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.02 1.5318
TW rank: 3306
GB rank: –
NYT rank: 2762
ML rank: 4070

h rank: 21
word: enjoyed
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.02 1.5318
TW rank: 1530
GB rank: 2908
NYT rank: 3502
ML rank: –

h rank: 22
word: healthy
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.02 1.0593
TW rank: 1393
GB rank: 3200
NYT rank: 3292
ML rank: 4619

h rank: 23
word: music
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.02 1.1156
TW rank: 132
GB rank: 875
NYT rank: 167
ML rank: 374

h rank: 24
word: celebrating
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.00 1.1429
TW rank: 2550
GB rank: –
NYT rank: –
ML rank: –

h rank: 25
word: congratulations
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.00 1.6288
TW rank: 2246
GB rank: –
NYT rank: –
ML rank: –

h rank: 26
word: weekend
*h*avg *ha-*: 8.00 1.2936
TW rank: 317
GB rank: –
NYT rank: 833
ML rank: 2256

h rank: 27
word: celebrate
*h*avg *ha-*: 7.98 1.1516
TW rank: 1606
GB rank: –
NYT rank: 3574
ML rank: 2108

h rank: 28
word: comedy
*h*avg *ha-*: 7.98 1.1516
TW rank: 1444
GB rank:

GB rank: –
NYT rank: 2566
ML rank: –

h rank: 29
word: jokes
*h*avg *ha-*: 7.98 0.9792
TW rank: 2812
GB rank: –
NYT rank: –
ML rank: 3808

h rank: 30
word: rich
*h*avg *ha-*: 7.98 1.3169
TW rank: 1625
GB rank: 1221
NYT rank: 1469
ML rank: 890

h rank: 31
word: victory
*h*avg *ha-*: 7.98 1.0784
TW rank: 1809
GB rank: 2341
NYT rank: 687
ML rank: 2845

h rank: 32
word: christmas
*h*avg *ha-*: 7.96 1.2930
TW rank: 138
GB rank: 3846
NYT rank: 2097
ML rank: 599

h rank: 33
word: free

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.96 1.2610

TW rank: 85

GB rank: 342

NYT rank: 393

ML rank: 219

h rank: 34

word: friendship

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.96 1.1241

TW rank: 4273

GB rank: 3098

NYT rank: 3669

ML rank: 3980

h rank: 35

word: fun

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.96 1.3087

TW rank: 110

GB rank: 4135

NYT rank: 2189

ML rank: 463

h rank: 36

word: holidays

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.96 1.2610

TW rank: 1204

GB rank: –

NYT rank: –

ML rank: –

h rank: 37

word: loved

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.96 1.1599

TW rank: 465

GB rank: 2178

NYT rank: 890

ML rank: 517

h rank: 38

word: loves

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.96 1.3696

TW rank: 780

GB rank: –

NYT rank: –

ML rank: 653

h rank: 39

word: loving

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.96 1.0093

TW rank: 947

GB rank: 4396

NYT rank: 230

ML rank: 527

h rank: 40

word: beach

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.94 1.0577

TW rank: 573

GB rank: 3596

NYT rank: 551

ML rank: 1475

h rank: 41

word: hahaha

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.94 1.5572

TW rank: 428

GB rank: –

NYT rank: –

ML rank: –

h rank: 42

word: kissing

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.94 1.1323

TW rank: –

GB rank: –

NYT rank: –
ML rank: 2052

h rank: 43
word: sunshine
*h*avg *ha-*: 7.94 1.1678
TW rank: 2080
GB rank: –
NYT rank: –
ML rank: 950

h rank: 44
word: beautiful
*h*avg *ha-*: 7.92 1.1753
TW rank: 266
GB rank: 1159
NYT rank: 1754
ML rank: 467

h rank: 45
word: delicious
*h*avg *ha-*: 7.92 1.2591
TW rank: 1565
GB rank: –
NYT rank: –
ML rank: –

h rank: 46
word: friends
*h*avg *ha-*: 7.92 1.1925
TW rank: 258
GB rank: 658
NYT rank: 347
ML rank: 321

h rank: 47
word: funny

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.92 1.0467

TW rank: 358

GB rank: –

NYT rank: 3194

ML rank: 755

h rank: 48

word: outstanding

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.92 1.1400

TW rank: 4468

GB rank: 4721

NYT rank: 1797

ML rank: –

h rank: 49

word: paradise

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.92 1.3974

TW rank: 3096

GB rank: –

NYT rank: –

ML rank: 1146

h rank: 50

word: sweetest

*h*avg *ha-*: 7.92 1.2911

TW rank: _

GB rank: _

NYT rank: _

ML rank: 2232