

Change your language

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When I first started working for Creative Restaurant Solutions in 2005 my boss suggested presenting our clients' exit interview results in terms of their strengths and opportunities. I rolled my eyes. Who was she trying to kid with this fluffy language? Opportunities? The opposite of a strength is a weakness, right?

How far my thinking has come in the last 12 years! While I don't believe we should try to turn every weakness into a strength (I'll likely never be great at basketball or ballet), my mindset changes when I think about having opportunities instead of weaknesses. Instead of saying, "I'm not great at planning," it's more helpful to think "I have the opportunity to improve my planning skills" or "I'm working on being a better planner." And then instead of spending my time criticizing myself for poor planning, I'm focused on actually planning.

In a [previous post](#), I talked about how I learned the importance of choosing my words wisely from my coach. Around the same time I was working with Phyllis, I read a book that had a significant impact on the words I choose. In *A Complaint Free World*, Will Bowen says, "If you will begin to call the people and events in your life by names that spur positive energy in yourself, you will find that they no longer bother you and in fact can be a real boon for you. Change the words you use and watch your life change."

He offers a great list of word swaps. Here are my favorites:

- Instead of "Setback" try "Challenge"
- Replace "Have to" with "Get to"
- Turn "Pain" into "Signal"
- Reframe "Struggle" as "Journey"

It can be a little uncomfortable at first to use different vocabulary. But just as learning a new language becomes easier over time, so does this. And it's worth the effort. Changing my language has changed my life.

For the next week I challenge you to pay close attention to the words you use. Are your words dragging you down or lifting you up? Consider the following modifications:

- Instead of, "I'm really bad at math," try "Math is an emerging skill for me." It emphasizes the fact that we continue to learn, even as adults.
- When asked, "How are you?" instead of "I'm okay" or "Hanging in there," what if you said, "I'm good, and grateful that the sun is shining today" or "I'm getting excited about a concert I'm going to on Friday." Let's not perpetrate the myth that we're all just barely getting by. Instead let's focus on the bright spots of life.
- Turn "I made a mistake" into "I learned a lesson" (and then make sure you actually learn that lesson). I remember a quote I learned from Oprah. She learned to ask in times of trouble, "What have you come to teach me?"

- Replace "I have to go to work" with "I get to go to work." Inspired by an interview with Jamie Lee Curtis, this has been one of my most powerful language changes. Even on the days I would have rather stayed in bed than go to the job I had, I focused on what was good about work: the fact I could provide for my family and develop new skills.

The change-your-language challenge is a great one to tackle with other people, because they can pay close attention to what you say and point out opportunities to elevate your language. You can do the same for them. Give it a try and let me know how it works out at christin@christinsmithmyers.com!