

CHAPTER 1

REMEMBER THE ICE:

Creating Better Communication (K)not by (K)not

There is power in the clarity of your articulation.™

Let me say that again: *There is Power in the Clarity of your Articulation.™*

I want you to take a minute to really think about that statement. It is both the center and the purpose of everything you will learn in this book. My goal is for you to embrace this truth, make it your own, and use the tools I outline here to achieve clarity in your communication.

This skill, in turn, will lead to more personal power than you even realize you can possess. And you already have the tools; you just need to learn how to use them.

How would you like to be listened to, and actually heard, every time you spoke? Confidence in your effectiveness as a communicator translates into confidence in every aspect of your life, from the boardroom to the backyard to the bedroom.

Your sense of personal power, confidence, and self-esteem are wrapped up in how well you are able to communicate your thoughts, needs, ideas and desires. When you articulate clearly and successfully, everything else falls into place. When the details fall into place, they make room for new or expanded ideas. Suddenly, all cylinders fire together, productivity skyrockets, results exceed expectation, and relationships become more intimate and rewarding.

At its most basic, the reason we communicate is to have our needs met. If you wonder about the power of clarity in your message, consider a newborn fresh to the planet. Within moments, he communicates hunger, exhaustion, and discomfort, and in such a way that he is fed, allowed to sleep soundly, and kept warm and dry. He does so without words, and yet he makes his meaning clear when vocalizing his needs.

The key to a newborn's success is the congruency of his message. It is absolutely vital for you to embrace this concept, and I will be talking about it throughout this book. The newborn's thoughts, needs, impulses, facial expressions, body language, and tone of cry are all congruent; they have the same goal and work in unison. They're all layers of the same onion.

As we mature, our needs get more sophisticated and intertwine with our desires. Our vocabularies grow by leaps and bounds, also becoming more sophisticated. But there is no need to lose the ability to be clear and straightforward in our communication. And yet, somewhere along the line, we do. We muddle things. We overcomplicate our message, and confuse the issue - and the other people listening to us - with some pretty common, pretty poor word choices.

We do it so often, and so automatically, that we overlook the fact that we are doing it at all.

The first step is to recognize the *challenge*, and then to enjoy the process of changing your behavior; I am fully confident that you will find doing it a breeze and a pleasure.

As you build your awareness and adapt to a new level of personal power, the tools I share in this book will continue to serve you wherever you go in life. Soon, you will discover that where you go in life is completely up to you; your word choices play a huge role in shaping your future.

There is power in the clarity of your articulation.™ Embrace this truth, put it into practice, and change your life. It's time to enhance every single relationship and every single experience you have. Spoken communication is just the beginning. I will show you how to shift your old paradigms and open yourself up to a universe of possibilities.

Why is it so important to pay attention to word choice? It's important because as a society, we have slipped into lazy habits that confuse or undermine the things that come out of our mouths. As a society, we are getting more and more frustrated by our lack of ability to understand and to make ourselves understood.

Poor word choice is a serious obstacle to clear communication and diminishes your personal power. Imagine how much more power and confidence you would have in your life if you could consistently get your message across clearly. How empowering do you think it would be to know that your words influence and inspire, rather than confuse and annoy? I believe few people actually set out to confuse and annoy others. I believe most of us want to be clear and make sense. I believe most people just need to know how to do it.

The good news is that you already have everything you need. It's just a matter of understanding the how and why of organizing and using your words, and putting it all into practice.

The first lesson is about the word "not", or as I like to write it: (K)not. I present it this way as a constant reminder that the word "not" ties your message in knots. I believe the word can be eliminated from our language.

If the word "not" ever had a good use before it became the standard method for muddling information, overuse has destroyed its meaning. The word is no longer effective. We have become desensitized to its meaning. It has been inserted so many ways and with such frequency to foster excuses and serve for laziness that we no longer think about why we use it, and most critically, we no longer hear it. It no longer registers. We no longer recognize its meaning in a sentence.

To demonstrate what I mean, I'd like to share the story behind the title of this book. "Remember the Ice" is a perfect example of the power in clarifying your message.

In a convenience store on Northern Avenue in Phoenix, Arizona, the manager had placed a couple of signs above his cash registers. Rick's intention was to encourage his patrons to buy more ice during the hot desert summer.

I lived across the street from this store and came to know him fairly well. One day when I stepped up to the counter to make a purchase, I glanced again at the two signs above his cash registers that read "DON'T FORGET THE ICE" and decided to ask him how his ice sales were going.

You may think this was a strange question, but I have always been intrigued by the

juxtaposition of words. I am also intrigued by the outcomes of behavior and how the two are intertwined.

Rick replied that ice sales were slow; he was unable to move his inventory with any speed or consistency, and most of it just sat there. We were in Phoenix, in the desert, in the middle of summer where it was 110 degrees in the shade on a cool day.

"Can I make a suggestion?" I asked. "Do you have a couple of pieces of paper and a Magic Marker I could use?" He gave me the items and I quickly made two new signs for him to place above his cash registers instead. The new signs read:

"REMEMBER THE ICE!!!"

I left with a knowing smile and purposely stayed away for about three weeks. When I did go back to the store, I spoke with Rick about his recent ice sales.

He was having difficulty keeping up with demand.

"Over the past month, sales of ice are up over 500%. "Sales are great."

I smiled and explained what I had done. "If I say to you," I began, "'Don't think of the color blue,' what color do you immediately think of?"

"Why, blue of course," he replied.

"Of course," I grinned. "Now, if I say 'Don't Forget the Ice', what will you forget?"

"Hmm ... the ice!"

"Right."

With a simple shift in word choice, Rick noticed a considerable increase in his ice sales. He shared the following with me:

"Bob, as the customers stand at the counter to check out, they look up, see the new sign - 'Remember the Ice' - and usually say, 'By the way, add a couple of bags of ice as well.' They pay for their items, pick up their ice from the freezer outside the door, and go on their way."

I love this story. It reminds me just how powerful a shift in speech can be.

It may be trendy to say "Don't forget this" or "don't miss out on that" in your advertising, but why would you deliberately confuse your customers when you know a more effective way of drawing their attention to your product?

The challenge with (k)nots is that their purpose is to invert a sentence and make it mean its opposite. They turn the message inside out and upside down, befuddling the listener. Pay attention to your message and use words that make your statement clean and clear; twisting it into (k)nots serves no purpose.

I have been a student of psychology and language choice my entire adult life. It is my passion, and I have spent the last 40 years learning, observing, counseling, and putting into practice the theories I was taught, tweaking and intertwining them as I honed them

into the tools that I use and share every day to help people.

I believe that word choice is the beginning of everything. As Stephen Covey shared in *7 Habits of Highly Successful People*; "*All things are created twice, first in thought, then manifested in the physical.*" It is the key that unlocks what we are thinking, and the key that unlocks what we want to say. When you choose selectively, you place yourself in the process of examining what you really believe, how you really feel, what you really mean, what you really want, and how best to make your thoughts and desires understood.

The first step to constructing a vocabulary that supports this empowering mode of living is to identify and eradicate the words that cause problems, simultaneously replacing them with language that is strong, clear and powerful.

There are a lot of different ways we let ourselves confuse and overcomplicate our messages when we communicate. The (k)not is at the epicenter. It turns your message backward and inside out, inverts what you're saying so that your brain has the added task of translating the words to make the sentence revert to its original meaning. More commonly, the brain simply has no image of "not".

Take, for example, the last time someone said to you, "I'm not hungry." Did you continue to offer them food, perhaps just a snack or something to drink? That's because your brain heard and understood the words "I'm hungry," which equates to the need or desire to eat. It takes a lot to convince someone to stop offering food once they've heard a guest or friend say something about hunger. However, the phrase, "I'm full" and especially "I'm really full" will generally stop the flow of food offers before they even start.

(K)nots are bad enough on their own. However they also sneak into our rhetoric in alarming numbers by attaching themselves to other words, creating the monsters that are featured on what I like to call my "Not, and the Hit List Six:

Not
Don't
Can't
Won't
Wouldn't
Couldn't
Shouldn't

We are so desensitized to "don't," or "do not," that the (k)not flies right past us; it fails to register, even as a counter to the rest of the statement. All we hear is the idea that follows.

Do you doubt the truth behind this? The best way to see it in action is to watch the way children respond to it.

Standing in a bank line recently, I had the chance to observe, yet again, just how ineffective the word "don't" is with children.

A little girl of about five or so was fidgeting and started eyeing the velvet rope guiding our line while waiting for a teller.

"Don't touch that," her mother ordered.

The child reached out and touched it.

"I said, 'don't touch the rope,'" her mother repeated.

Again, the little girl touched the rope, this time making it swing a little. What she was hearing was "Touch the rope."

Deterred temporarily by the tone of her mother's voice the third time she was told (k)not to touch the rope, the little girl waited a couple of heartbeats and then touched it again, and again, playing with it until it started to creak and swing rapidly, thus annoying the people around her.

By using the words "don't touch the rope," her mother had solidly planted and nurtured the idea of touching the rope in her child's head. It became the dominant idea, and the temptation was too much for her to resist, despite her mother's anger. Her mother kept saying "don't touch" and the little girl kept hearing "touch."

Now, if her mother had known about the uselessness of "don't," she could have come up with far more effective ways to keep her child from playing with the rope.

The most effective idea would have been to give the child instructions that included what she could do.

"Please keep your hands to yourself," would have been a decent start. Handing her something to hold onto carefully would have been better.

She could be told quite simply and clearly to stop. She could be told to put her hands in her pockets or behind her back. She could be asked to hold her mother's hand or purse or the keys. Failing that, her mother could distract the child entirely by engaging her in conversation.

I have seen this behavior pattern time and time again, and it rarely fails to amuse me. It also frustrates me. The remedy to the situation is often so simple, and would make running errands just a little easier for both parent and child, however there is a taboo in society about making child-rearing suggestions to strangers. Instead, I had to write a book. My hope is that you will invite me into your living room in the form of this book, and that you will find my observations and suggestions helpful.

Doubting the validity of my theory that using "don't" in a set of instructions will have the opposite of the desired effect, a friend of mine put it to the test while we were on the phone. Her 10-year-old son had been quietly playing with his Hot Wheels while we talked. He had been driving them on and around the couch as one of their cats slept soundly and undisturbed on the ottoman.

Engrossed in the game, the boy had been ignoring both his mother and the cat.

I heard my friend say to him, "Looks like you're having fun, but don't drive your cars on the cat." She then pretended to turn away, and sure enough, he glanced up to see if she was watching and immediately drove his car up the ottoman and over the cat.

This is a considerate child who rarely disobeys his parents. He was unable to resist what he heard as a suggestion to drive his cars over the cat. Later, he asked his mother

why she had thought of such a thing. Why drive a car over a sleeping cat?

My wife and I can predict with frightening accuracy just how quickly a child who has been told (k)not to spill something will make a mess, while a child who is told to be careful will do just that. The child who makes a mess will generally burst into tears or otherwise show remorse; they had no intention of spilling, they just did what they thought they heard they were told to do.

Adults cause confusion with "don't" on a regular basis, even when talking to themselves. Have you ever said to yourself, "don't forget the keys," only to have to run back for those keys later because you forgot them? That's because in effect what you were telling yourself was "forget the keys." Next time, just say, "Remember the keys."

I have another friend who makes sure she takes a moment to deliberately tell herself, "Remember that" every time she sets down her cell-phone to wash her hands in a public restroom because she grew tired of leaving it behind.

"Don't" is an insidious little word that shows up virtually everywhere lately, especially in catchy advertising and public service announcement slogans.

There is a reason Nancy Reagan's anti-drug use campaign slogan was "Just Say No" instead of "Don't Do Drugs." Think about it for a minute. "Just Say No" is a positive command, clear and uncluttered. It gives you something to do. "Don't Do Drugs" registers as an idea to do drugs.

"Don't speed" is just as bad, as "Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk." How about, "Friends Get Friends Home Safely?" I have included a long list of some of the most common ways we use and ignore "don't" at the back of this book. I have also included some alternate phrases to get you started. You will have fun coming up with your own once you get used to it.

The words we tie up with (k)nots are what I call disempowering words. As you continue to replace them with alternatives, you will find the process of selective word choice to be empowering.

"Will" and "would" are empowering words. They imply intention. When you intend, you open the world up to possibilities, especially when those intentions are good. But when those words become "won't" and "wouldn't" they confuse, undermine, or even try to reverse your intentions. When you set your sentence up to use a "won't" or a "wouldn't," you set it up to support a negative inversion of an intention. Remove the (k)not in that intention - because that's what the brain of the listener will do - and your negative inversion becomes a positive.

For example, say you have just done something that has caused you pain like hitting your head on the low ceiling as you descend a set of stairs. Your intention is to avoid repeating the experience the next time you go down to the basement. When you say to yourself, "I won't do that again," you are setting yourself up for another nasty knock on the head. Why? Because you have set up your sentence like this: "I will (negative inversion of what I want) do that again" but your brain registers "I will do that again."

If you would like to change your behavior and spare your head, give yourself clear instructions that your brain will glom onto. Tell yourself, "I will duck next time" or "this is where I will duck my head" while looking at or picturing the offending ceiling

edge, and see what happens.

If you tell yourself "I won't let my guests hit their heads," guess what? You will forget to mention it. Instead, tell yourself "I will warn my guests about this" and you will remember to.

I find it interesting that people in positions of authority often choose disempowering words and a lot of (k)nots to motivate others, and then wonder why no one steps up to the plate for them.

It's approaching the end of the month. Your sales team is responsible for meeting a group quota on top of their individual quotas. The team earns a reward if they exceed the team quota, and every salesperson is entitled to a bonus for every sale above their individual quota. For some members of your team, it could cost them their job to fall short.

You're sitting at the head of the conference table, looking at your team, proud of their hard work, but fully aware that it's going to take a lot more hard work and some overtime just to meet the team quota. The last thing you want is to lose any of your salespeople. Even if you liked them less than you do, finding and training replacements puts a strain on the rest of the team, making it that much harder to meet next month's quota.

They're starting to sag. They're discouraged, tired of being in the current month, and beginning to doubt if all their effort was worth it. You know you have to get them fired up. You have to inspire each person to go out and work that little bit harder and make those sales for the benefit of everyone on the team. This is where your word choice can make or break your chances for making quota.

Let's look at some of the possibilities, all of which I've heard more than once during my career in sales. I follow each one with the translation of what your team actually hears.

"C'mon guys, you won't make quota with this attitude."

Well, that's just whiny, and it sounds like "C'mon guys, you will make quota with this attitude." That's a mixed message. Your tone of voice says it's a bad thing, yet you're reinforcing the present attitude.

"Don't forget you won't get your bonus if you don't make quota."

Whoa! That's three (k)nots right there that your team has to untie. What they hear is "Forget you will get your bonus if you make quota."

You could try, "Remember you won't get your bonus if you don't make quota," and then they'll hear "Remember you will get your bonus if you make quota." But what's the point of sucking the energy out of your imperative with all those cumbersome (k)nots? If you want them to remember they will get their bonus when they make quota, just say it. All those (k)nots are weighing you down and slowing them down.

"Don't slack off now, we're almost there."

I hear this sort of thing quite often, and I ask you; why on Earth would you want to

motivate someone by telling them what (k)not to do? Now slacking off is stuck in their heads and you have a problem. Either they'll go out there and slack off, or they'll stew in resentment because you implied they would do such a thing after all their hard work.

"John and Sue, you have not hit your quotas for two months in a row. You won't have a job unless you make this month's quota."

Fear has been used as a motivator since the dawn of time, but I find that positive reinforcement is a much more productive and powerful way to inspire someone to achieve. What John and Sue hear is, "You have hit your quotas for two months in a row. You will have a job unless you make this month's quota."

How about:

"We're right there, guys. Just a few more days like you've been putting in, and that quota is history! Hello bonus! Keep going out there, keep working your magic, and we will have this one locked in, easy. If anyone can do it, it's the people on this team. John and Sue, you're a little behind but we're going to get you there. Who's got ideas? Let's hear them, round the table right now."

In this situation, you have decided to use words that reinforce to the team that you believe in them. By choosing to start with "we," you have put yourself in the bullpen with them. You have made it clear that you have confidence in their ability to achieve their goal, and that doing so is something to celebrate. You have reminded them that they have to keep working hard, that their skills are enough to make it happen. You have made it sound inspiring. By reminding the people in the room that they are a team, you have united them to work toward the goal as one unit. You have also made it the team's responsibility - and a fun challenge - to find a way to help the faltering John and Sue.

Where there's a will, there's a way. The opposite is true: Where there's a "won't" there's no way.

It happens often. When I sit in on a meeting, no matter what the subject, if the people in the room are upbeat, positive, carefully constructing their message to be (k)not-free, identify themselves as a team, and are ready to take the world by storm, I get jazzed. I love witnessing how inspiring language can be, and how it can turn a seemingly insurmountable challenge into an achievable goal.

The word "wouldn't" can be so confusing that I'd be surprised if most people realize it means "would not."

"Wouldn't you like some ice cream?" What kind of question is that? If you say yes, it means you have no desire for ice cream. If you do want ice cream, the correct response is no. I'll show you what I mean: "Wouldn't you like some ice cream?" breaks down to "would not you like some ice cream?" which is a weird way to say "would you not like some ice cream?" Well, if you say "Yes," you are saying, "Yes, I would not like some ice cream."

"Would you like some ice cream?"

"Yes, I would like some ice cream."

Boy that was so much easier. If you're going to offer me some ice cream, please be as clear as possible. I like chocolate sauce and sprinkles; leave off the (k)nots.

"That confusion wouldn't have happened if you had been listening, Bob," you might say.

My brain would hear, "That confusion would have happened if you had been listening, Bob." And then I would be practically speechless with confusion.

Replace what you say when you're being lazy with deliberate diction. Choose the words you use carefully. Pay attention. Say what you mean without inverting a perfectly clear sentence because you think it's easier just to throw in a (k)not.

It will take some practice, and you will find it an empowering tool right away. I love to get feedback from friends and clients who have just started to drop their (k)nots and replace them with words that are better suited for delivering a clear, constructive, powerful message.

The word "can't" is a real challenge. Any number of successful coaches will tell you that they refuse to let their athletes think, let alone say out loud the words "I can't." They understand how destructive and discouraging "I can't" and "I cannot" are. They're on the right track, yet there's more to it.

"Can't" is a double-whammy. Used passively, it's as confusing as the other (k)nots. "I can't understand" sounds like "I can understand."

While the word "can" implies ability, the word "can't" in our society also implies refusal; refusal to try, refusal to accommodate, refusal to take part.

"I can't do it."

"I can't help you."

"I can't be persuaded."

Each of these statements is interpreted one of two ways:

"I can," which is confusing.

"I can," but I refuse to, which is irritating.

Just a few extra, better words will make a huge difference when you need to express your inability to do something without confusing or offending another person.

"I have yet to figure out how to do that."

"I would like to help you, but I am unable to. However, I will find someone who can."

"I have spent a lot of time researching this topic, and my opinions are firm."

Choosing to speak this way leaves no room for doubt. It is empowering for you because there is no room for misinterpretation, and it is empowering for the other person because it replaces the dismissive "can't" with information. This is a concept I call respectful elegance, and it is a mode of communication that you will develop with increasing proficiency as you continue to practice and invent ways to avoid using, "Not and The Hit List Six."

Next on the hit list is the word "couldn't." It, too, implies ability. When tied with a

(k)not it becomes confusing and irritating.

When someone who is trying to be helpful says, "I couldn't find it," and you find that it irritates you, it's because it sounds like they were saying "I could find it (if I tried)." But since they have returned empty-handed, your subconscious concludes that they gave up too soon or failed to try hard enough.

How often do you end up going to find something yourself after you have been told "I couldn't find it"? It's an interesting phenomenon. Instead of registering that the object was looked for, un-found and must be somewhere else, you register that the object was looked for, but inadequately.

The same applies to "I couldn't fix it." The overriding impulse upon hearing that phrase is the one that drives you to try fixing whatever it is yourself - even if it involves pipes and you have no plumbing experience. After all, you were just told "I could fix it (if I wanted to)" so it must be fixable.

The word "shouldn't" is a "loaded gun". "Should" itself is one of my least favorite words. It carries the weight of judgment, of what someone thinks ought to happen or what ought to have happened "if only" things were different. Well, guess what? Things are just things, and there's no use worrying or picking at the "if only" in life.

"Should" traps people in disappointment and bitterness. Whether your brain hears "should not" or "should," this word is an enemy of clear thinking and clear speaking. It has little to do with intention; it has everything to do with projecting your judgment onto someone else.

Think about it. Here are some examples to help:

"You shouldn't have done that."

"You should know better."

"I shouldn't expect too much."

Do yourself a favor and just kick all the "shoulds" out of your language. In fact, kick it out of your thinking and your life. You will be happier. Notice I said "will" instead of "should." I have been doing this for a long time. I know of which I speak.

As you begin to untie each of the (k)nots on the hit list, you may falter at first, and feel like you're forcing an odd issue. Stick with it; it's worth it.

At first, you will search around in your head for a word to fill in the blank that's left behind when you erase the offending word. You will start leaning on a set of words, throwing them into a sentence because they create the same meaning that the original word did.

Then, you will search around in your head for a different way to construct the sentence, reverting back to a clear, straightforward statement from the inverted one that was tied up in (k)nots.

Soon, these clear statements will be second nature, and it will be time for the next level of interacting with the components, including people, of your life.

As you build your awareness and develop a new way of communicating with the world around you - and yourself - you will start to notice transformations in the way you react to situations professionally and emotionally. Everything will get better. You will see it as clearly as you speak it.

There are several levels of communication and experience in this book. Untying the (k)nots is the first step on a road that will lead you to discovering the role that word choice plays in creating a truly enriched and enriching life.

To build a solid structure, we start at the foundation. "*There is power in the clarity of your articulation.*" TM You know why? Because this skill will lead you to a place where you can bring the experiences you crave into your life, and reshape your paradigm into exactly what you desire.

The most empowering lesson in this entire book is that you already have everything you need within you. Now it's time to learn how to use your tools to change your life.