



talking about...

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... designing better relationships for better outcomes

A newsletter for those interested in ontological coaching

When are you right or wrong?

"This isn't right. This isn't even wrong"

... Wolfgang Pauli (1900 - 1958), on a paper submitted by a physicist colleague

As I have said in previous articles, our use of language reveals a lot about our way of being and our worldview. One of the key things we look at in our work is what people say and when and how they say it. This month, I want to delve into a couple of words that get a good workout in the English language – "right" and "wrong".

As with language in general, the interpretations we bring to the use of certain words is contextual. One of the key contexts that we listen for in our work is the linguistic actions associated with the words used. You may recall that we define two of the key linguistic acts as assertions and assessments. Assertions relate to aspects of our world that can be true or false and assessments relate to the world of opinions. As such, assessments are not seen as true or false rather as carrying certain weight based on the authority we give the speaker.

If we relate this back to the words "right" and "wrong", we can see that these words make sense in the context of an assertion. $1+1=2$ is an assertion and the answer "2" is right. In other words, there is only one answer – the right one – and all other answers are wrong. However, when it comes to opinions this is clearly not the case. An opinion is a subjective point of view, not a matter of fact. Hence there can be many opinions about a particular situation. It may be that there is an opinion that held by a majority of people, but this still does not make it right; simply more popular.

It is so common for people not to distinguish between assertions and assessments that the concept of "right" assessments is generally not questioned. Indeed it plays itself out large in our lives everyday. Politicians are probably the best and most obvious example of people who are skilled at using techniques designed to have people believe that the opinions they hold are the "right" ones and therefore everyone else's point of view is wrong. This leads us into a very black and white worldview that is epitomised in George W. Bush's quote, "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

Language used in this way seems designed to polarise communities in order to achieve certain political ends. However this sort of polarisation leads to those in power disregarding the opinions of those who are not in power. This ultimately leads to much poorer choices being made as the way situations are observed becomes more and more one dimensional.

This sort of language is also prevalent throughout our work organisations, where people use their authority to create right and wrong points of view and often marginalise those who might disagree with them. This sort of management style can be seen as one that is more about getting your own way than considering better solutions. At one level, we can see this represents quite an ego-centric way of dealing with the world; one that sees the direct use of authority as being the key thing to getting things

done, rather than the more subtle skills of collaboration and influence.

At a very simple level, when we hear "right assessments", at some level we are hearing someone seek to put their view across as "the only way". We invite you to listen to the conversations in your world today and observe how many people use a "right assessment" in order to achieve an end. You may well be surprised by what you find.

"If you want to build a ship don't herd people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

... Antoine de Saint-Exupery, 1900 -1944, Author

A Little Humour ...

Thanks to Julie who sent this one through to us ...

Apparently, at a computer expo a little while ago, Bill Gates reportedly compared the computer industry with the auto industry saying, "If GM had kept up with technology like the computer industry has, we would all be driving \$25 cars that got 1,000 miles to the gallon."

GM apparently responded by pointing out that if GM had developed technology like Microsoft, we would all be driving cars with the following characteristics:

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1. For no reason whatsoever, your car would crash twice a day.
2. Every time they repainted the lines in the road, you would have to buy a new car.
3. Occasionally, your car would die on the freeway for no reason. You would have to pull over to the side of the road, close all of the windows, shut off the car, restart it, and reopen the windows before you could continue. For some reason you would simply accept this.
4. Occasionally, executing a maneuver such as a left turn would cause your car to shut down and refuse to restart, in which case you would have to reinstall the engine.
5. Macintosh would make a car that was powered by the sun, was reliable, five times as fast and twice as easy to drive - but would run on only five percent of the roads.
6. The oil, water temperature, and alternator warning lights would all be replaced by a single "This Car Has Performed an Illegal Operation" warning light.
7. The airbag system would ask, "Are you sure?" before deploying.
8. Occasionally, for no reason whatsoever, your car would lock you out and refuse to let you in until you simultaneously lifted the door handle, turned the key and grabbed hold of the radio antenna.
9. Every time a new car was introduced, car buyers would have to learn how to drive all over again because none of the controls would operate in the same manner as the old car.
10. You'd have to press the "Start" button to turn the engine off.

It all depends on your point of view, doesn't it!!

***"Your coffee's warm but your milk is sour
Life is short but you're here to flower
Dream yourself along another day
Never miss opportunity***

***Don't be scared of what you cannot see
Your only fear is possibility
Never wonder what the hell went wrong
Your second chance may never come along ..."***

... Pete Murray, Opportunity, See the Sun

More Interesting Links

The Newfield Network is one of the primary ontological coaching organisations in the world. They are currently growing their European organisation and are offering some programs in that part of the world. Given our commitment to growing this work around the world, we invite you to take a look at their web site and explore the value of their programs for you. You can find out more at www.newfieldeurope.com.

"The longest journey is the journey inward."

... Dag Hammarskjold Swedish diplomat (1905 - 1961)

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