

We have created a world that moves at a pace our bodies were not designed to contend with. Our biology has not developed anywhere near as fast as our technology.

In a week we can now have more input and stimulation to our nervous systems than people experienced in a year just 2 centuries ago.

We have created our world with language, and if we are going to successfully adapt to the revolution in communications, the flattening of the world, and the epidemic of change, we must grasp **the generative nature of language**. It is the key to our collective future and the key to your transformation.

Because this idea is so important to the work we're going to be doing together, let's be clear about how humans use language to generate their realities. I don't mean that you can simply announce, "I won the lottery!" and make it true. That would be magic, and we're talking about how language shapes reality, not fantasy. And yet a new world opens up when we see the possibilities we hold when we truly comprehend **the generative power of language**.

Let's turn to shaping a deeper understanding of what I mean when I talk about language and to building some basic practices in this new realm. I will begin by teaching you what we call the basic linguistic moves, then show you how we use these moves to construct and make operational the principles that will enable you to take your place in this new world. When I talk about language, I am not talking about a specific language such as English, French, Chinese, Spanish, or Hindi. I am talking about the phenomenon of language.

All languages contain the same linguistic building blocks, and I refer to these as the basic linguistic moves.

What this means is that whenever a human being opens his or her mouth to speak, he or she is making one of these moves, regardless of what language is spoken. The basic linguistic moves are:

- **Declarations**
- **Assertions**
- **Assessments**
- **Requests**
- **Promises**
- **Offers**

That's it. That's all there is. There may be a million words in the English language, but no matter how you mix, match, or configure them, you will be making one of these moves.

Once you begin to see that these basic moves construct your world, entirely new realms of possibility will open up, and actions that you would have thought impossible will become commonplace.

Read any magazine, newspaper, or book, and all you have are various combinations of these moves. Once you come to see them clearly, you will be able to perceive things that others don't, laugh at some of the pretentiousness around you, and be very clear about what is unfolding-how language is in that very moment shaping reality. Stay with me and watch what happens. Here is how these basic linguistic moves work...

[NOTE— I skipped over Declarations in an attempt to keep this as short as possible. The point I'm after here has to do with TRUTH and the power of language to OPEN and CLOSE POSSIBILITIES— JMF]

ASSERTIONS

Assertions are statements that we usually refer to as facts. They can be true or false, and are always oriented to the past or present, never to the future. To be a "true" assertion, it must pass what we call the universal observer test. This means that anyone on the planet, no matter what country he or she is from, would agree with your assertion. Grass is green, water is wet, the sky is blue, and $2 + 2 = 4$ are all things that a universal observer would attest to. After that, the list starts to dwindle.

**When you apply the universal observer rule,
you will find that there are very few things**

that you can assert. There just isn't that much TRUTH out there.

We can assert things only about the past or present because these are the increments of time that we can observe: They have occurred or are unfolding in the moment. The future hasn't happened yet, and thus we can't assert anything about it as fact. There is strong evidence to suggest that the sun is going to rise tomorrow, but we can't state that as an assertion because much as we might all want it to, there is no certainty until it actually happens.

ASSESSMENTS

Assessments constitute the bulk of human speech and communication.

These are our opinions, feelings, thoughts, sensations, and personal points of view, and are the building blocks for our interpretations of the world and characterizations of each other.

While we spend a lot of time dishing them up, assessments are useful only for designing action, and it is their relationship to action that gives them power.

Assessments open and close possibilities for action, and people act out of their assessments, not their assertions.

"Sales are down from this period last year" is an assertion. For now let's assume that we can pull out the comparative sales charts and prove that it is true. So what? The answer to that question depends on your assessment. In and of itself, the statement doesn't drive any particular action. The chief financial officer may assess that this means we need to cut spending and thus he would predictably propose a cost-cutting plan. The head of sales may assess that it means we aren't doing enough to generate business, so we need to spend more on sales initiatives. Which one is right or true?

Neither, as assessments are never true

or false.

They are what we call grounded or ungrounded. Grounded means that you can provide assertion-based evidence to support your assessment, and ungrounded means that you cannot. The CFO may base his assessment on his years of experience and the claim that he has been through this before. The head of sales may base her assessment on a comparative analysis of financial performance as driven by research on proportionate investment in sales initiatives over time. Does that make her assessment true? No, it means that it is grounded, but no matter how much grounding you have for an assessment, no matter how much you may like it, or how many people agree with it, it is never true.

This is critical, as you will soon find that most of who you think you are is a construct of ungrounded assessments.

Moreover, you will discover that much of what you have always assumed to be the truth or facts about life and our world are merely assessments that have been masquerading or sold to you as assertions.

Unlike assertions, assessments can be oriented toward the future. "I think it is going to rain tomorrow," "I think the market is going to tank," and "I am sure the sun will be up in the morning" are all assessments. They may be grounded, but they can never be true.

Here is why this matters as we work to build the new you. Outside of your physicality—your height, weight, gender, eye color, hair color, and age—there is nothing that we can assert about you that is true. Everything that you think of as your immutable character or nature is all a collection of assessments. You may think, or others may tell you, that you are kind, gracious, attractive, sexy, smart, generous, lazy, or self-centered. None of it is true, not the parts you like or agree with, not the parts you don't like or deny. None of it is true, as they are all assessments.

They may be grounded or ungrounded, but they are all *always just assessments*.

Again...

The reason we need to wake up to this is because assessments open and close possibilities, and human *beings act on our assessments, not our assertions.*

We shape the way we act and treat one another based on our assessments. Let's say you are at a party, and a friend of yours introduces you to someone named Jim. You look Jim up and down, and what I am going to call your assess-o-matic starts up. This is something that human beings do. We are constantly assessing everything and everyone. It is a survival mechanism that was very useful when we were hunting on the savannahs and needed to assess whether someone or something new was a potential threat or not, but now that we have evolved beyond that, it isn't necessary in many modern situations. At the party, it kicks in and the little voice in your head begins reeling off a series of assessments. "Hmm, tall, not too heavy, doesn't look very threatening, has a funny mustache, I am sure that I am smarter than him, etc.... " Your friend goes on to say, "Jim is a great guy, and I think you will have a lot in common as you both like to ski." *You both like to ski* sounds harmless enough, but even this assessment will open certain possibilities and close others. It opens the possibility of an interesting conversation about skiing, a potential new ski buddy, and the opportunity to share insights on the best resorts. At the same time, it may close the possibility of a conversation about snowboarding, surfing, or bowling. They may not be permanently closed, but they fade into the background in the presence of the assessment about skiing.

It is important to note that assessments are not innocent.

When you gossip about what a jerk your co-worker is, those around you are shaping an assessment, not just of him, but of you too. They will act on their assessment that you are a gossip and not to be confided in, despite the fact that they come to you for the latest dish. Moreover, your casual, "innocent" assessment of your co-worker can have unintended consequences. People aren't used to grounding assessments. They often just accept them at face value and move with them. When a new project comes up, one that your co-worker would be well suited to, he might never get a call, as someone took your assessment at face value and didn't even offer him a shot at it. Your assessments are not innocent. Each and every one opens and closes possibilities, even when they are about you.

Assessments— our opinions, feelings, thoughts, sensations, and personal points of view, are the building blocks for our interpretations of the world and characterizations of each other— are NOT TRUE.

Each assessment OPENS some possibilities and CLOSES other possibilities.

OPEN and CLOSE are neither good nor bad. They are simply open and closed.