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Words we choose

The New Year has brought a lot of political hype and grandstanding. I want to address the power that individual words have for all of us. This can be in personal relationships or in the media that we are inundated with every day. The word choice we make will make a difference in the perception that people generate in their mind regarding that particular topic or idea.

The recent events in Washington where some government employees did not get paid is a great example. We were overwhelmed with "Government shutdown" at every turn. Social media, print, television and satellite radio all echoed those words. Was the government actually shut down? Absolutely not, 86% of the government continues to operate regardless of whether there is a budget in place. The government is not actually shut down. The question is how many Americans just take the narrative and believe the word picture that the words imply? When I think of a business closing even for a short time, I create the picture in my mind of a building that is locked and maybe even chains on the door. The windows may be boarded up and the parking lot is empty. The government shutdown was far from this scenario. There were some federal agencies that were affected and people did not get paid which is wrong. The bottom line here is that the words that were chosen did not reflect reality but were effective in creating an emotional response in people. This term is not new and has been used many times in the past for the same purpose. There are better words that would more accurately describe the reality but would not create the desired emotional response. What if the words chosen were: Some agencies have suspended funding? Does that generate the same picture in your mind as "government shutdown?" Likely not, which is why those words are not used even though they are accurate. Words have power to drive perception.

The other word that is being bounced around in Washington that is tied to the previous situation is the "wall." I have heard several politicians in the last few weeks state that they could support a barrier but not a wall. The most notable wall was in Germany and there were a lot of negatives associated with that structure. There are those in Washington that seek to drive public opinion and have used that word to develop a picture of something that is bad and immoral. I personally do not understand how enforcing our laws and protecting Americans is immoral? I spent 7 years living and ranching in South Texas and I fully understand the crisis of protecting our borders. It was 25 years ago when I lived there and it was bad then and has only gotten worse. I am saddened to listen to those who have lost loved ones to violence from people who are in our country illegally. Where is the immorality in their loss? Why was that person allowed to remain in our country when they were breaking the law? It is irrelevant what a person believes about immigration when someone's life is taken. Does the word chosen really have an impact on whether someone will accept the general idea? Obviously it does based on the current public perception. This particular word does provide an adequate excuse to drag their feet. Words have power to impede progress or derail opportunities.

What words do you choose when you relate to your employees and are they communicating the message that you want to convey? I was recently discussing heifer condition with one of my colleagues. My word choice was that the heifers were fat while he chose to describe them as well developed. My choice brought negative while his brought a positive response. The heifers still have the same BCS but his words did not create a negative picture with our client. I am fortunate that I work with someone that holds me accountable to make good word choices. Think about the words you use and the word you hear. They have power.