

Words have the power to shape our lives

by Mark Pavilons

“A word once let out of the cage cannot be whistled back again.” Horace

This eloquent Roman lyric poet coined the phrase “carpe diem” – seize the day – and believed we should be “modest” in speech, but excel in action.

We are a verbal species and our words are everything to us. Every language has its own nuances, so it's important to not only use the correct terms, but in the correct way.

Despite our large vocabulary, misunderstandings are commonplace. The content and structure of our language all contribute to how our message is received and perceived.

How often have you engaged in conversation and said to someone, “that's not what I mean,” or “that's not what I said”?

The first essay is believed to have originated some 5,000 years ago in Egypt.

Coincidentally, it was about speaking effectively.

In this age of instant communication, the preferred method of exchange is written – texts, memes, images, posts, emails. It seems we are more apt to approach someone in these ways than actual words or phone calls. Are we “hiding” behind walls of words without context?

Author Stefan Fatsis notes the digital era is historically robust linguistically. Social media is a hothouse for neologisms, and the internet is both an enabler and an accelerant for the ridiculously rapid adoption of new words.

The idea of the dictionary as a living document has never been truer.

Merriam-Webster published a new edition of its Collegiate Dictionary every 10 years, which is about how long new words were required to percolate before gaining entry. Today, updates happen several times a year, and words speed into the limitless online dictionary faster than ever before.

The power of words goes beyond just conveying facts or information. Words can shape a conversation by forming our ideas into meaningful conversations. When speaking with another person, it is important to consider which words are best suited for the situation at hand so as to effectively communicate without offending or alienating them.

Words play a critical role, especially when trying to convey emotion. The way we use our words reflects our emotional state and can reveal our true feelings even when we may be trying to mask them. Learning to understand the power of words, and using them wisely, is a key component of “emotional intelligence.”

Ultimately, the power of words should not be underestimated.

In fact, they are among the most powerful of human creations.

Deep, meaningful words, in documents, books, Scripture, poems, charters, manifestos and even posters plastered on lamp posts, can stir and evoke emotion.

Words, especially emotional ones, can lead to conflict, unrest, revolt, hatred and violence.

We see it every day. And we've seen it throughout our history.

We are emotional creatures, and are often overwhelmed by feelings when trying to convey our thoughts.

I'm in the communication business, and I have to choose my words carefully when I write articles for the newspaper. For news or feature articles, there can't be any room for vagueness or innuendo, unless it's intentional. The message should be crystal-clear.

For me, words paint a picture, on the canvass that are the pages of the King Weekly/Sentinel. I help people's stories come to life. Injecting emotions is also important, to capture the subject's passion.

Of course, I'm getting my information from people who aren't the best or most accurate of sources. When someone says, well that isn't true, it sometimes depends on who you ask. I have learned there are often three sides to every story one on each extreme, with the truth resting somewhere in the middle.

I've tried to leave lasting messages, albeit my own personal diatribes. The funny part is all of my written creations will be left fatherless upon my departure. Who will read them when I'm gone?

And yet, words alone can't necessarily reveal the inner workings or inner substance since we're quite complicated souls.

They impose limitations on our perception and they often fail to convey the full depth and complexity of what we're trying to describe.

That's what makes this world and the people in it very interesting.

Art, music, film, poetry, photography all impart emotions on the viewer. Often, words alone can't express the total picture.

Lawrence Durrell once said that music is love looking for words.

And Horace noted that a picture is a poem without words.

We can be speechless, and there are many moving moments in life that leave us without words.

It's funny because we think in words. I compose ideas in full and partial sentences, paragraphs, complete with punctuation. Perhaps that's the writer in me.

We absorb, digest and decipher the words we hear from the mundane TV commercials, to the stirring sermons of pastors. It's like enjoying a meal, starting with the appetizer and wrapping things up with a delicious dessert.

We can hang on every word, and even have a word with ourselves. We spring into action from the word go and sometimes spread rumours via word of mouth.

And the unspoken word can be quite profound.

A word to the wise: sometimes it's a good idea to bite one's tongue.