

HR Heuristics



About Rashmi Datt: [Rashmi Datt](#) is an independent HR consultant and works regularly with companies such as ACC, Areva, Reliance Power etc in the area of individual and organisational development and is an acclaimed author. Her latest book is on Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and is titled 'And the Lion Smiled at the Rabbit.' Read on for take-aways on how to strengthen your own EQ which we hope will also strengthen your business.

Read her blogs at [Emotional Intelligence at Work Place.](#)

How do you speak to yourself?



Recently a colleague was visibly upset because she was informed at the last minute of a change in a programme. She complained bitterly that it affected her entire week-end schedule. 'I am so angry. How could people be so disorganized...this is immensely frustrating for me, I now have to shift the doctor's appointment, and I will be able to spend less time with my week-end visitors. This is terrible...I hate these last minute changes...I am so livid.'

Another friend wrote me 'I just couldn't figure out how to change the password in a networking site, it was so maddening.'

In our conversation, when we use strong words like 'livid', 'frustrating', 'hate', 'terrible', 'furious', 'nightmare', 'disaster', 'never', 'can't', 'bored' we are actually tuning into a frequency of intensifying our own negativity. We are creating our own zones of intolerance when we say 'I can't bear it.' Here are some more examples of statements you may hear from others, or statements that you may be making!

- 'I *hate* going to a government office! It makes me so *frustrated!*';
- 'I can't handle my relatives (read in-laws!) they are so terribly boring';
- 'What nonsense he is talking';
- 'My client is a nightmare to deal with.'
- 'How dare my boss ask me to work late. This is too much. I can't handle this',

We are actually creating our own world around us with the words we use. The words we choose to describe our experience, defines our own reality, making it concrete, more tangible. If your dentist tells you, 'This will hurt quite a bit!' you will probably find the procedure more painful than if you've been told 'You may experience some discomfort'.

Have you noticed when a nurse attends to a patient, she asks 'How is your discomfort?' The patient may well have reported an 'acute pain'. But deliberately referring to it as discomfort, a less intense word than pain, diminishes the awareness of the distress in the patient's subconscious mind.

This rule is applicable in both situations: When we talk to others, and when we talk to ourselves too. In our own self-talk also when we use strong negative words we are increasing the bitterness of our own pill which we have to swallow.

<i>Instead of using powerful negative words like:</i>	<i>Replace it with:</i>
I hate going to a government office. It makes me so frustrated.	I don't like dealing with government offices; it puts me off.
I can't handle my relatives, they are so terribly boring!	My relatives have different interests; it will be a challenge to keep the conversation flowing for a couple of hours.
What nonsense he is talking!	He certainly has a different point of view.
My client is a nightmare to deal with.	He is a stickler for deadlines' or 'somewhat hard to please.
How dare my boss ask me to work late? This is too much. I can't handle this.	This is rather inconvenient; I don't think I can get out of it. Let me see what rescheduling needs to be done.
I just couldn't figure out how to change the password in a networking site, it was so maddening.	This is awkward; let me come back to it later.

Turning powerful negative words to milder ones reduces our perception of our stress, our frustration and inability to cope with the situation. It helps neutralize our down-beat experience, and gives us (and others) the message 'I can manage'. It keeps us on track and provides to energy to push towards our goals.

Have you noticed the language people use to describe their difficult experiences? Do you think it makes a difference in how they are perceived? Do you think it makes a difference in how they see themselves?

The article below appeared in the last issue of *The FISME Factor*. For her articles in previous issues please click on the links at the end of the following article.

Handling Success without Losing your Head

A lion once planned to recruit an executive assistant who would do the running around for him and manage his schedule, while he himself lorded it over the jungle. He cornered a jackal, and declared, 'I would never make you my prey, as you are one of the cleverest animals in the jungle. I hereby appoint you as my executive assistant, my right-hand man, to assist me in running Jungle Inc.'

The jackal answered politely, 'I appreciate your faith in my abilities, and that you have chosen me for this position. Indeed the honour is mine to work with such a revered and senior leader. There is much to learn from being with you.'

The equation worked well, as the jackal knew his place, and enjoyed the fringe benefits of eating fresh and juicy meals after the lion was done with his kill. One day, however, the lion was severely wounded in a battle with an elephant. For several days he could not hunt, and both the lion and his EA were going hungry.

The jackal said to the lion, 'Let me persuade an animal to come here, and you can kill him for both of us.' The lion was doubtful; surely no animal would be foolish enough come to the hunter's own den?

The jackal, on reaching the outskirts of the jungle, found a plump young donkey, to whom he approached and said, 'Our CEO is very impressed by your talent and personality. Your track record in serving your master, the washer-man, is tremendous. He sees great potential in you and would want you to join his team. Your first job would be as the personal bodyguard of the lion, and then gradually you would be expected to set up security and surveillance systems for the entire jungle.'

The donkey's heart was singing at the jackal's words. All he ever got from his boss were curses,

grunts and prodding with the stick. Starved of appreciation and gratitude, he gladly swallowed the bait the jackal held out to him. But he expressed some doubt. 'We domestic animals are in danger in your part of the jungle,' he said. 'We usually prefer to remain at the outskirts, closer the village.'

'About your safety, I give you my personal guarantee,' assured the glib jackal. 'Under my protection, no one will dare harm you.'

The donkey set off with the jackal. He was on such a high that he was almost walking on air. He imagined himself wielding power, with the other animals looking up to him. His true worth had been recognised at last.

However, there was a mishap as soon as they reached the lion's cave. The lion, in his haste, made a grab before the intended prey was within easy reach. The donkey kicked and pummelled in the confusion, and ran for his life.

The jackal was annoyed at the lion's clumsy move. Couldn't the fellow control his impulses? Why must his tongue be hanging out at this crucial moment? Following the rule 'never embarrass your seniors', he masked his feelings, and politely said, 'Sir, the donkey got away this time. But I will bring him again. This time you must wait until he is close enough, before you attack.' The lion nodded doubtfully. 'It is unlikely he will come again, isn't it?'

'Don't worry on that account,' replied the jackal confidently, though he did not feel very sure about it.

Following the donkey's trail, the jackal found him and said, 'That was an excellent response. The lion wanted to test your alertness and therefore made a move towards you, which you dealt with so coolly and quickly that he has no second thoughts, and wants to meet you right away.'

The poor donkey once again went along, silencing the doubts that arose in his mind because he was completely enamoured of the picture the jackal had painted of his abilities and the opportunities that lay at his feet. He forgot to exercise his own judgment, and met his end.

Ah, praise! The applause! The cheering! The recognition! Success and appreciation is a powerful motivator. It affirms our sense of identity, and boosts our self-worth. It provides us with the energy to keep going. It is a valuable source of information, confirming that we are on the right track.

But this Panchatantra tale is a wonderful illustration of the fact that when we receive recognition, we can get so inflated with our own importance that our self-assessment no longer remains accurate. We either become conceited, believing that none are better than us, or become complacent and are unable to move towards further betterment.

Then, like the donkey in this fable who got swayed by the effusive accolades by the task-focused jackal, we too can get manipulated. We could end up behaving or performing actions geared to receiving positive feedback, rather than for a commitment to excellence, or the exultation of a challenge, or for the joy of learning. Flattery can seduce us into doing something that we would not otherwise do. We lose our ability to realistically judge the situation and our own capabilities.

Mike Tyson, the world-famous boxer, was once asked, 'How do you feel after knocking out an opponent?' He replied, 'Job accomplished. This is what you've practised. When I was a kid, and I knocked a guy out, I would jump up and be excited. My mentor, Cus D'Amato, would say, "Why are you excited? You anticipated this. Anything different would be a failure."'

Tyson's answer indicates that praise or success are part of the plan, a natural course of things, and need to be treated as such.

When receiving praise, ask yourself, 'Is this something I already know, or is this a new piece of information for me?'

If it is already known, then it was expected. It is nothing to be surprised or elated about. It has simply validated a perception. Another person getting to know about this trait or talent does not mean that you have changed or become more capable. It is simply that another has now seen this quality. 'Yes, it is good to know that I am on the right track,' you can say to yourself.

If this is a new piece of information, we need to investigate further. Is this a correct view that the appraiser holds, or is it coloured by some of his own biases or requirements? Is this in line with our goals and values?

It surely requires effort and self regulation to ensure that applause doesn't tilt the balance of our sails.

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Links to Rashmi's articles in previous issues:

<http://www.fisme.org.in/Feb1&15-2012/docs/Rashmi%27s%20article-dc-%20interview.pdf>

<http://www.fisme.org.in/Jan15-2012/docs/HRHeuristics.pdf>

<http://www.fisme.org.in/Jan1-2012newsletter/docs/HRHeuristics.pdf>