

# The Most Powerful Word in Creation

## What to Say When You Don't Know What to Say

Content Subject: Avoiding Conflict, Improved Communication • Reading time: 5 minutes

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Periodically, we take actions that can only be labeled as – euphemistically speaking – “less than intelligent.” It has nothing to do with age or maturity. Knowledge of right and wrong is not the issue. It’s just that – well, at least for me – something shuts off my brain and drives me nuts. Even though I know I’m going to hate myself later, I accelerate over the cliff without regard for consequences.

Picture this day: You have a minor cold; well, at least it’s called “minor.” In reality, it’s only “minor” when someone else has it. To you, it’s a raging beast invading and thrashing through your life. Your nose is runny; you can’t stop sneezing long enough to get out a complete sentence; your head feels stuffed with cotton. Therefore you didn’t get any sleep and you’re drop-dead exhausted. What you really want is to stay home and heal. Instead, being loyal – and realizing that there’s a severe staff shortage – you drag your bones into work to face an endless frustrating, parade of annoying calls, missed deadlines, five projects (all due yesterday), and a sick co-worker (where do you think you caught the cold?). At day’s end, you hasten home, desiring only a hot bath and a warm bed.

Your spouse greets you and – innocently enough – asks, “Didn’t you go to the grocery store? I don’t have any ice cream.”

OK. Time to freeze the clock. In all honestly – and on a better day – this query could be looked at as relatively harmless – albeit insensitive. There wasn’t an ulterior motive, aside from wanting to get lost in a gallon of cold, creamy goodness. However, as referenced, that’s on a better day. Antihistamines, lack of sleep, and one too many deadlines has clouded your judg-

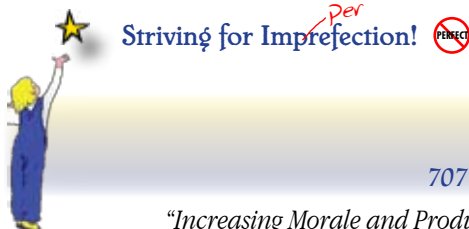
ment. You’re red-lining and that seemingly simple question becomes the final RPM to overload the engine.

You are faced with two choices:

- 1) *Relax and take a deep breath. Tell your loving spouse of 13 years that although it was your plan to get to the grocery store, the cold had other ideas; you’ll work it in at the next available opportunity. Or you provide car keys with directions to the grocery store. And by the way, it’s been a long day and you could really use 15 minutes of solitude and a hot bath.*
- 2) *You roll your eyes, exhale impatiently, and grit your teeth. Balling your hands into white-knuckled fists, you take a deep breath (sneez-ing during the process), and blast your partner with a string of words your mother taught you never to say. Moreover, you insult IQ, your spouse’s history, your lack of judgment when you decided to marry in the first place – as well as the results on your spouse’s waistline already incurred by past ice cream consumed. Upon releasing this terrible, terrifying, torrent of temperament, you turn on your heels, sneeze twice, and storm into your room - slamming the door hard enough to knock paint off the wall.*

Let analyze the results from each option. Number one gets peace and help – maybe even a little closeness. Choice number two has no upside and will probably drive the two of you into four days of silence, solitude, and sleeping in separate rooms. The decision is obvious.

So why choose number two? The results were pre-ordained. It’s not like this is the first time this has happened. Yet, know-



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ing the outcome, you still opted to jump in with both boot-clad feet and mix it up. All you really wanted was help and support. Now you have none. (But you do have the house to yourself.)

Without getting into a discussion about the selfishness of your spouse or deep psychological discussions about anger possibly being a mask for an inability to ask for help, it's worth understanding how to change this pattern.

I direct you to the use of the most powerful word in creation. Granted, that's a pretty strong statement. I mean it's not like I called it the "second most powerful word in creation" or even the "most powerful word in several parts of Texas."

The word is (are you excited yet?):

## **“WOW”**

I know what's happening right now. You're scratching your head, looking contemptuously at "WOW" thinking, "That's ridiculous. How can a word as simplistic as 'WOW' be that potent? It's so, er, um, - anti-climatic. Where's the pomp? Where's the drama? How can three letters (actually, two with one repeated) wield such influence?"

The key is in how one says it. Understand WOW is a reflective expression. In its purest form, it is merely a simple way of saying, "I heard what you said and it has value." (It doesn't say what kind of value.)

Before one can even attempt to change another's behavior, one must make sure the barriers to effective communication are minimized. Our first response when confronted by perceived insensitivity, anger, or rudeness is to "teach the other person a lesson." Whereby that might be appropriate on some karmic scale, one cannot teach a lesson that is un-wanted. To reply to the offending comment with another tactless retort only escalates the drama. By simply uttering softly and with compassion, "WOW," you acknowledge — without judgment or agreement — that you heard what was said. Since it's only three small letters, the opportunity for additional noise is also minimized, cleaning up the communication channel. You have therefore diminished the number of words and tones that could further pollute your objectives.

About the writer:

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So, why does this work? It's arguable that the strongest need we have is to be "heard," to realize that what we say matters. We don't always need someone to agree with us, but we do want our ideas registered and considered — especially from those we consider to be important in our lives. Language is at best an imperfect medium. As Ralph Waldo Emerson stated, "It is a luxury to be understood." When one correctly (with compassion while modeling the tone of the person who's speaking) uses "WOW," the other person feels acknowledged. When you acknowledge another, he looks at you as compassionate and intelligent. (Don't you relate most with those who understand your feelings)? When we are able to cut through our own problems and feelings long enough to first relate, the other person feels understood. They want to help— not hinder you. And isn't that what you want too?

To "WOW" does not mean, "You are correct" or "I'm going to do what you say." It doesn't even imply agreement. It simply states, "What you said has value," which opens the door for all parties to get what they want. And on a practical level, use of WOW gives you time to think up something more articulate if necessary and possibly continue the discussion on a more humane level, hopefully getting closer to what you really want.

Keep your eyes on the prize. Take a deep breath. Match the tone — and "WOW" your arguments away. You'll be "WOWED."