

LIVE LIFE INTENTIONALLY

# WATCH YOUR WORDS

**M**Y NIECE ALYSSA frequently tells me I'm the luckiest person she knows. When she was nine years-old, she enviously declared that the best thing about being a grown-up was that no one can *make* you do anything.

"You don't have homework. You can drive. You can stay up late, wear make-up and go shopping whenever you want to."

In short, I can do anything.

My first impulse was to laugh, but in fact, she's right.

Yet how many times have you heard yourself saying, *I have to* or *I can't*?

Despite being taught as a kid that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," words do have power. And the words you direct towards yourself have a *lot* of power.

Each time you say or think that you *have to* do something or *can't* do something, you've just sent yourself the message that you're not at choice. That's a pretty good recipe for stress and frustration.

More importantly, it's simply not true most of the time.

My client Peggy recently declared she's no longer using *I have to* and *I can't* because it makes her feel powerless. Working last week instead of joining friends for dinner, she said, "I've *decided* to stay late tonight so the rest of my week isn't out of control." A few days later when her boss made a last-minute request for her to attend a dinner meeting that evening, she



paused for a moment and reminded herself she's a *grown-up* and didn't *have to* go. Despite a few butterflies, she told him she wasn't available.

Language is powerful. You can use it to boost or bludgeon yourself. Personally, I recommend the first option!

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*"What are the expressions that give you confidence, energy, and a sense of calm?"*

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• **Banish specific words and phrases.**

*I can't* and *I have to* are worthy of banishment except when literally true – as in, "I can't bench press 500 pounds." (Unless, of course, you're a professional body builder.) There's room at the language landfill for many other words and

phrases, too. Notice which ones negatively impact you, and send them packing.

During a particularly busy time several years ago, I realized that I was describing my life as crazy and chaotic. In truth, it was neither, just very busy. But every time I used those adjectives, I could feel my blood pressure rising. It

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*“It’s not just the words you choose; it’s how you say them.”*

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might sound mundane, but when I said instead that I was simply very busy, I felt less stressed and more honest.

Words are not inherently bad, but if they add to your stress or make you feel lousy, they don’t belong in your vocabulary.

- **Find your favorites.**

Instead of thinking how she has too much to do, my friend Marsha chants, “I have all the time I need” when she feels overwhelmed. It wasn’t an overnight shift; it took her close to a month to say it with a straight face and to actually believe it. But with the new phrase now firmly planted, each utterance reminds her she *always* gets done what’s necessary. This helps her relax and keeps her focused on what’s most important.

What are the expressions that give you confidence, energy, and a sense of calm? Keep them on the tip of your tongue. Get into the habit of using them when you need a boost. Whether it’s a mantra that gets your day started on the right foot or a fallback phrase you use in situations that trigger negative speak, keep the right words handy so they are there when you need them.

- **Use the right tone.**

It’s not just the words you choose; it’s how you say them.

Remember being mad at your mother and having her say, “Don’t use that tone with me!” And

with a wide-eyed, innocent look you replied, “What do you mean?” knowing full well your voice was dripping with disdain and sarcasm.

What’s your tone when you chat with yourself? Are you sneering or genuinely laughing with yourself when you’re less than perfect? Does your voice carry a sound of support, or criticism when you make comments about yourself? It makes a difference.

- **Be your best friend.**

When your friends make mistakes, you don’t beat up on them. Likewise, their successes yield happy enthusiasm without a flicker of the suggestion that it’s not deserved.

Talk to yourself just as you would speak to your best friend. Enough said.

Watch your words. Use them intentionally. You’ll be amazed at the results.!

*If you have an idea or story to share about living with intention, or would just like to comment on this article, drop me a note at [sessig@priorityventures.com](mailto:sessig@priorityventures.com)*



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