

"With brilliance and rigor, this book shows you how to prosper differently by making love—not war—the new way of business."

—**CHIP CONLEY**, hospitality entrepreneur and
New York Times bestselling author

THE AMARE WAVE

Uplift
Your
Business
by Putting
Love to Work

əma're
Latin, verb
to love

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BOOK ONE OF THE AMARE WAY SERIES

PROMOTING OPPOSITION THROUGH PREDATORY LANGUAGE

As I shared in the Introduction, one of the most striking impressions I had of some large management consulting companies early in my career was the way that those who brought in business were called hunters, and those who did the work were called skimmers. In our business culture, it is certainly easy to get caught up in this kind of violence-laden and predatory language. I've caught myself using phrases like "capture market share" and "fighting competitors," and in strategy sessions with clients on business development, new product innovation, or positioning and branding, I've often heard things like:

How do we hunt down our target customers?

What market segments can we exploit with our solutions?

How can we steal customers from our competitors?

What's our plan of attack for capturing more of our customers' wallet?

Over time, I became increasingly disturbed at the predatory nature of these metaphors, especially in relation to customers, i.e., those we serve who give us money. *Exploiting* customers. *Capturing* customers. *Stealing* customers. *Hunting down* customers. Really? We think and talk about customers in terms of violence, and that violence is what we aim to *do* to them?

Maybe I felt this more strongly because several of the clients posing these questions were in the humanitarian business of health and well-being. But for any company, this kind of predatory language promotes an adversarial relationship dynamic in which the business aims to overpower, dominate, and subdue its customers. In short, the business only "wins" when the customer is beaten.

We all know that language is immensely powerful and that it has lasting impact. This recognition led Marshall Rosenberg in the 1960s to create the Nonviolent Communication (NVC) process—also referred to as Compassionate Communication because the core premise is about understanding, valuing, and meeting people’s basic human needs by replacing any kind of violence in language with responsible and compassionate words.

Think back to your early years: If perhaps a teacher—even once—said something hurtful to you, such as “You’re just not smart in math,” or a parent said, “Why can’t you be more like your brother?” you know that those words can be internalized and negatively affect you for years. The same holds true for the *positive* words that get through and stick. The words people say shape us continuously throughout our lives. In business, you have no doubt experienced this, either as the one speaking or the one receiving the message. Words can edify, encourage, embolden, enlighten. They can also denigrate, dishearten, disrupt, and destroy.

**Violence-laden language always hurts business,
rather than helps it.**

Even if all a business cares about is making money, treating customers as prey is not the optimal path to success. Why? Because the relentless stream of predatory thinking and corresponding language in business causes suffering. It promotes an attitude of fear, self-protection, and unkindness that serves no one. It also breeds contempt, while diminishing respect and gratitude. And worst of all, little by little, it hardens people’s hearts. The *amare* alternative is thoughtful choosing and using of words that convey compassion and caring rather than violence and predatory intent.

WINDOW

**A Shift in Language Promotes a
Shift in Perspective**

Sister Mary Jean Ryan recognized the power of language and long ago institutionalized a non-violence language policy at SSM Health, the nonprofit Catholic healthcare system she led as CEO for many years.³² In an open letter to employees, physicians, and board members, here's how Sr. Ryan set the tone:

"We know all too well that violence exists in our nation and the world. Every day, those of us in healthcare tend to the victims of violence in our hospitals and emergency rooms. Most certainly the violence will not end until we each take responsibility for promoting non-violence in our personal lives and in our communities."

She went on to say that people at SSM can make a difference in reducing violence and promoting safety, in part, with their choice of words.

"One way is to be aware of our own language and the language spoken in our homes and offices. You may be asking, 'How can that make a difference?' Don't underestimate the power of language. We each can choose to speak to those close to us or to strangers in ways that create happiness and inspire, as opposed to language that demeans people or creates unhappiness."

Her conclusion connected simple changes in language to their purpose as a healthcare system:

A SHORT IN THE HARDWIRING

“Our overall goal with language is to help create healing environments for patients, their loved ones, and for ourselves. At first glance, it may seem like a small thing, but it is something every one of us can do to make a difference and to make the world a kinder place.”

Sr. Mary banned the use of language in SSM Health that gratuitously indicated violence, in everything from business strategy to community presentations. For example, instead of *capturing* markets, SSM *secures* markets. *Target* audiences become *intended* audiences. *Take a stab at it* gets replaced with *give it a try*. SSM Powerpoints don't use *bullet* points, they have *information* points. She wanted her employees to recognize that their words had power and should be used to strengthen their culture of healing body and spirit.³³ [italics added]

Indeed, our words reflect our thoughts and shape our actions—and they have significant consequences on those around us.

I recognize that within the culture and times in which we live, predatory language is deeply entrenched in our daily lives. It's pervasive in popular entertainment, advertising, competitive sports—and need I even mention politics! But the fact that warlike language is ubiquitous in our culture and common in business does not make it right, necessary, or acceptable.

A story on PRI's *The World* called “How Gun Culture Permeates Our Everyday Language” opens with some relevant questions:³⁴ Have you ever found yourself “sweating bullets” because you were “under the gun” at work? Ever hatched a “bulletproof” plan? Or taken a “shot in the dark?” Told a joke that totally “misfired?” Ever had an idea that was “shot down” right on the spot? If you have, did you “stick to your guns?”

In the story, Bob Myers, a cultural anthropologist who studies language, violence, and culture, points out that this pervasive “gun

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“speak” has so permeated all levels of American culture, we often don’t even notice we’re using those kinds of expressions. The article raises the question: If the expressions are so common that they are stripped of violent intent, does it matter that we use them so casually? Myers responds that though he scientifically sees a strong association, he does not see the evidence to claim direct causality, i.e., that using violent language is why we as a nation have so many killings. But it is clearly a contributing factor, as he suggests when he raises the provocative question that if instead of “gun speak” we routinely used all kinds of racist words and expressions without thinking about it, would we be more racist or accepting of racism? My guess is yes. And by extension, if compassionate language was the order of the day, would we not be far more love-centered in our world?

In the same way that I took part without initially being aware of it, most of us use some predatory language in everyday conversation and don’t even notice it as such. But that’s no longer an excuse. It’s time for us to both *notice* and *choose* our language consciously. We have reached a time when there is no longer space for a violence-based paradigm that uses predatory language in relating to customers or competitors. Being rooted in fear, this language is not only self-defeating, but it perpetuates a negative mindset and wears people down. In addition, it does not genuinely serve employees, meet customer needs, or sustain healthy relationships. And, through the insidious and sometimes invisible damage predatory language causes, it can greatly reduce profitability over the long haul. As the main conveyance of our thoughts and beliefs, language truly matters.

If you want to change the world, change the metaphor.

—JOSEPH CAMPBELL

MIRROR
How Predatory Is Your Language?

1. Have you noticed the violence in the language of business?
2. When you think about how pervasive this language is in business, does it bother you?
3. Is violent or predatory language commonly used in your company?
4. Do you tend to use warlike euphemisms in your work?
5. Do you believe business needs this kind of language in order to motivate people?
6. Do the words you use in business match your values and beliefs?
7. Can you imagine eliminating violence-laden language in your company?
8. Do you believe business can be highly profitable without resorting to warlike language?
9. Will you commit to replacing predatory words with more compassionate language?

Based on your answers to these questions, place yourself on the scale below with regard to how prevalent predatory language is in your work world—with 1 being highly prevalent and 10 being nonexistent.

