Generative Language: The Language of Leadership

By Tony V. Zampella

The Zampella Group works with learners in the philosophy and pragmatics of language. We hold a particular relationship to language as generative. We explore “our way of being human in language” through an ontological inquiry. This “inquiry” has learners experience the generative properties of language as action, stretching learners beyond command of a new set of words or a vocabulary. We use generative language in a manner that develops our mind as a “system of meaning and thought.”

This paradigm shift – from language as descriptive to language as creative – fundamentally alters the way we speak, listen and act. We develop the properties of generative language through categories such as declarations, offers, promises, requests, assertions, and assessments, which discloses how language creates reality in our speaking and listening. These linguistic categories reveal creative properties of language observed in action, which has us relate to reality through interpretations and distinctions in action.

- Once embodied, individuals will relate to their listening as creation and their speaking as action.
- Once proficient in this “inquiry,” these properties can be applied to any discipline, situation or circumstance.

In this way it is possible to see generative language as the “Language of Leadership.” Fundamentally, the critical difference between leaders and others is the way leaders create reality in their speaking; the way leaders speak. For them language is action. Not action as content, but as context: the capacity to honor choices and recognize opportunities to act and forward action. In every field, discipline, artistic endeavor and business, leaders can see action and will act while others observe, evaluate, explain, assess, complain, etc. Without the ability to act, leaders cannot serve.

For instance, John F. Kennedy’s declaration that … We would place a man on the moon and return him home safely by the end of the decade, created that possibility in the hearts, and minds of all Americans. In his speaking he focused attention and intentions, aligned resources, shifted agreements, and created urgency merely because he was willing to speak and act – and we knew it. At the time of his declaration, the metal to construct such a spacecraft had yet to be invented. Still, the country was aligned in a vision that occurred in his speaking with no evidence to offer to those seeking it.

Unlike descriptive language, which offers evidence for its claims, generative language offers no evidence, only authority – creating from nothing, from no evidence -- spoken from the depths of responsibility and integrity.

The profound nature of what’s possible when we situate ourselves as creators in language alters how we act and learn and enhances our ability to serve others. All speaking and listening in this domain is grounded in your word as the source of action, and is intentional. It cannot be spoken by those with a weak relationship to their “word.”” Here, even the responsible choice not to act is a conscious choice that forwards action. Indeed, in this mindset a leader’s ability to think, reflect and observe at a deeper level aligns choices, focuses attention and intentions, and is the source of action.

Coaches at the Zampella Group are trained in the ontology of language and its generative properties. We coach in an ontological inquiry, which, when embodied and practiced creates a mood of action, and over time cultivates trust, generates commitment, enhances performance and builds relationships. Consistent application of generative language alters the observer you are, thereby altering your individual context, how you learn, and how you view the world.