

# The Power of Words

By Eileen L. Berman

A funny thing happened to me on the way to the forum: a heavy weight came down and whacked me over the head! An emotional **whack** can be as devastating as a physical one, and this one packed a great emotional **wallop**. Unemployment.

For years, I have listened to stories of people who faced **crises** in their lives. I **marveled** at how they reached out for help and battled their way through it. Today, I find myself in a crisis situation and I think back on those clients and wonder how they got through it. What was their experience really like? How did they manage to keep their heads above water while feeling as if they were drowning? How did I contribute to their well-being? What was I doing that made a difference? What is making the difference for me now? The **crucial** element is the power of words. What do people say that make a difference, lift my spirits, motivate me and **spur** me **on**? I find the power in the survival stories I am told. After all, that's what you take with you from any encounter —the emotional memory and the words that inspire.

I ask questions. Did they go through denial, anger, **bargaining**, acceptance? Were they aware of the different stages it would take to get them to believe that this was really happening? One of my clients described the experience as “surreal.” Even 10 years later, she looks back at her experience as having belonged to someone else. I could relate to that. Certainly, at this  **juncture**, my life has changed dramatically. How was I to **cope**? The fact that I was now going through an experience that many others have gone through and will continue to go through gave me a profound awareness of the power of words. Perhaps I didn't listen to people as keenly prior to this event or I wasn't as needy for encouragement and support. Either way, I began to realize that my spirit was awakened by so many people uttering words that had the power to invigorate me and give me hope.

Telephone calls on a daily basis from people I **scarcely** knew, the cards with beautiful messages attached, the food that neighbors brought in and the offers of help all **overwhelmed** me and gave me the strength to **plow through** a difficult time. Their words made me aware of my significance in other peoples' lives and their significance in mine. Not a small thing. Particularly in these difficult times with so many people unemployed and the anxiety of holding on to jobs, I believe this message has great relevance. If only we were all aware of the power of words in everyday interactions: supervisor to supervisee, employer to employee, parent to child, husband to wife. Could our lives be improved?

Someone once said, “Words can **sting**.” But they can also **soothe**. By supplying hope in time of difficulty, they can motivate a person to begin to sort out his life and learn to cope. It gives a person a feeling of his own significance in the lives of others, a very profound sense of meaning to impart. Particularly in today's employment situation, a kind word from one co-worker to another or telephone calls to a fellow worker who has lost his job or a written message sent regularly can make the difference between inaction and action. “Just thinking of you, John” can be significant in

a person's sense of self-esteem as he struggles to find work. Since we find a sense of identity in what we do, to be remembered as a part of a team on a regular basis by one's former co-workers gives a sense of power to words that cannot be underestimated.

By the same token, the recipient of these words has to realize the power of his own words in **conveying** appreciation and gratitude to others. Survival is not a one-way street. To feel good about receiving, one has to feel good about initiating. And in these times, with so many people out of work or waiting to join the ranks of the unemployed, it seems to me the power that words convey should be uppermost in our minds as we interact with others. I am richer for it as I am profoundly grateful to all those people who took the time to acknowledge my pain.

Losing one's job is a deep and personal affront to one's sense of self. We need the awareness of others to help us through this, and the power of words is what makes all the difference.

Text taken from: [www.iienet2.org/uploadedFiles/IIE/Management/IM\\_MJ09\\_Berman.pdf](http://www.iienet2.org/uploadedFiles/IIE/Management/IM_MJ09_Berman.pdf)

**Exercise.**

Match the words to their meaning.

| 1. WORD          | A. MEANING  |
|------------------|---|
| 1. Whack         | A. Extremely significant or important.                        |
| 2. Wallop        | B. To contend with difficulties and act to overcome them.     |
| 3. Crises        | C. To affect deeply in mind or emotion.                       |
| 4. Marvel        | D. A sharp, swift blow.                                       |
| 5. Crucial       | E. To cause to suffer keenly in the mind or feelings.         |
| 6. Spur on       | F. To become filled with wonder or astonishment.              |
| 7. Bargain       | G. A hard or severe blow.                                     |
| 8. Juncture      | H. To bring comfort, composure, or relief.                    |
| 9. Cope          | I. To execute: to face.                                       |
| 10. Scarcely     | J. A point in time, especially a critical point.              |
| 11. Overwhelmed  | K. To encourage someone or something.                         |
| 12. Plow through | L. Almost not; hardly.  |
| 13. Sting        | M. An instance of arguing.                                    |
| 14. Soothe       | N. To communicate or make known.                              |
| 15. Convey       | O. A crucial or decisive point or situation; a turning point. |