



Metaphors Not to Live By

A NEW LANGUAGE FOR DIALOGUE



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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE BY METAPHORS?

“Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is **fundamentally metaphorical in nature**. The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in **defining our everyday realities**.” - George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (1980)

TWO DEEPLY INGRAINED + UBIQUITOUS CONCEPTUAL SYSTEMS IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH

WAR + DOMINATION

LEARNING + SUCCESS

- master a concept or skill
- think tank
- dominate; killing it, crushing it, slay
- ftw (for the win)! winning!

DISCOURSE + CONFLICT

- strategy for engagement
- gain ground/lose ground; new territory
- take a shot; shoot your shot; troubleshoot
- right on target; hit the mark; on point
- backlash; clapback; attack; defend
- a battleground state/issue
- culture wars; clash of the titans

PROCESS OF SOCIAL CHANGE + PROGRESS

- in the trenches; on the front lines; in the fight
- caught in the crossfire; a movement under fire
- social justice warrior; soldier for the cause
- launch an initiative; make an impact

MARKETPLACE

TIME + EFFORT

- spend time; waste time
- pay attention
- invest work, time, effort
- what's the payoff?; return on investment

PEOPLE + RELATIONSHIPS

- market yourself; sell yourself
- my brand; that's on-brand for them
- that person is trash/garbage/worthless/useless
- high-value man/woman/person
- mutual benefit; equally invested
- sunken costs; costs incurred; net loss

IDEAS

- give my two cents
- package your ideas
- no one will buy that idea/concept/argument
- marketplace of ideas
- running out of ideas; generate/produce ideas

QUESTIONS TO THINK + TALK ABOUT

What is your reaction to the examples given above? What do they make you think, feel, or wonder?

How have you noticed yourself and others thinking, speaking, experiencing the world, and interacting with others through these frameworks (war + domination and/or marketplace)? What is the effect on dialogue and relationships?

When have you made a conscious choice to change the language you use? What has been the effect for you?

What are alternative metaphors you can identify or imagine for the various concepts listed above? That is, how else might we choose to describe discourse, relationships, success, and ideas? Feel free to think about how these concepts are expressed in other languages besides English...to name other metaphors in English that are used for these concepts, perhaps in specific communities or contexts...and to suggest new metaphors/conceptual systems.

