

# Introduction

I wrote the first edition of this book, with coauthor Julie Stiles, about ten years ago. In the years since, I have continued to facilitate people in challenging situations to be heard as they would like to be and hear others as they would like as well. I have trained people in more than twenty countries to do the same, thereby deepening my own understanding and integration of the skills offered in this book, and I expanded my capacity to use those skills in emotionally charged, high-stakes, high-conflict situations. As I reviewed *Words That Work in Business* with the idea of publishing a second edition, what struck me was how relevant it still is.

In some ways, *Words That Work in Business* was ahead of its time, as perhaps all of Nonviolent Communication has been. The ideas in this book are becoming more mainstream, with increased coverage in the media and research on such topics as empathy, positive psychology, happiness, and meaning in the workplace.

Often in the workplace, the focus is on the actual work being done. Yet, the underpinning of all efforts in any industry is communication. The key to successful communication is connection. Without self-connection, you are not going to stay present and focused on your priorities. Without connection to the person you are speaking to, you might as well save your breath, because the other person will not be available to your influence in a way that you will like.

This book—and all of my work—is fundamentally about having the tools to evaluate these conversations, including whether they are moving us in the direction we want. For instance, we have a conversation and then debrief how it went in order to learn from it. We decide how we want to do it differently next time, and eventually, we have that next conversation. This learning cycle repeats itself again and again, each iteration getting us closer to creating what we want. In this way, we create our lives one conversation at a time, whether in our

personal or professional lives. All efforts to succeed in any endeavor occur in this way.

The measure we encourage using in this learning cycle is *needs*: Did what just happened meet your needs, or when looking to the future, do you predict that one strategy versus another will better meet your needs? When you are consistently assessing and acting to meet your needs, you experience increased satisfaction and meaning in your life. With that, you're more effective in contributing to others' well-being.

Popular culture is catching up to this idea that contribution, satisfaction, meaning, and happiness are important and worth paying attention to in the workplace. Yet, despite this increased attention to these topics, the "how" of creating these outcomes is often lacking.

*Words That Work In Business* provides that "how." It tells you where to focus your attention and what conduct to engage in—what to say and do—in challenging workplace situations. I've come to realize that these are the only two things over which you have some conscious control.

When I am in a challenging situation and flooded with emotion, having a map that I have practiced is like a port in a storm. A map tells me what to pay attention to and what to do. It guides me through the shoals of my conflict habits when they would otherwise take over my thoughts and actions. How often do we look back on such situations and regret what we have said and done? Practicing the skills necessary to execute these maps helps us to step out of our conflict habits and to reduce the regret we so often experience for what we have said and done under the powerful sway of the stress hormones that flood us with emotion.

Of course, my thinking has evolved during the ten years since I first wrote this book, and if you're familiar with my more recent books, including *Choosing Peace, From Conflict to Connection*, and *When Your Mind Sabotages Your Dreams*, you'll see that evolution. Yet despite how my understanding has grown, the skills, concepts, and practices included in *Words That Work in Business* are still relevant and accurate. Hence, I haven't tried to rewrite this book to be entirely consistent with the language used in later works.

New in this edition is a series of Workplace Communication Tips, which are included in Chapter 7. We'll discuss both where these came from and how you can use them to enhance your integration of the skills in these pages in the introduction to the tips beginning on page 109.

I have also written a companion to *Words That Work in Business*, titled *Collaborating in the Workplace: A Guide for Building Better Teams*, that provides specific maps to support people working in teams, whether in the workplace or in the community. These maps guide you through conversations, both with yourself and others, and provide the groundwork to produce the outcomes you want.

Perhaps what has become clearest to me since the first edition was published is the importance of practicing the skills it explores in order to integrate them easily and habitually into day-to-day life. The clarity of this insight arose early on in my learning journey when many times I had the skills at my disposal but, in specific emotionally charged moments, did not have the capacity to actually use those skills. Much of my learning and offering of trainings to others has focused on how to develop this capacity to use these skills when flooded with emotion.

Finally, I have found the strategies offered in this book have transformed, much for the better, how I go about living my life. I hope they change your life for the better as well.