

PERSONAL STORY: Bathmophobia!

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A few winter ago, Juliana and I decided to go on a skiing holiday. Now we thought this would be great fun, an adventure. A week before the holiday I tried on all my old ski clothes and realised they all must have shrunk since I last wore them some years before so the next day I went out to buy something more fashionable so I could blend in on the slopes.

The clock raced by and in no time we found ourselves in the airport check-in line. We were soon standing at the top of the mountain admiring a truly magnificent panoramic view. I thought this skiing holiday is going to be great fun.

It had been many years since I last skied and it was Juliana's first time on the slopes so we joined a ski class.

Six eager new skiers lined up on the first morning of ski school. The sky was clear, though below us we could see pillow-like clouds. Our ski instructor, an Englishman I'll call John, then introduced himself and set the scene for the coming days. He said:

"My name is John. Don't worry it will be quite normal for you to feel nervous."

A few minutes later he remarked:

"Many of you are going to find it difficult, very difficult. This is normal."

A second or so later John said:

"Fear not if you don't enjoy your first day. This is normal"

He continued using these types of words for the remainder of the morning. I remember that first thing that morning everyone had informally introduced themselves, smiled and exchanged pleasantries. But by lunchtime many of the group were looking nervous and they were certainly not finding things easy.

The next morning John continued using similar words. We went to a slope to try out our new traversing skills. We all lined up. He stood in front facing us. His voice boomed out:

"B-A-T-H-M-O-P-H-O-B-I-A. Let me tell you about BATHMOPHOBIA."

Hmm, big word, I thought, I wonder what it means?

John continued:

"Bathmophobia is the fear of steep slopes. As you each traverse across this steep slope you may each suffer from bathmophobia. It is very normal to find this next exercise frightening!"

Then an amazing thing happened. I looked along our row of novice skiers and saw that everyone's knees had started shaking. This feeling of nervousness immediately became contagious as my knees started to shake

and then my hands trembled as I looked down the slope. It was then that I realised that words change minds.

The next day we thought no more lessons with John thank you. We're going to try some private tuition.

Our new instructor was called Wolf, a tall thin man with a weathered face in his late fifties. After we introduced ourselves he said, *"Skiing is easy. You are going to enjoy this class"*

He asked us how much skiing we had done and then thought for a moment and told us to expect to be going down red runs that afternoon. Wow, I thought.

In the first minute of our lesson with Wolf I skied out of control...one ski went in one direction and the other ski went in the opposite direction...I missed a tree by a few inches as I hurtled down the slope and crash landed.

As I looked up unharmed Wolf said, *"All good skiers fall over now and then. I do about once every two seasons. Now let's try that steep slope over there, it looks fun doesn't it"*

From that point Wolf's words changed our minds. Skiing became fun, the adventure we had hoped.

John's words changed our minds in a dis-empowering way - fear, nervousness.

Wolf's words changed our mind in an empowering way - enjoyment, fun.

The words you use to yourself dictate how you think and behave. Do you use empowering words or dis-empowering words to yourself? The words you use when talking to other people embed messages and change minds. Do you talk to people like John or Wolf? Just a thought.

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