

# Words Are Cheap

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Are you surprised when I tell you that I have no idea what the word 'love' means? I can tell you that I love my daughters, good food and music. It is impossible for the same word 'love' to describe such very different experiences.

Lavender is an edible herb that you can see and touch and taste and smell. You can use four of your five senses when you hold a flowering stem of lavender in your hand. Yet if I ask you to describe the scent of lavender or to describe what it tastes like, it cannot be done. Words are inadequate to describe an experience.

The January sales are barely finished when commercial interests are exploiting romance in the run up to St Valentine's Day. The media creates all sorts of unrealistic expectations for how couples should celebrate the 14 February. Feature articles in newspapers and magazines offer advice on the amount of money that lovers should spend on gifts.

Stories about romantic couples who spend upwards of 500 euro on the card, flowers, gift of jewellery and romantic champagne dinner are newsworthy. There is an unspoken inference that there is little romance for the happily married couples who celebrate with a home cooked meal

and a bottle of supermarket wine.

People are influenced by advertisements that promote extravagant gift-giving. Men are warned that flowers bought from a garage are not an acceptable gift. The commercial message about romance appears to equate the depth of love for a partner with the amount of money spent on the celebration of the day.

Whether we like to admit it or not all of us are susceptible to being influenced by advertisements, peer pressure and our own beliefs about what love is. Isn't it true that the single rose that a teenage boy presents to his girlfriend will generate a very different emotional response to the single rose each customer gets at the supermarket check-out on Valentine's Day?

Founded on the modern sciences of biology and linguistics, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) explains how we create and maintain our inner thoughts and feelings. The 'neuro' part refers to the nervous system; 'Linguistic' refers to the ability to use language; the 'programming' part is borrowed from computer science.

From NLP we know that the meaning of language is the response you get. Author Gary Chapman introduced the concept of the five love languages, which are words of affirmation,



quality time, physical touch, acts of service and receiving gifts. Different people have different ways of showing their love which, explains why an action that one person intends to show love might be overlooked by someone with a different love language.

A woman whose love language is service will feel more loved if her husband puts out the bins than if he brings her home a gift of flowers. Show don't tell is a technique that writers use to bring drama to a novel. It's also the best strategy for building strong, loving and affectionate relationships.

There are two aspects to every communication, the word message and the emotional response to what the listener hears. In the 1980s a political consultant, Lee Atwater, who

was known for coining the phrase, 'Perception is reality', said, 'Don't worry about the facts, because if you can get people to believe something it becomes a de facto fact.'

It takes no effort to say the words, 'I love you', because words are cheap. Showing your love, affection and care for someone is demonstrated more by actions than by any flowery words. The son-in-law who spent days scouring the country to find a car his mother-in-law can afford might never say 'I love you', but surely the efforts he made on her behalf are love in action.

No truer words were ever said than by poet and philosopher Maya Angelou: 'I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.'