

Words matter

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Words matter to me. They are my literal stock in trade. I write them and speak them to make a living.

I endeavour, when using words, to ensure that my meaning is clear. I don't always succeed. As a result, I try harder. Seeking clarity whilst also being entertaining (or else people would not wish to return and read what I have to say again) is vital to me. Practising getting my words, sentences, paragraphs, and message right is not an obsession of mine, but it is something not much less than that. If it seems nerdy to say so, I don't care. I cannot see what is wrong with trying to do something as well as I can.

In that case, I found a comment that Nigel Farage made yesterday particularly annoying. [He said](#):

You should always take everything Donald Trump says seriously, you shouldn't always take things Donald Trump says absolutely literally. I think that applies very much in this case.

Not only was this comment by Farage ambiguous as to its meaning, suggesting that his own approach to this issue was disingenuous, but his willingness to excuse the impression of Trump was much worse.

Trump does not have the right to be imprecise, unclear or ambiguous. Without a doubt, lives depend on what he says, how he says it, when he says it, to whom he says it, and what he means by doing so. His words have meaning, whether he appreciates it or not.

More than that, if he does not speak literally but, like Gollum, chooses to speak in riddles where it is left to us to work out the meaning of what he says and their potential consequences, the world is, at best, a more uncertain place, and at worst, a profoundly more dangerous place for many, including those for whom the resulting anxiety is intolerable.

Trump is, then, abusing his privilege by being imprecise. We are entitled to believe what he says. He has a duty to be clear. We need to be able to act, knowing that what

he says is a fair representation of the truth as he sees it. How else are we supposed to make decisions?

Farage must also know this. He is a fool, but not when it comes to the use of language, which he has mastered. His own comments are, in that case, deliberately misleading. He is very obviously seeking to condemn Trump, but in the mildest of tones, keeping open the option of simultaneously being Trump's friend, as if such a thing was actually possible with a person who you know does not always speak the truth, meaning their expression of friendship can never be relied on, making your desire for their acquaintance appear desperate.

What are the consequences of this?

We have to assume Farage is unreliable.

We know that Trump is unreliable.

We face much greater risk because of the influence of politicians of this type.

They wish to exploit that fear, which they are deliberately creating, knowing that this is the consequence of their words.

It is, then, beholden on others to speak with greater clarity.

We should expect political condemnation of the imprecision of Trump and Farage.

We should presume that those with influence will demand clarity from them.

We have a right to expect their actions to be called out unambiguously.

Instead, we get Starmer fawning to Trump because he is desperate for the photo opportunity of a day trip to Washington next week, the purpose of which Trump has already said he does not know.

Starmer is, in that case, also failing to provide leadership. His own desperation, uncertainty, self-doubt, and lack of conviction strip his words of any meaning, almost as much as Trump's desperate desire to spread confusion does so with regard to his.

In a world where words lack meaning, what can we know? How can we decide? What can we do? I go back to Viktor Frankl for an answer to this. In his post-war book, *Man's Search For Meaning*, he made clear, based on his experience of being in and surviving Auschwitz, that when there is nothing left, the choice we have is to find our meaning.

Right now, in the midst of the chaos, confusion, and uncertainty that our politicians are seemingly deliberately creating for us, I suggest that is our purpose. And when we succeed in finding our meaning, as best we are able, then our job is to use that

knowledge to inform our collective future. It is the only way I can think of to survive the current mayhem.