



THE POWER OF NO AND OTHER SINGLE WORDS

“We must build a kind of United States of Europe. In this way only will hundreds of millions of toilers be able to regain the simple joys and hopes which make life worth living”. 1946, speech to the academic youth by Churchill held at University of Zurich.

Winston Churchill would not be pleased about Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union. Having been a driving force for European integration as an answer to another war, and Europe’s hope for stability and prosperity he would stand in unity with Prime Minister Cameron.

How could this happen? Boris Johnson, who joined the Leave Campaign shouted, “Take back control” as a slogan. Who could be against take back control? People always want more control even if they don’t know what to do with it. Children grow up demanding more control, even when wise parents preach the consequence and implications.

I’ll leave the political and economic analysis to the inevitable talking heads and analysts that will pop out of the woodwork. They will tell us what it means and how it happened in their perception. They may also see a connection to remarks such as, “Make America great again.”

What I will look at are the psychological dynamics behind this action.

As a psychotherapist, I've spent many years trying to help people clean up their messes, many of which, were caused by simply saying "NO!" and not realizing the implications of their actions. No at times is almost fun to say. It's like waving a finger in someone's face and being defiant when you feel oppressed overwhelmed, unheard or simply angry.

The immediate consequence of this action is to create uncertainty. That word immediately, creates a sense of instability and anxiety in individuals and economic markets.

I regularly promote the powerful properties of saying NO! If I can't trust you're no, I can't trust your yes and vice versa. That's smart stuff and helpful said at the right time in the right context.

Britain's finger in the face of the European Union and tight vote heralding withdrawal reflects more about a psychological need, then a clear economic, political, or strategic policy viewpoint.

Standing up and leaving your cards on a table with 500 million players is a big move with even bigger consequences. During these next weeks we're going to be told why this action will have profound consequences. But maybe the real answer to the why lies within our own collective psyche.

People don't like to get pushed around especially when they feel impotent to fight back against faceless bureaucrats living in other countries. "Take back control" those may have been just the words for a group of people feeling evident and unable to make a living wage. They feel they must take care of their families.

Obviously immigration and refugees seeking solace and economic opportunity have fuel the fires that caused the UK to withdraw into it. Psychologically speaking this is a contraction reaction. If you poke an amoeba it will contract. If you poke a person the first reaction is a contraction reaction. The same is true for groups, organizations and even nations.

It's quite normal to contract when feeling overwhelmed. Moreover it's not just overwhelmed but inability to deal with that feeling. It becomes compounded adding frustration and anger when you feel unable to confront those who create those feelings within you. This may well explain the frustration in Birmingham to Brussels and Leeds to Luxembourg. England's socioeconomic regions with high unemployment and pressing socioeconomic issues often seek shortsighted solutions,

ignoring the larger implications of saying no. Northern England voted strongly to remove itself from the EU and it is insensitivity to the common workers plight.

Back to the basics of life? It conjures up images of the mom and pop store and not Costco. When gas station attendants existed, clean your window and sometimes even knowing your name. Saturday Evening Post covered by Norman Rockwell depicting simple honesty and a simpler way of life.

The “NO people” are in for a rude awakening. No is not a plan nor does it point at a direction! It doesn’t even offer a solution. It simply says no. It is an honest statement, has a basic need for attention, respect and a desire to move from powerless to powerful with control of one’s destiny.

This is a basic human need. Gratifying that need may take an awareness of a means, and a sophisticated plan to return to those basics of life. My dad, used to say, “A man is as good as his word.” The message remains the same. Promises count.

Many in the United Kingdom felt their basic needs neglected, and their words ignored as a result the word enough is enough and NO is not far behind.

Thousand years of written history of a willingness to stand alone and fight for that which is felt to be right, comes more from the part of the people from the UK then logical thinking bureaucrats from what was once a 28 country alliance.

Winston Churchill said, “All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, honor, duty, mercy, hope.” No is also a single word, one that would best be used incorporating those in Mr. Churchill’s simple single words.

ref.: Photo Churchill bust by Leo Mol
Churchill's United States of Europe speech Zurich