

Chapter 7

SECTION 2.

DECLARATIONS

“We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America... solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States;”¹

Declaration of Independence
United States of America

“Whether you say you can, or say you can’t... either way, you’re right!”

Anonymous

If assertions are the speech acts with the least generative or creative capacity, then *declarations* can be viewed as the *most generative, most creative*. We can contrast them this way: With *assertions*, *first comes the world and then comes the word*. We use assertions to describe what is already so. They are dependent upon the existing world. But with *declarations*, *the word comes first. Then the “world” follows*. We use declarations to generate new possibilities, new action, new results in the world.

Language and the Pursuit of Happiness

These are *not* dependent on the existing world—they bring a new world into existence. In our view, assessments (see previous chapter) are a special type of declaration. As such, as we have seen, they have the creative power of all declarations—very different from the descriptive characteristic of assertions.

Declarations are speech acts in which the speaker—out of nothingness—brings forth a new world of possibilities, a new way of seeing things, a new playing field on which to play.

Declarations produce a new context and are closely connected to leadership (organizations) and our ability to guide and design our own lives (personal). With our declarations, we bring forth new worlds and invent new possibilities. More than any other linguistic act, we claim that declarations are what generate our reality. Matthew Budd, author of *You Are What You Say*, says it this way: “A declaration is an utterance in which someone with the authority to do so brings something into being that wasn’t there before.”²

Let’s start with a brief look at our most famous declaration—the Declaration of Independence. We say that the primary purpose of the Declaration of Independence wasn’t to describe anything. What the Declaration of Independence did was create possibilities and shift context. Notice these specific parts of the declaration:

It was declared that “..these United Colonies **are**, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States;” and that “all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, **is** and ought to be totally dissolved;” (my emphasis). This is not describing—this is declaring into being a new situation, a new relationship, a new context. After this declaration, something (a new country) became possible and very likely, and something else (continued colonialization) became very unlikely. Now, after this declaration much work remained in order to fully realize the declaration, but notice how the declaration opened the space of possibility, created the new context in the first place.

Again, this new context that was declared into being had the impact of changing how future events were interpreted! Without the declaration, certain colonial and British movements and actions would have been interpreted one way. With the declaration, these same future actions are interpreted very differently.

Chapter 7, Section 2 – Declarations

In a very real sense, our country was *declared into being*. For that matter, all countries and organizations that I'm aware of are declared into being. Somewhere in the archives is a charter or original document upon which those authorized "hereby declared..." and in so doing, brought forth the new country or organization.

President Kennedy declared that "America will put a man on the moon within this decade," and indeed it happened. Kennedy had the power (authority) to make such a big declaration and have it not be dismissed as wishful thinking or a pipe dream. He declared new possibilities, created a new context for action, one in which new actions and new results occurred. As this declaration shows, to declare has *more to do with starting a process and creating something than it does with merely naming a goal or objective*.

The parent who says "No more TV after 9:00" is creating a new context with her declaration. Before this declaration, little Johnny could watch TV at 10:00 and nobody raised an eyebrow. But after the declaration, his same actions show up as "wrong." The reason? The context is different. Context isn't physical, but it's real. And it's generated, in language, by our declarations.



So we've said here, and earlier in the book, that declarations create or shift context. Before we go further, let's further define and clarify what we mean by "context" and "content." We say that context is very, very important for relationships of all types—personal and professional. Context can be critical for individual success, marriage/family relationships, as well as for success in organizations. Webster's defines **context** in the following way:

- *the parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning*
- *the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs*
- *the environment or setting.*³

Another way of looking at the first part of this definition is to view *context* as *with-text*, or as "that which goes with the text." The context "surrounds" the text (goes with the content) and provides the background against which a particular meaning is generated. Change the context,