


PERSUASIVE POSSIBILITIES OF METAPHOR*

Conceptual metaphors are used often to help us understand abstract or intangible ideas, by describing them in terms of simpler things we can more readily grasp. 

“If you want to change the world, change the metaphor.”

- Joseph Campbell,
The Power of Myth

Non-Profit Leaders Brief bite-sized insights for busy non-profit leaders.

In an experiment, two groups were given the same statistics about crime in a city, but a different metaphor for crime was used for each.



Participants who read the description of **crime as an opponent** overwhelmingly favoured **tougher law enforcement** as the appropriate response.

Participants who read the version comparing **crime to a contagious virus** favoured **preventive programs** to address crime.

These metaphors **subconsciously triggered an understanding of crime based on the understanding of the thing they were being compared to.**

Making metaphors work for us:

Use deliberately selected metaphors: they can be a persuasive communication tool, subtly seating issues within a set of assumptions that will favour the response we seek.

Ensure that the metaphors used in your advocacy are supporting, not undermining, your goals.

* These insights are from Anat Shenker Osorio in her book "Don't Buy It: The Trouble with Talking Nonsense about the Economy."