

Be Better Understood by Learning this Simple Habit...

By David Brewster

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Wouldn't life be simpler if you didn't have to repeat yourself? If every time you attempted to persuade someone of something, they got the message first time? If your instructions were carried out without fault - first time, every time? My kids have taught me a powerful lesson in making these happen more often.

I have two young daughters, aged four and seven. Statistically, they probably have around 1,500 to 2,500 words in their respective vocabularies (compared with a typical adult's vocabulary of about 20,000 words). And boy do they ask a lot of questions!

Two of the recent favourites were "what makes the wind blow?" and "what is a government?". What got me thinking was that, with a bit of thought, it was possible to answer these questions using only words from the girls' limited 'personal dictionaries'.

So why do we adults need all those extra words?

On the surface this seems like a ridiculous question. Obviously we need extra words in order to be efficient with our communication. Most of these extra words summarise concepts it would be just too hard to explain in full every time.

Why would an accountant want to refer to the 'amount remaining after expenses have been subtracted from revenues' when he could simply say 'profit'? Why would a chef want 'to remove the browned bits of food from the bottom of a pan after sautéing' when she could just 'deglaze'?

What the experience with my kids has reminded me is that the efficiency we gain from using our own specialist words entirely depends on the listener or reader understanding them. This is a truism we often lose sight of.

When it comes to communicating, most of us have a tendency to err on the side of efficiency rather than effectiveness. In other words, we tend to choose words that make it easier for us to send our message than for our audience to receive it.

What you should do is the same whether you are communicating with your customers, your staff, your family or anyone else. You need to take responsibility for ensuring that your audience understands the language you are using.

I learnt my lesson because young kids are pretty good at letting you know that they don't

understand. But adults don't like to appear ignorant. If they don't understand, they often won't let you know. Ultimately this results in very inefficient communication.

Think simple. If you're not always properly understood, try listening to yourself for a time. Identify words and expressions you use that may not be clear to others. Think about how you might replace these expressions with 'Plain English'. Think like a teacher - not an expert.

Then if you want a real challenge, try and explain what you do to a four year old.

More thoughts on this subject at <http://www.businesssimplification.com.au/articles/issue5vol2.htm>

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