

Fuzz Words

By Bob Pladek

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Bob Pladek
outbroker@comcast.net

Insincorious Business <http://mydeas.com>

I haven't met many consultants yet who speak Real English. Just Fuzz. The next time you see your CEO walking out of a strategy meeting not wearing her pupils, watch out. She's been 'fuzzed', and likely has it in mind to turn the fuzzers on you. If you've ever attended a business seminar on....well, anything except Ron P. setting and forgetting...you've probably been fuzzed, too. I recently read an article on "strategic knowledge management" that utilized the following fuzzbuzz:

- Innovative culture
- Collaborative technologies
- Sustainable performance
- Leveraging on knowledge
- Quality systems
- Process simplification
- Technology infrastructure
- Restructuring
- Reorganization
- Channels
- Systematic
- Best practices
- higher knowledge retention
- Ever changing demands (of the market)
- External motivation
- Strategic platforms
- Human capital
- k-professionals
- performance-directed learning
- solution focus mindset
- personal knowledge creation
- leading-edge enterprises
- strategic assets

Ladies and Gentlemen, all this in a 600 WORD ARTICLE. Not a book, or series of books. Just a couple crummy paragraphs. The intro/summary was this:

Strategic knowledge management is about creating an innovative culture supported by collaborative technologies to secure competitive advantage, sustainable performance and enhance productivity by leveraging on knowledge.

Crest, on the other hand, has been shown to be an effective decay-preventing dentifrice.....

Can you imagine this guy on a date? Somehow I think he'd find a perfectly self-justifiable way to avoid picking up the tab. What surprised me, when I finished this bear, was that I hadn't learned the ultimate secrets of the universe. Just some principle handled better in Animal House:

Knowledge is Good.

This kind of no-speak-um started in the 60's, when people began looking for ways to make sense of the technology revolution that was just beginning to make timely AND comprehensive information critical business factors. It also coincided with the rash of new skyscrapers borne of new building materials and new approaches to construction. Businessmen, who have always envied the secret lingos of other professions, began incorporating the language of architecture, physics, and philosophy into professional business bullshit (PBB, for short.) We've experienced this kind of fuzz-word junk ever since, the artform brought to new levels of indigestibility when consultants realized they could make more money by saying stuff that makes sense in ways that don't. I will argue with anyone who insists that message requires these words as messenger; that there is an exaction of language that can be met no other way. I tell you, even if I LOST that argument (I lose many) I still believe that you are much, much better off talking straight to people, in a manner that doesn't set you apart as somehow blessed with divine knowledge. And truth be known, I haven't met too many of these fuzzboys who make 1/10th as much as most of the members of their audiences, and who wouldn't gladly give up their tremendous grasp of what it takes to be successful in business to actually BE successful in business.

Ken Iverson's book "Plain Talk" is an example of how you can talk about what is needed to achieve, without sounding robotic or like a pompous ezzo. Carnegie's work on plain-talk speeches is still relevant. On this knowledge-management subject where my "sorry-I-chose-you-as-an-example" author sought to enlighten us by giving us the formula for battery acid, rather than tossing us a couple of AA's, Thomas Davenport, PHD, talks to it in horrifyingly simple terms that make sense. Probably nobody will hire him. <http://www.bus.utexas.edu/kman/kmprin.htm>

It is possible to communicate principles and models and things that will help people be more effective in their businesses without resorting to the fuzz. Leave it where it belongs. On your wife's black dress. The back, near the bottom, where everyone BUT she can see it.

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