

# Are Bureaucratic Buzzwords Muddying Your Message?

By Dianna Booher

If a phrase starts to roll off your tongue, shut your mouth; consider it a cliché—a sentiment so overused that it has long since lost its power. Instead, aim for originality and specificity. Stringing jargon terms and business clichés together in paragraph after paragraph from document to document, ... from presentation to presentation, ... from slide to slide makes communication bland and meaningless.

Take a look at this excerpt from an annual report of a Fortune 10 company to see if you find anything thought provoking:

Our industry is constantly evolving. The industry has globalized as the world's economies have expanded. Partners and competition change. New opportunities are larger, more capital intensive, and often in remote areas or difficult physical environments. Business cycles fluctuate, but our long-term view provides us with consistent direction. Finally, technology has improved the methods we employ and the results we achieve in meeting the world's energy challenges.

Any great revelation here? Could have come from any energy company in the market—or remove the word *energy* and you could insert it in just about any annual report. Bureaucratic. Bland. Boring. What in the world are they doing behind closed doors? Paragraphs like this make shareholders wonder, where in the world is Waldo working?

Here's a list of bureaucratic buzzwords that muddy messages and mar your image as a clear communicator and straight shooter:

- **No-brainer** (meaning if you don't see it as clearly as I do, you're off your rocker)
- **Enhancement** (an improvement too insignificant to charge for but worth touting; often confused with body parts)
- **Value-added** (anything you can't charge for because the client doesn't value it enough to pay for it)
- **Value-proposition** (proposing differing shtick to see what flies)
- **Incent** (prodding people with money, freebies, coupons—whatever it takes to get them to do something they're not inclined to do on their own)
- **Core competencies** (as opposed to core incompetencies?)
- **Initiatives** (long, long ago, these were called goals and plans)

- **Thought leaders** (as opposed to those leaders who don't think?)
- **Optimization** (the process of making things better and better—as in cooking, flying, making love, making stealth missiles, making movies, building skyscrapers, counting votes, applying makeup, charting sea turtles)
- **Solution** (solid dissolved in a liquid or a mathematical proof hidden inside all products and services now offered by all corporations around the world)
- **Alignment** (identifying where the rubber doesn't meet the road in goals that are supposed to be running parallel to yours)
- **Deliverables** (paperboys and girls used to ride bikes and carry these)
- **Rightsizing** (Nordstrom does this free of charge if the clothes are pricey enough)
- **Moral clarity** (when you decide you can't get away with something without being fined or jailed)
- **Impactful** (newly coined term meaning packed full of potential to be hard-hitting—in the mind, heart, pocketbook, gut, mouth)
- **Robust** (fat, wealthy, expensive, complex, healthy, meaningful, deep, feisty; can be applied to people, philosophy, technology, equipment, training, strategy, food, religion, research, vegetation, medicine, light bulbs, laughter, beer)
- **Branding** (marking livestock so it doesn't get lost or stolen; marking dead stock in inventory that hasn't sold in years with a new “look and feel” so that it finds its way to market again)
- **Methodologies** (in more primitive times, this was *methods* or the way you do something)
- **Technologies** (yet undiscovered wizardry from the netherworld)
- **Bandwidth** (refers to anything you want to limit, as in “that's outside our bandwidth”)
- **Seamless** (meaning, I don't know where the heck my job ends and yours starts, so we can pass the buck if necessary)
- **Platform** (horizontal structure that supports all systems, people, brands, and philosophies)

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When tempted to spout off jargon and drivel, stop. Think. Speak specifically, succinctly, and sincerely. You may be surprised at the attention plain English generates in a world of babbling.

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