

Learning from Academia

Everyone has their personal cross to bear. Mine is that in one of those irrational moments that one can never quite fully explain, I married into a 110 percent, gold plated, copper-bottomed academic family. A family where education and the garnering of prizes for obscure texts is valued above all else.

Now while my own texts might be a trifle obscure to many (you should see the HRGateway post-bag!!), academic they ain't. So most of the time I am looked down on as one of those sad creatures whose intellect is never quite going to get him to Nobel Prize status. Or much else either. To put this into context, if in the highly unlikely event that I won an Oscar for the best screenplay, or a Pulitzer prize for journalism, it would be frowned on. I would be urged to do something "useful" with my life.

However, all is not lost. My father-in-law, a professor of mathematics in California has been instructing me in the evil, closed world of academia, where you are only as good as your last research paper. In doing this, he has shared with me many of the secret codes that get used in the dusty corridors of higher education where no margin note or conclusion is ever what it appears on the page.

While working through some of his observations, it occurred to me that many of these comments (and their consequent "real" meanings) would be ever so useful to the human resource profession. Indeed, as business whirrs back into some semblance of motion again and HR gets asked to run all sorts of feasibility studies and strategic reviews, some of these (garnered from social science classes in the main and used by countless PhD hopefuls) will make a wonderful security shield for the concerned personnel professional: who, while telling it like it is, doesn't want to tell all either.

Download these into your hard-drive and pepper your next confidential memo with them. You won't get a Pulitzer, but you may get a prize for fiction. In case you are really slow, the phrase to use is on the left, what it REALLY means is on the right.

- "It has long been known" ... We lost the original reference
- "A definite trend is evident" ... the data is practically meaningless
- "Three of the samples have been chosen for detailed study" ... the other results didn't make any sense at all

- "Typical results are shown" ... this is the prettiest graph
- "In my experience" ... once
- "In case after case" ... twice
- "In a series of cases" ... thrice
- "It is believed that" ... I think
- "It is generally believed that" ... a couple of others think so too
- "Correct within an order of magnitude" ... wrong
- "According to statistical analysis" ... rumour has it
- A statistically-oriented projection of the significance of these findings" ... a wild guess
- "A careful analysis of available data" ... three pages of notes were destroyed when I knocked the coffee over

Now I just know that given the HR persons penchant for prevarication (yes, I am also urging you to use big words to confuse the enemy in marketing and finance), you are going to pick up on this and find it very useful in those monthly reports to the management board.

What HR professionals need to do is use their superior word-power skills to outfox the rest of the management team. I mean you are the only person anywhere on the sixth floor who can not only spell paradigm-shift, you can also pronounce it correctly. Some of you (this is true) also claim to know what it means! This gives you access to superior fire-power in the battle for the CEOs attention. And by the time you have salted your phraseology with a few determined "downsizings" and some "career-transitioning" you are a clear winner.

Remember, in the new world of work, winning is all. So get your buzz-words burnished, steal from academia and get to work. Those memos never need to be dull again! A few carefully turned phrases and you can earn kudos and credibility with your peers, the like of which you have never experienced before.

Of course, you may not have a clue what you are talking about, but then who knows any better. Anyway, if it's good enough for the academics it's good enough for us. In fact it is positively supercalifragilisticexpialidocious!