



# The Dictionary of Corporate Bullshit: An A to Z Lexicon of Empty, Enraging, and Just Plain Stupid Office Talk

By Lois Beckwith

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This caustically funny Webster's of the workplace cuts to the true meaning of the inane argot spouted in cubicles and conference rooms across the land.

At a price even an intern can afford and in a handy paperback format that won't weigh down your messenger bag or briefcase, **The Dictionary of Corporate Bullshit** is a hilarious guide to the smoke-screen terms and passive-aggressive phrases we traffic in every day. Each entry begins with a straight definition followed by a series of alternative meanings that are, of course, what is really meant.

Take, for example, the widely used, seemingly innocuous term brainstorming:

1. to generate ideas as a group in an accepting environment and in a free-form manner
2. a supposedly relaxed forum in which no idea is a bad idea – that is, until you generate a bad idea and are met with uncomfortable silence/looks that suggest you are retarded or really uncool/the feeling that you are about to be fired

Beyond deciphering corporate commonplaces, you'll learn the PC term for secret Santa (Holiday Harry); why the Blackberry is "most commonly referred to as a 'Crackberry' due to its highly addictive nature"; and that when a co-worker says "Have a good night", they really mean: "this meaningless, seemingly interminable exchange of small talk is now over. I am no longer speaking to you, and will now flee this awkward social situation. Don't even think of asking which way I'm walking."

Just remember to read this only at COB (close of business) to avoid being busted (caught idling by your boss).

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

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## **Editorial Review**

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A

### **accounts payable**

1. department responsible for processing the fulfillment of **invoices** rendered to a company
2. one of the least glamorous and most underappreciated departments of any organization, as its staff members are seen as merely number-crunchers and paper-pushers; identified by sprawling and depressing **cube** farms, big calculators, and the palpable sense that the employees there know that no one knows their names and, really, doesn't care, and/or the thought, "I went into accounting because I thought it would grant me job security . . . but this sucks. And PS: Screw these elitist liberal arts grads hounding me for checks."
3. may behave as policy Nazis, due to the fact that any previous deviation from departmental rules (perhaps encouraged by an **office flirt**) has resulted in serious reprimand and multiple departmental **memos**
4. a black hole for **invoices**; when you inquire about the status of an **invoice**, you will inevitably be met with the uncaring statement that there is no record of it and it must be resubmitted, indicating the need to begin the process all over again, even though your job depends on delivering a check the next day; and, resubmitting means securing sign-off from your **boss**, who is too busy having **lunch** at a nice restaurant to approve the payment of a bill. In extreme circumstances you will have to venture to the accounts payable department to physically retrieve an unsigned **invoice**, check, etc., to ensure payment and the avoidance of the cancellation of a priority contract.

### **acronym**

1. a term formed with some of the letters (often the initials) of a phrase, used as an abbreviation
2. "words" that are so prevalent in business that people will often string them together with a few articles to form a complete sentence, and worse, not even realize they are doing it. The fact that people constantly ask them to translate what they have just said does not deter them from doing this.
3. terms that are frequently indecipherable to those not "in the know" (i.e., people who speak plain English), and which therefore serve to alienate them and make them feel stupid. People may enlist the use of acronyms for this very purpose.

### **action items**

1. issues on a **meeting** agenda that require decisions
2. issues that are classified as such because no one wanted to deal with them/take responsibility for them in

the last **meeting**, that suddenly require **vetting**, a deep dive, etc., and therefore will be tabled until the next **meeting**. Also see **parking lot**.

### **actionable**

1. giving grounds for legal action
2. that's right, this is a legal term, and doesn't actually mean "the things that can be done," as it's repeatedly hijacked by the smarty-pants who went to **Bschool**
3. the things that can actually be accomplished or **moved forward** on, e.g., boss: "Tom, how many of the eight items in this proposal would you say are actionable in the next six months?" Tom: "Uh, maybe two."

### **add-value**

1. to increase the worth of something by supplementing it with services, products, or access to resources
2. classic **sales** and **marketing** speak used to justify charging more than the competitor by offering frequently intangible and often unquantifiable things like "knowledge" or "experience," which are referred to as "value adds." Employees will continually be hounded by management to find ways of adding value to products so that the company can jack up the price.
3. means nothing in terms of quality, especially since *anything* can be claimed to add value

### **administrative assistant**

1. junior employee who supports an executive or department through the execution of administrative tasks
2. whatever you do, *do not* call these people secretaries, because they really don't want to be associated with those people. PS: Depending on how long they've been around or the status of the exec they support, they might make *a lot* more money than you, so when you're wondering why they have Prada boots and you shop at T.J. Maxx, now you know.
3. employees who are highly valued for their **attention to detail**, in part because their boss claims to be focusing on the **big picture** and doesn't "do details," but in fact can't balance his own checkbook and would be rendered helpless if he had to do his administrative assistant's job; for administrative assistants who have taken a job with the hope that they can **move from within**, their rigorous **attention to detail** and achievement of **excellence** may in the end be used against them, as these qualities will not be seen as a reason to advance them to another job that challenges them; instead, they will be **pigeonholed** as a member of **support staff**, and the person they report to will fight like hell to keep them in their current position, because, you know, good help is so hard to find these days.

### **advocate**

1. one who supports a person or issue

2. what senior members of an organization avow they will be for a junior employee or cause, a promise they immediately forget when the opportunity to do so presents itself

3. employees may be told they need to be an advocate for themselves, which is the **boss's** way of saying, "Although it is my job to be aware of your performance and reward you for doing good work, I'll never do that unless you tell me exactly what it is you do around here. You should not count on me to know this information, or certainly, to give you a raise or promotion unless you hound me about it."

### **antidepressant**

1. medication used to manage depression

2. a prescribed medicine that in the past, you never really felt a need for, but when you started having **crying** jags in your **cube**, losing your mind, and couldn't concentrate on anything, your therapist suggested you should check them out. And by God, you don't know how you would go to work every day without them!

*See also Zoloft, Zyban.*

### **ASAP**

1. *abbr* as soon as possible

2. a last-minute qualifier delivered to junior employees that is always preceded by "I/we need this"; the "as possible" implies some flexibility, and a recognition that a late-breaking request may encroach on other, perhaps equally urgent matters already being attended to. However, it really means "stop everything you're doing and take care of this now. I don't care what else you have going on."

3. often used when requesting something that the person making the demand knows full well, due to normal business hours, red tape, the sign-off of an SVP currently vacationing in Tahiti, etc., will require several days to accomplish

### **ass kisser**

1. a person who engages in **kissing ass**. *Also known as* a brown-noser. *See kissing ass.*

### **as you know**

1. a phrase invoked to indicate that what is about to be said is information the audience is well aware of

2. a phrase invoked to indicate that what is about to be said is information the audience is probably not at all aware of, but probably should be aware of (because it was on the front page of the *New York Times* or discussed in a high-priority memo they received the week before or was in all of the **trade publications**) but that the speaker is going to give them a pass on and tell them about so they can act like they knew about it all along. Used in **ass-kissing** situations like **sales** presentations or any forum in which the speaker has something to gain from the people they are speaking to; otherwise, the individuals receiving the information would be quizzed on the subject in an attempt to **bust** them.

## **at Stanford/Wharton/Princeton/Harvard . . .**

1. a conversational reference to where the speaker went to school and its philosophy/culture; most often citing work at the graduate level
2. sign of a major elitist tool who in reality probably isn't that smart, as he wouldn't need to mention his Ivy League credentials when recommending a good burger joint if he were; it's not enough that these people went to a premier/expensive school and may have secured an **interview** or job through a particularly rousing night of drinking scotch or by attending a delightful tea at the club, they *need to let you know*.
3. major irony: many titans of the corporate world went to Joe Blow University and really don't give a shit where people went to school, in fact, may regard highly credentialed colleagues as nancy boys or softies. Also see **Bschool**.

## **at the end of the day**

1. not the literal end of the day, as in sunset, 5:30 p.m., 7:00 p.m., etc. The end result, The final analysis, When all is said and done, When the pedal hits the metal, When the shit hits the fan, When I'm reviewing my mutual fund balances and realize my kid is going to a state school . . . A phrase uttered in conclusion by managers who are supposedly explaining a somewhat nonsensical corporate tenet/idea/policy/decision that probably does not make sense. ("At the end of the day, **it is what it is**.") A nice way to end a thought, thrown in to infuse a statement with an air of authority, common sense, and definitive finality. A common leitmotif; it just sounds good. *See also bottom line, net-net.*

## **attention to detail**

1. diligent and focused concentration on the smaller components of one's job
2. if you are a junior staffer, this will be your downfall; any mistake you make will be attributed to your *lack* of attention to detail, regardless of how many details you did pay attention to. No crises will result from your oversight, it will just be an error made, which happens to humans, who are made of flesh and blood and are fallible, unlike machines and computers--oh wait, they make errors, *too*.
3. something everyone says they have in a job **interview**; totally meaningless claim, often untrue
4. should your **boss** independently make a mistake that is caused by his own lack of attention to detail, it will be your fault. *Important caveat:* Do not shirk on attention to detail when ordering the **boss's** salad nicoise **lunch** or **company car** to ferry him to the airport for his vacation in Capri, as he tends to get very cranky about these mishaps above all else.

## **avoidance**

1. the act of deliberately keeping away from someone or something
2. essential survival skill in the corporate world

3. physical avoidance involving strategic adjustment of commonly traveled routes, creative and sometimes inefficient use of multiple elevator banks and the connections they provide, attempts to embed oneself in a large crowd waiting for an elevator, utilization of entries and exits other than the main one (parking garage, loading dock, etc.), and sometimes just flat-out running

4. digital avoidance can be attempted by simply not returning **e-mail** or phone messages, or using **caller ID** to screen unwanted calls; a more conciliatory form of avoidance is to assure someone that you are "working on it," or to promise delivery at a time/date of your choosing and then not honor it.

## **B**

### **bandwidth**

1. resources available in the form of time, staff, etc.

2. most frequently used in a negative context, denying its availability, e.g., "I just don't have the bandwidth right now" (It is rare to see people running around saying, "I've got all this bandwidth I'm not doing anything with--anybody got a project I can take on?"); very useful way of saying "I don't feel like doing that" without actually saying it, with the extra bonus of making it seem like you're really **swamped**

3. a claim of low bandwidth can also be used as a tactic to get more funding, staff, equipment, etc. e.g., "I don't have the bandwidth, but if you allow me to hire for the position that I've been telling you has needed to be filled for months, some bandwidth might appear."

4. may also indicate that the people with low bandwidth don't want to work more than the two or so days per week they currently are. *See also push back.*

### **bathroom**

1. the place where you go to perform essential bodily functions

2. the first place you are shown as a new employ, by a fellow staffer who is resisting telling you all the reasons it sucks to work there

3. for the cubicle set, the favored place for **crying** when struck by a particularly rough breakup, unfair retribution/public humiliation from the boss, or the overwhelming sense that your life is shit and you're never going anywhere, ever

4. site of bizarre intragender scolding regarding hygiene [primarily female], found in the form of eight-and-one-half-by-eleven-inch sheets of paper taped to the wall castigating fellow users with statements in the spirit of "Your mother does not work here"; "Learn to love the art of flushing"; "If you sprinkle when you tinkle . . ."; and "Were you raised in a barn?!"

5. also realm of uncomfortable monitoring/timing when it's okay to do a number two; some employees, most frequently men, will attempt to casually make their way to or from the bathroom with reading material, as if they are not announcing either "I am about to" or "I just did" take a shit; execs tend to relieve themselves

with abandon, indicating their place in the social hierarchy, and may even conduct **conference calls** while on the can, an act that makes those in the bathroom uncomfortable as well as those who are subjected to the sound of flushing in the background during their **meeting**.

6. may also be the site of repeated encounters with a **weird person**, whom you get trapped in **small talk** with, or of a supreme **busting** in which you are openly bitching/**gossiping** with a coworker only to have your **boss** or another senior staffer emerge from a stall

### **battery cell**

1. a self-contained remote source of energy
2. a productive employee who generates ideas and, due to the nature of the reporting structure, provides them to his boss, who then embraces the concepts and claims them as her own, or as the work of their anonymous **team**; most battery cells are aware of their plight, which causes them extreme frustration and resentment.
3. very sci-fi; think *Coma*, *The Matrix*, or any cinematic portrayal of a helpless body in a pod delivering, against its will, some kind of energy or sustenance to an oppressive entity via a tube

### **bcc**

1. *lit* blind carbon copy
2. an option available in e-mail programs that allows people to "copy" others without the recipient being aware
3. so nasty and **passive-aggressive**; essentially a way of "telling" on someone, the act of a child who can't handle things on his own
4. can be useful for **busting** someone who is being a total jerk to you, in which case it's awesome; also a helpful way to tell your **boss**, "Um, can you step in here, because I don't have the authority to rip this person a new one. **Thanks.**"

## **Users Review**

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