Clear Communication Can Allude Those Who Speak in Bizbabble

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The good doctor, Baron von Frankenstein, is alive and well and living in the heart of corporate America.

He has, however, given up creating living monsters out of leftovers. Today, he is working on his greatest monster. It’s an aberration so hideous, so awful, and so devastating in its potential impact that only strategic planners and marketing people will be able to stand before its terrible onslaught.

I’m speaking, of course, about trendy bizbabble, the new language of American industry. Here’s a recent example from the March 26 edition of the Business Travel News.

The story is a discussion of changes in the corporate strategy of Carlson Wagonlit. Its North American president, Robin Schleien, had this to say:

“This industry is at a level of enormous transformation and is begging for different constituents to morph into creating more value.”

Thank you, Dr. Frankenstein, for that pithy observation. Morph, indeed. Schleien continues:

“We discussed new competition, economic cycles, probable business scenarios, wireless, then we put it all in a pot and stirred it up.”

Well, you know, I’ve always thought that was pretty much how strategic planning was done, anyway. But, next time, Egor, find us a brain that can communicate in plain English.

This sort of thing begins when simple buzzwords and phrases suddenly become sentient. The latest in my collection is this: A Skip Level Meeting. Now this has nothing to do
with me, personally, but I’m still proud of it. A Skip Level Meeting is a meeting in which you meet with your boss’s boss. It’s designed to put you “in the loop” and get “your buy-in” on plans and tactics, therefore making you feel like “a stakeholder” in whatever the hell is going on.

Now, suppose you skip two levels. Would that be a skip-skip level meeting? Or, maybe, just a hop and a skip? See? That’s how it all begins. Take simple words and start to twist them. Very devious, Dr. Frankenstein. Pretty soon, you get monsters like this one from a corporate publication that shall (and certainly should) remain nameless:

“The need to fly in formation and achieve clarity of focus. Using extremely compelling systems thinking tools, the NQC is refining the six strategic outcomes so that they align with the strategic organizational review process. An NQC member will champion each outcome, with a key role being to strike cross-functional teams to clearly identify corporate and branch strategies to reach each outcome.”

Did you understand any of that? Me, neither, and there’s a good reason. I still see language as a means of conveying ideas, instead of what it has become for the new generation of corporate creatures. For them, words are trendy symbols, sort of like the prehistoric cave paintings in France. We know they must have meant something once, but today, hey…who knows? Words are also passwords. If you understood that paragraph, you are an initiate of a highly esoteric, extremely complex corporate ritual. You are on the cutting edge of corporate technobabble. You, kid, are going places.

If, on the other hand, you didn’t understand anything except the prepositions, it’s clear YOU were not meant to understand it. Information is power. What makes you think you can handle power?!

By the way, in my handy little Palm Pilot - yes, I have succumbed – I have this swell little program called Buzzword. Its icon is a small role of toilet paper. You touch the screen and it instantly generates a three-word buzzphrase. Here are a few:


Aren’t those great? And they don’t mean a thing! What a great program. Someday, I plan to write an entire book using just those computer-generated phrases and my personal collection of prepositions.
Watch for it. It will have a title something like….oh….

A Six Point Plan to Applying Skip Level Thinking to Your Career.

Or A Holistic Approach to De-engineering Systemic Attitudes.

The trick, of course, is one Dr. Frankenstein knows all about: Taming the Monster. Good luck, Doc.