

J. Michael Locke

Musings

#24: Choose Your Words Carefully

April 15, 2020

Go to <https://gilesrichard.com> for past musings.

While politicians generally exhibit very little in the way of good leadership and management, there is one thing we can learn from them. They are very good at choosing their words carefully and creating naming conventions which might influence perception before you even dig into the topic.

Think about “illegal aliens” vs “undocumented immigrants.” The latter creates a feeling of a mistake in the paperwork. The former creates a feeling of a criminal invader. How about the “Affordable Care Act”? How could someone be against that? Legislators are even getting good with acronyms. The huge stimulus bill is actually the “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act” or “CARES Act.”

Leaders should choose their words and naming conventions carefully. You can frame a conversation to your advantage by how you name it. The most common approach is to just be descriptive when doing things like setting up a meeting. Instead, I recommend you name the outlook meeting invite with the outcome you want. As an example, if you are meeting with the VP of Sales to talk about how to get more traction—call the meeting “Strategies to Accelerate Bookings” rather than just “Sales Meeting.”

This is especially important when you are trying to motivate. Recently, I was involved in a business where we created a special team to explore a new area for expansion. We gave the team the project name of “Go Big.” That kind of sets the framework doesn’t it?

When building PowerPoint slides, use active titles which frame the message. Rather than saying, “Q1 Expenses” say “Gross margin expanded in Q1.” Make the takeaway point in the title of the slide. That way, the ppt flipper will get the message just by quickly reading the slide titles. You will know the message got delivered.

Let me digress on PowerPoint for a second. It is ruining management discourse. Too much time is going into the preparation of PowerPoint slides and not enough into actually thinking and discussing. Executives are becoming TV anchors reading the teleprompter when they recite their slides. Enough. Tell your team you want a 1-2 page memo and then a conversation. #killpowerpoint.

Choosing words carefully can even apply to simple things like email addresses and platform decisions. Personally, I think someone’s email address says a lot. I will never forget the younger candidate who had an email with 420 in the name. Seriously? Casual nicknames are also suboptimal. Use some form of your official name as your work email. Sorry for those who like Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks but an aol.com email shows a lack of technology sophistication. Obviously, the most digitally fluent will have their own domain. Gmail is probably the core of digital crowd. Outlook use implies a more ‘standard’ person who is probably on a Wintel machine and not Apple.

Slow down and think about your words. Colleague *not* subordinate. Partner *not* vendor. Disappointed *not* mad. We *not* I.

Ad (See Musing #21: How Google Works)

I am really proud of the innovative team at Bennett Day School (where I serve on the board.) They have introduced two hours of daily, free educational programming for parents trying to juggle everything. Those with little ones can join them from 11 am-12 pm central for [Creative Play with Mrs. Cunningham \(for PreK-Grade 1\)](#) and 2-3 pm central for [Exploring with Mr. Reynolds](#) (Grades 2-6). To learn more and to download the Weekly Learning Guide for Parents and Educators visit: <https://bennettday.org/bennettlive/>

Be safe.

Jml

Second Thought

In Musing #6, I wrote about de-risking decisions for consumers who have been shell shocked by the Covid shutdown. My nephew Chip shared this ad from an apartment building he was considering.

NO RISK #1

Once you apply to live at our community, and are approved, if you cancel your reservation in writing for any reason prior to 72 hours of move in, **we will refund 100% of your reservation and application fee.**