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HEINOUS BUSINESS JARGON, PART XXXVIII



cleanse More heinous business jargon you should endeavor to avoid: m vis-à-vis: This is French, and means "in relation to." (It's actually a type of carriage where the occupants face each other.) It's perfectly fine, if it's used every once in a while -- but when overused it's really annoying. Although the phrase literally translates as "face-to-face," don't use it that way -- say face-to-face or in person. become more finite, make more finite: Some business people use this to mean "decrease" or "reduce," or to refer to progress completing a list of goals -- we will reassess as our deliverables become more finite. This is terrible. English is malleable, but not this malleable. Something cannot become more "finite," no more than someone can be more dead or more pregnant. Don't use this. diversifying the brand: This phrase actually has a meaning -- expanding the use of an existing brand to sell items not previously associated with the brand. For instance, when Procter & Gamble uses the "Pringles" brand to sell other kinds of snacks, or things that are not snacks, it has "diversified the brand." Unfortunately, marketing people throw around this phrase as if it could mean anything, rendering it meaningless. If you're going to use jargon, at least use it in a way that aids in communication -- that is to say, accurately. circle with: Intended to mean "to meet with," as in why don't you circle with Greg and Lacey, and get back to me." This makes no sense whatsoever, unless you're forming a knitting circle or a drum circle. Anyone who says this should be circling with everyone else in the unemployment line. A note on rhetorical questions. A rhetorical question is a statement phrased as a question that does not require an answer. Why don't we meet again tomorrow? And John, how about you put together that report? The person saying this isn't asking, he or she's telling. The only problem with rhetorical questioning is overuse. If every command out of your mouth is phrased as a question, you will sound precious and silly -- and seeming silly is a poor management technique. Some managers express instructions as questions to seem less like they're giving orders, and more like they are making suggestions. But are you making suggestions? If it's an instruction, use the imperative -- be here at Bam tomorrow, not can you be here at Bam tomorrow? For some reason, it is really, really annoying to answer a rhetorical question as if it were a question, especially when answering in the negative. Why don't you finish this report for me? -- Because I'm busy. This often invokes an angry retort -- well, do it anyway! Respond to rheotrical questions as if they were statements. Let's continue this after lunch, shall we? -- Oh, I'm afraid I can't. How about 4pm?

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