**Life under the Chief Doublespeak Officer**

**By William Lutz**

If there's one product American business can produce in large amounts, it's doublespeak. Doublespeak is language that only pretends to say something; it's language that hides, evades or misleads.

Doublespeak comes in many forms, from the popular buzzwords that everyone uses but no one really understands - "glocalization," "competitive dynamics," "re-equitizing" and "empowerment" - to language that tries to hide meaning: "re-engineering," "synergy," "adjustment," "restructure" and "force management program."

With doublespeak, no truck driver is the worst driver, just the "least-best" driver, and bribes and kickbacks are called "rebates" or "fees for product testing." Even robbery can be magically transformed with doublespeak, as a bank in Texas did when it declared a robbery of an ATM to be an "authorized transaction." Willie Sutton would have loved to have heard that.

Automobile junkyards, junk and used car parts have become "auto dismantlers and recyclers" who sell "predismantled, previously owned parts." Don't want people to know you're in the business of disposing of radioactive and chemical wastes? Then call your company "U.S. Ecology Inc."

Wages may not be increasing, but the doublespeak of job titles sure has increased. These days, your job title has to have the word "chief" in it. How many kinds of "chiefs" are there? Try these titles on for size: Chief Nuclear Officer, Chief Procurement Officer, Chief Information Officer, Chief Learning Officer, Chief Transformation Officer, Chief Cultural Officer, Chief People Officer, Chief Ethics Officer, Chief Turnaround Officer, Chief Technology Officer, and Chief Creative Officer. After all the "operations improvement" corporations have undergone, you have to wonder who all those "chiefs" are leading. Never before have so few been led by so many.

These days, a travel agent may be called a "travel counselor," "vacation specialist," "destination counselor" or "reservation specialist." As part of their merger, Chase Manhattan Bank and Chemical Bank decided that the position of "Relationship Manager" would be divided between executives of both banks. What is a "Relationship Manager"? Once upon a time this person was called a salesman. And if you're late in paying your bill after buying something from one of these "Relationship Managers," you'll be called by the "Persistency Specialist," or bill collector. If you're "downsized," the "Outplacement Consultant" or unemployment counselor will help you with "re-employment engineering," or how to find another job.

With doublespeak, banks don't have "bad loans" or "bad debts"; they have "nonperforming assets" or "nonperforming credits" which are "rolled over" or "rescheduled." Corporations never lose money; they just experience "negative cash flow," "deficit enhancement," "net profit revenue deficiencies," or "negative contributions to profits."

No one gets fired these days, and no one gets laid off. If you're high enough in the corporate pecking order, you "resign for personal reasons." (And then you're never unemployed; you're just in an "orderly transition between career changes.")

But even those far below the lofty heights of corporate power are not fired or laid off. Firing workers is such big business in these days of "re-engineering," "restructuring" and "downsizing" that there are companies whose business is helping other companies fire their workers. (Think about that for a minute.) These companies provide "termination and outplacement consulting" for corporations involved in "reduction activities." In other words, they teach companies how to fire or lay off workers. During these days of "cost rationalization," companies fire or lay off workers many different ways. How do I fire thee? Let me count the ways.

Companies make "workforce adjustments," "headcount reductions," "census reductions," or institute a program of "negative employee retention." Corporations offer workers "vocational relocation," "career assignment and relocation," a "career change opportunity," or "voluntary termination." Workers are "dehired," "deselected," "selected out," "repositioned," "surplussed," "rightsized," "correct sized," "excessed," or "uninstalled." Some companies "initiate operations improvements," "assign candidates to a mobility pool," "implement a skills mix adjustment," or "eliminate redundancies in the human resources area."

One company denied it was laying off 500 people at its headquarters. "We don't characterize it as a layoff," said the corporate doublespeaker (sometimes called a spin doctor). "We're managing our staff resources. Sometimes you manage them up, and sometimes you manage them down." Congratulations. You've just been managed down, you staff resource you.

An automobile company announced the closing of an entire assembly plant and the elimination of over 8,000 jobs by announcing "a volume-related production schedule adjustment." Not to be outdone by its rival, another car company "initiated a career alternative enhancement program"' that enhanced over 5,000 workers out of their jobs. By calling the permanent shutdown of a steel plant an "indefinite idling," a corporation thought that it wouldn't have to pay severance or pension benefits to the workers who were left without jobs.

Doublespeak can pay for the company, but usually not for the workers who lose their jobs.

As Pogo said, "We have met the enemy, and he is us." Or maybe Dilbert got it better: "Do we really get paid for writing this stuff?"

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