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## Talk—I Mean Obfuscate— Your Way to the Top

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“Synergy” is one of the key words used by business professionals to indicate that they have no clue as to what business they are actually in.

—DAVE BARRY, “IDIOT’S GUIDE TO ENGLISH,” *MR. LANGUAGE PERSON*

You’ve tried dressing like a boss and acting like a boss. Still waiting for that promotion? Try talking like a boss. Why let all that bureaucratese go to waste?

For starters, don’t raise problems. Raise concerns. “I have a problem” makes you sound like a whiner. “I have a concern,” on the other hand, sets you up as a responsible corporate citizen. Open this way, and then state your problem. People take you more seriously when you use fuzzier language. (Notice how seriously you’re taking me right now.)

Is your department overworked? You don’t need people. You need resources. Better yet, you have a resource concern. As often as possible, use two words instead of one, and you’ll impress your audience twice as much.

Need an extra chair? You could get one. Then again you could procure one. Extra syllables get you extra stuff. I mean, extra *matériel*.

In the middle of a meeting, don’t blurt out, “Have you lost your mind?” Say, smoothly, “Let’s take that offline.”

Don’t tell people what to do; give them action items. Don’t make plans; negotiate logistics. Don’t prepare; do legwork. Don’t get people to agree with you; get them to buy in. First, though, triangulate (don’t bounce) your ideas off them.

Don't buy cheap goods. Buy cost-effective goods. And don't spend money. Spend monies. Even better: appropriated monies (monies from someone else's budget).

Above all, don't ask for a raise. Discuss a salary action.

When managers talk, listen. Gerard Braud, author of *Don't Talk to the Media Until ...*, did just this, gathering favorite business buzzwords

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from three hundred people. His list, which he strung together into a speech, landed him on stage at the International Association of Business Communicators 2012 World Conference. Borrow from Braud, whose speech you'll find on YouTube.<sup>34</sup> Borrow from everyone. Practice your new words on

the way to and from work. Say them out loud. Roll them around in your mouth. Ease them into your conversations. At first they'll feel artificial, euphemistic, inflated, and repetitive. And redundant. Don't worry. You will get comfortable with your new language.

And your new peers.

Be prepared for new challenges in your managerial role. Imagine catching the CEO in the elevator. You tell her that you have a critical-path concern about resources. You're not asking for sign-off yet. You have a few ideas to triangulate first to ensure a cost-effective resolution. You offer to take an action item to do the legwork and negotiate the logistics if she'll appropriate the monies. You'd even postpone your salary action if doing so would procure her approval.

You've got this game down.

She says, “Let's take that offline.”

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34. Gerard Braud, “The Worst Speech in the World,” YouTube video, 6:41, from a presentation at the International Association of Business Communicators 2012 World Conference in Chicago, posted by IABCtv, June 27, 2012, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLIAI2tEApC&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLIAI2tEApC&feature=player_embedded).