

FLIPPING HELL!

Flip Dictionary! If the phrase leaves you lost for words you probably haven't got a copy. Designed and compiled by Barbara Ann Kiffer, the person responsible for the Millenium update of Roget's Thesaurus, the flip dictionary solves the problem of when you know what you want to say, it's right on the tip of your tongue but you just can't quite think of it. It goes beyond the standard dictionary format by offering cues and clue words to lead you to the precise phrase or specific term you need. (note to self - 'look up phrase 'flip dictionary'). There's even an online Adobe Acrobat version available for people with a fear of paper (papyrophobia) or even worse, fear of paper cuts (pulpuslaceratophobia).

As you can see, the Flip dictionary is full of amazingly useful and totally useless titbits like highlighting to me that there are more than 80 different shades of the colour brown (I had about 12 in my repertoire) and in case you don't believe me here is a sample to whet your literary appetite; anthracene, beaver, bistre, brindle, buff, doeskin, dun, fallow, fulvous, nutria, pongee, raffia, seal, sorrel, taupe and umber. Now I am not quite sure where I can slip these extensions to my vocabulary into the conversation or even this column but I'm working on it and it did get me thinking that there is so much that is useless or inappropriate in the business world that it would be handy to have a flip corporate manual to assist in offering 79 other choices to specific situations, standard problems, accepted solutions and clichéd practises. Maybe the flip policy manual or whatever could advise you what was no longer useful or completely redundant?

Having 80 different colours of brown may seem superfluous and overkill but so too are the many flaccid HR business practices and trends around. If I was writing the HR/Business Flip manual here are a few of the things I would be proposing to remould or trash completely.

These kinds of exercises are usually heavily over-subscribed by executives secretly harbouring a desire to be daredevils and thrill seekers but who can only usually get their adrenalin rush watching Rambo movies. How pathetic is that and what are the chances of these wannabe SAS initiation exercises actually achieving their objective? Team building can better be accomplished by using common sense and a few fundamental principles such as getting people to recognise that together they perform better and produce more than individually, by establishing an environment of trust, involving and including everyone and then recognising the efforts and attainments of the team, rather than by silly virtual reality war games or scripted, controlled and orchestrated adventures, the results of which rarely last much longer than the end-of-exercise piss-up.

Mission Statements – A litany of self-delusion that everyone has to have but never remembers what is contained in it or why the hell it was put there in the first place. I am a great believer in 'if its not working, toss it out' and in my humble opinion I would have expected by now that mission statements would have fallen into a state of total disuse. Surprisingly they continue to be considered one of the most popular end-product management tools in the world and have even been ranked as one of the top two corporate practices in global usage by Bain & Company since 1993. I also believe in the old expression, "No wind favours the ship that has no charted course" so I appreciate the critical need for organisational direction but don't kid myself that the mission statement is the vehicle that will make it happen. When consulting or training, the very use of the term literally sends chills down the spines of many managers and for good reason because they've found they're simply not worth the paper on which they are written. Unless you can get the mission statement lived out in practise they are, as John Philpott in 'People Management' says, "little better than a secular version of the religious pieties that in early times were hung above the door of the workhouses in England."

Corporate Uniforms – Now I know I am going to be hugely unpopular with this one but lets face it, having a dress code is the ultimate in management command and control. I have worked for organisations that branded you a black sheep, sent you home and docked a day's pay because you exercised a bit of personal choice in the threads department, leaving the work to be carried out for the day by the mindless sheep happy to be all dressed the same way giving the same lousy service. But at least, the corporate thinking goes, they are uniformed and uniform in their lousy service. Fortunately in this country the not wearing of ties and tights is not too much of a criminal offence anymore. My flip manual would abolish ties outright and down with pantyhose, I say.

Security sign-in Procedure – This is a whole industry on its own and creates loads of redundant employment. First you have the security guard whose only responsibility, lets face it, is to ensure that the access register is completed. I love it when they get pernickety about the time "Excuse me sir but it is 4.25 and you have entered 4.23. 'The fact that you recorded your name as Rumpelstiltskin and listed the reason for the visit under 'Business, as in none of yours' is neither here nor there. The only purpose for access-control security guards is to make printers rich. The big books are always expensively bound and of nothing but the best quality paper. They have to go, the books and the guards!

And last but by no means least the phrase '**X Factor**' – as John Philpott so aptly puts it 'a meaningless cliché that is used to suggest HR is the magic yet intangible ingredient in organisational performance. This may be true but overuse of the phrase can subvert any psychological benefit of wellness programmes by causing staff to think of Simon Cowell'. ie putting the fear of God into them! Hardly a confidence-boosting rally cry and do you really want to put your faith in the unknown? Better surely to identify your HR strengths and build on them?

So flip manuals are in and team building, mission statements, front desk security, X-Factor and corporate uniforms are out. Or not? Shall we flip a coin!

