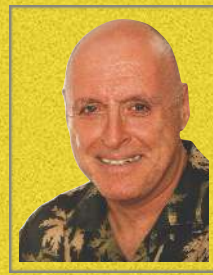


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



584 When a Big Vocabulary Can Be a Big Problem

How's your vocabulary? Is it pretty big? Are you happy with it? Do you find that people around you use a lot of words you don't know? Do you find yourself looking in a dictionary to figure out what so-and-so just said to you? Relax, I'm not judging here. I'm Jerry Roberts and today, the big deal about vocabulary and why so many people get it so wrong. That's up next on The Extra Point.

I'm told the English language has over a million words, with about 170,000 in current use, and over 20,000 used by the average person. Do you know and use over 20,000 words?

My son had several vocabulary assignments in his English Honors class this year, and there were words I felt he was unlikely to use. I grabbed the 9th grade list online and put together a sampling, along with a simpler word with similar meaning. Ready?

Deride, or *insult*; nefarious, or *evil*; imperturbable, or *calm*; acrimonious, or *angry*; repugnant, or *awful*; and ephemeral, or *brief*. See what I mean?

It's no secret I have issues with the curriculum taught in our schools. I'm not blaming teachers who are compelled to use what the school system provides.

My question is this: What is the purpose of language? Did you say, "To communicate"? Congratulations, you're right. Why then, do we focus on words that make that process more challenging?

I've known people who were very proud of their vocabulary. At any moment they could pull out a big and fancy word, knowing most of the people within the sound of their voice wouldn't know what it meant. Was it designed to make them feel superior or us inferior? It never really bothered me, except that I thought it wasted time. I suppose I have a reasonable vocabulary but I have no interest in anyone thinking that.

I want as many people as possible to instantly understand what I say and write, without the need of a dictionary. I write The Extra Point at roughly the fifth- and sixth-grade levels. I have software that rates each commentary. Sometimes it gets into the seventh grade. When it does I look for different words to lower my score.

I know that most of the listeners went beyond grade five and six, finished high school, and a fair number went to college. However, I want to reach people with simple language.

Too many workplace letters and emails have words and phrases that must be there to impress somebody. It's often the same with employee handbooks, standard operating procedures, and even marketing materials.

Hey, if you want to learn a pile of words that will make you seem an equal to most any college professor anywhere, go for it. However, I believe it should be the goal of every educator and every manager in the workplace, to use the words that are easiest to understand.

Thus, go forth now and dredge, rummage, scour, troll, investigate, inquire, probe, and search for the words that will get your point across quickly.

Make it your desire, your commission, your quest, to accomplish this in a manner that is expeditious, prompt, and with alacrity. Above all, never fudge, hedge, waffle, weasel, or equivocate.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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