

Green Weenies shows creativity of language of commerce

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Books editor

It's funny how the jargon from movies and music affects the way we speak in this country. Politics also brings a slew of expressions into our conversations. But few people consider how many business words and novel usages percolate through our language. Ron Sturgeon does. He's the author of *Green Weenies & Due Diligence* (Mike French Publishing, \$28.95), a fascinating book of definitions, including explanations of more than 1,200 terms.

Sturgeon really does begin at the beginning, with "alpha male": A natural leader. That one's familiar to most people, but do you know what a "bee with a bone" is? According to Sturgeon, that's "an individual that is obsessed with something which is none of his concern, and which is likely way out of his league." Some of the images dredged up by the expressions are funny like "eating your own dog food": a company testing a product on itself. Others are a bit risqué, and Sturgeon anticipates some folks won't want to read these definitions, so he offers the book in a "G" rated version too.

It's not all fluff. In fact all the terms Sturgeon lists are in use in the business world and some describe some complex ideas like "Greenmail": A legal but perhaps unethical stock market profit-taking strategy. A buyer takes a significant stock position that enables him to state plans for taking over a publicly held company. The buyer doesn't really want or plan to complete the takeover, however, and hopes that the target company will buy back the stock at a premium to avoid the takeover. The maneuver isn't blackmail; it's greenmail.

Some of the terms are purely descriptive. A business that is near failure is said to be "circling the drain." A stock issued at less than its market value is "watered stock." Sturgeon is a successful businessman. He built his own company and wrote a successful business book, *How to Salvage Millions from your Small Business*. He didn't learn his business strategy at Harvard though. Sturgeon graduated high school and sought no further formal education. But he learned plenty in the real world, business expressions included. He was also savvy enough to get famous cartoonist Gahan Wilson to draw illustrations for this book.

Much of the last third of the book is technical, textbook-type definitions. It's pure business reference and not as much fun as the previous two-thirds of the book. It might not be "popcorn and peanuts": something that sells quickly and easily, but *Green Weenies* is worth a look.

A green weenie, by the way, is an unpleasant surprise discovered belatedly after a transaction or deal. The term refers to the way a wiener might look if it was left in a refrigerator for a year or two. "If, during your due diligence, you discover that the receivables are much older than expected or that the revenues are recognized on an accounting basis that is unacceptable to the IRS, those are green weenies," Sturgeon writes.