

**ON NEWSTANDS NOW**

Vol 3, No. 2 | March/April 2006

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## Insider Business JARGON

**Raw, serious, and sometimes funny**

by [Ron Sturgeon](#)

Then it comes to business and the pursuit of success, sometimes a factual description just does not do the situation justice — only a metaphor can convey the thought. Often serious and sometimes insulting or funny, as these metaphors work their way into our regular vocabulary, they become immortalized, they become ... jargon. Here are a few you can't do without, and some you probably should ...

**Banana problem:** A project so simple that a big, dumb gorilla could handle it. Commonly used in increments of "one banana" for very easy and "two banana" for easy. **Use:** "What's taking him so long to get your office set up? It's a *two-banana problem* at most."

**Chair plug:** Someone who attends meetings but contributes nothing.

**Changing the tires while the car is going down the road:** Refers to making adjustments in the fast-paced business world. Often the rapid pace does not allow for measuring results before plotting the next step, so the next moves must be decided while the venture plows ahead. In a perfect world, cars and business would stop for changes and decision making. **Use:** "Our sales turnaround was so intense that we were often *changing the tires while the car was going down the road*, making alterations before we even knew the effects of our last changes."



**Chipmunking:** This describes someone in a meeting holding a handheld device, feverishly typing with their thumbs, perhaps sending a text message or entering data. **Use:** "David wasn't paying attention to the financial projections; he was too busy *chipmunking* on his Treo (or Palm)."

**Company cholesterol:** The buildup of information, staff, or other bottlenecks that impede a company's ability to perform.

**Cutting the dog's tail off one inch at a time:** It would be torture to a real dog, and eventually the critter is likely to retaliate. The term is often used to warn against administering adverse or

traumatic change a little bit at a time. Such prolonged "treatment" or agony can have negative consequences. Obviously this method should be contrasted with doling out too much change at once. **Use:** "When someone needs to be terminated, don't *cut the dog's tail off one inch at a time* by demoting him continuously until he quits; just make the cut quickly and humanely."

**Death from a thousand cuts:** Termination of a proposed deal for many small reasons as opposed to one major cause. **Use:** "Following months of negotiations, the merger proposal suffered a *death from a thousand cuts*, although there was no single dealbreaking component."

**Dirt in the oyster:** A gem that is just waiting to grow and be discovered. **Use:** "Our widget is *dirt in the oyster*. It just needs some tweaking."

**Don't change the dog food without talking to the dog:** In other words, do not go to the market with your new product or service (or change the existing one) before you fully understand what the customer wants. (Note: Do not ever let the customer know you're referring to him or her as a dog.) It can also describe making personnel policy changes that might adversely affect employees without thinking through the changes first. **Use:** "We knew we had *changed the dog food without talking to the dog* after sales plunged on our revamped formula, which we had not consumer-tested well enough."

**Don't leave for Chicago until all the lights have turned green:** A pejorative term for one who can never get started. Wait until all the lights are green before leaving for Chicago. All the lights are never green at the same time, so you would never leave. This describes someone who is afraid to start on a venture and is hyper-cautious to the point of dysfunction.

**Drinking from a fire hose:** A situation where there is more work to do than any human can accomplish. Imagine trying to cope with your mouth clamped to a running fire hose. It's a vivid description of business at its most intense level, and particularly applicable to turnarounds.

**Dry hole:** A speculative venture that turns out to be a huge loss. This originally referred to an oil well that cost a huge amount of money to drill but didn't yield a single drop of oil. Now used to describe any fruitless business initiative.

**Eating your own dog food:** A company testing a product on itself. **Use:** "Microsoft *eats Microsoft dog food*; they use their own products to run their business."

**Herding cats:** This is one of my favorite terms. In business, it translates as managing a group of people who are hard to control or direct. Imagine trying to keep dozens of cats all headed in the same direction, focused on the same results. **Use:** "Trying to coordinate all those investors has been as hard as *herding cats* — and about as effective."

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Look for more jargon from Ron Sturgeon in upcoming issues of *AdvantEdge* magazine. To learn more about Ron Sturgeon and his book *Green Weenies and Due Diligence: Insider Business Jargon — Raw, Serious and Sometimes Funny*, visit [www.AdvantEdgeMag.com/Sturgeon](http://www.AdvantEdgeMag.com/Sturgeon) today



Ron Sturgeon is a successful entrepreneur and the author of *How to Salvage Millions From Your Small Business*. After finding a following in the U.S., the book – which is now in its second printing – has been licensed and printed in Korea, China, and the Czech Republic.

Ron, whose rags-to-riches story began in the auto salvage business right out of high school, is a sought-after speaker and consultant for small business owners. In 2004, he was the keynote speaker at 3 international conventions, including two in Australia. His unique story of personal development and success is inspiring, and his motto is “mission possible.” He especially likes to speaking to students and other developing small business owners, sharing tips to his success, and challenging them to be whatever they want to be with his theme of “mission possible.” In addition, he has expanded his expertise to real estate development and is a noted collector of fine automobiles and antique toy cars.

Sturgeon seems an unlikely candidate to write the book, or even know the terms. His dad died when he was a senior in high school, and left to fend for himself with only a high school education, he went on to build one of the largest operations in his industry, the auto salvage business, which he sold to Ford Motor Company in 1999. He later founded and sold another business to a large public company, while building a small real estate empire, starting a small business consulting practice, and did two in-house over subscribed stock offerings. Throughout the last six years, he patiently gathered the terms found in the book.

Ron and his wife, Kathi, live in Texas with their three beloved Cavalier King Charles Spaniels.