



By Jo Owen

Don't worry about the jargon: At least we all recognise it when we hear it. The really nasty language in business consists of normal words with abnormal meanings. Here are 12 words that should get any alert manager's bullshit detector working overtime.

*Note: This article originally appeared on [BNET UK](http://www.bnet.co.uk).*

## 1 Just

This is used to make a huge request or error seem trivial, as in, "Could you *just* do this (500-page) document by Monday?" -- a request best made late on a Friday afternoon.

## 2 But

Remember, whatever is said before *but* is b\*\*\*\*\*ks, as in, "That was a great presentation, but..." or, "I would like to help, but..."

## 3 From

*From* is much loved by advertisers, as in "Fly to Rome *from* £10" -- excluding £100 of taxes and other "optional" extras for a flight leaving at 4 AM and going to an airport about 100kn away from Rome, and only if you book the ticket one year in advance.

## 4 Might (and any other conditional verb)

*Might* is used to achieve two things. First, it sets up a negotiating position, as in, "I might be able to do that if..." Second, it lays the groundwork for excusing failure later on: "I would have done it, if only..."

## 5 Only

Closely related to *just*, this is an attempt to make a big request or problem seem small. "It was only a small error.... We only dropped one nuclear bomb over London..."

## 6 Important (and urgent)

This is used to puff up any presentation: "This important new product/initiative...". Important to whom? And why? Maybe it is important to the speaker, but why is it important to me?

## 7 Strategic

Important, with bells on. See *Strategic Human Capital Division*, formerly known as the *Personnel Department*. It's alternatively used to justify something that has no financial justification at all: "This strategic IT investment (which costs £100 million and has no identifiable payback) is essential to the survival of the business."

## 8 Rightsize, downsize, best shore, offshore, outsource, optimise, redeploy, downshift, re-engineer

How many ways are there to avoid saying straight up: "We are going to lay off staff"?

## 9 Thank you

Normally, *thank you* is good -- except when used by automated voices at call centres saying, "Thank you for calling; we value your call... (and we have so much contempt for our customers that we can't be bothered to answer your call promptly, so we will put you on hold until you give up and try to use our impenetrable and useless online help instead)."

## 10 Interesting

Fear this word. When your lawyer uses it, you are doomed. When your doctor uses it, check that your will is up to date. The recession is certainly interesting. A slightly less interesting time would be preferable.

## 11 Opportunity

Because the word *problem* has been banned in business-speak, all problems have become opportunities. This means many opportunities are problems. There is a limit to how many opportunities I can solve. Interesting and strategic opportunities really scare me.

## 12 Investment


*Investment* was first hijacked by the British government to justify wild and uncontrolled public sector spending. Spending is bad, but investment is good, so it simply reclassified all its spending as *investment* in the health, education, and future of the country. The businesses that followed the government's lead by going on a spending/investment splurge are now going bust -- unlike the government, they can't print money or raise taxes.

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### Sound familiar?

Have you run into these verbal gotchas on a few occasions? What other common words and expressions have you encountered that were being wielded disingenuously? [Join the discussion.](#)

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