

Get off your high horse (if you really want to communicate)

We've all met people who are desperately trying to make sure everybody knows how smart or how powerful or how well-connected they are. These people do things like sweep into a room and speak very loudly, making sure they become the center of attention. They may also love to name-drop. And sometimes they think that by using sentences packed with big words and jargon, you will be mesmerized into thinking they really know what they are talking about.

But the opposite always happens. The harder people try to impress you, the more you tend to see through them. Same thing happens with your written communications—blogs, websites, letters, whatever. If you try to impress, especially by filling your writing with jargon and big words, the less you are communicating.



Merry Go Round by Mike Rawlins on Flickr.

As Mack Collier wrote in his blog post, “You Don’t Look Smarter by Making Others Feel Stupid.”:

Make your ideas more accessible and empower your audience to

learn at a pace that's comfortable to them. Remember that if your words make the reader feel dumb then the reader might decide that you're not an 'expert' after all

So, if you think that throwing big words around will result in you looking smarter, you are dead wrong. (P.S.: I LOVE that quote from Albert Einstein: "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.")

It reminds me of a time when I was visiting a friend in Florida. She had a little baby at the the time, and she had another friend visiting who also had a baby with her. Both women were in the pool and both babies were naked. They asked if I wanted to get in. I said I really did not want to be swimming in baby pee. The friend looked at me and said that baby pee was sterile, and that I needn't be concerned. She added she knew this because she was a physician. Yes, she called herself a physician. To which I promptly replied: "Oh you're a doctor. What is your specialty?" (I think she was a dermatologist, but I don't remember.) I couldn't get over that she thought calling herself a physician somehow made her more authoritative.

In everyday conversation we visit our doctors and have our lawyers—not our attorneys—draw up contracts. When someone asks us where we live, we don't say we "reside" in a certain neighborhood. If someone asks why we are taking night classes, we usually say we are trying to learn more about the topic, not "augmenting our knowledge base." If we get a new gadget, we tell people how much it has changed our lives, not "it is a disruptive technology."

So, next time you want to appear like you know what you are talking about, get off your high horse and use the words most people would actually use in conversation.

