

## Style

GRAHAM ROTH, retired Consultant Psychiatrist, Bristol

A number of readers have asked for clarification of some commonly used expressions in management jargon. We have invited Dr Rooth to explain some of the more widely used examples.

### *Take it on board*

**Illustration:** “Yep. I’ve taken that one on board.”

**Meaning:** I’m not actually going to do anything about what you’ve just told me, but let’s still be friends.

**Discussion:** Nautical expressions of this kind are favoured by the physically insecure, striving to generate a more robust self-image, while at the same time concerned to avoid giving offence.

**Response:** Anyone moved to respond congruently to the fading images of yo-ho-hohery and mainbrace-splicing evoked so gamely by the speaker could consider stowing something in their foc’s’le.

### *Line of thought*

**Illustration:** “I don’t quite follow your *line of thought*, old wo/man.”\*

**Meaning:** I think you are suffering from Stage One Brain Failure.

**Discussion:** At first sight the example suggests that the speaker is on your side and has made the generous assumption that thought is present and that it has a direction.

However, non-verbal leakage usually hints, more or less crudely, that cognitive impairment has been diagnosed. The example given is in fact a close relative of “What do you have in mind, if you’ll pardon the exaggeration”.

**Historical note:** An earlier version, “train of thought”, fell into disuse after Beeching.

**Response:** Not easy. You could try “Let me run the scenario past you again, more slowly;” or “Shall we try again when you’re feeling fresher?” But on balance if you’ve laid yourself open to this one, it means you’ve probably been blethering on and ought to shut up for a bit anyway.

\*Note: This is an Equal Opportunities presentation.

### *Aspirational goal*

**Illustration:** The Working Party Sub-Committee will meet to hopefully prioritise its *aspirational goals*.

**Meaning:** Synonymous with aspirational aim or aspirational objective. *Targeted target* and *intended intention* also convey the broad thrust of its meaning, though less allusively. Probably something to do with through-put or cost-efficiency savings.

**Discussion:** One’s first reaction is that the expression “aspirational goal” contains an element of redundancy. However, the qualifier “aspirational” functions as an *aide-sensorium* for less gifted committee members who could be perplexed by what they might otherwise take to be a sporting term.

This construction is also related to phrases such as “central core”, “problem situation” and “genuine sincerity”. Here the intention is not so much to provide signposts for the mentally-deprived committee member as to bolster a failing verbal currency.

### *Window of opportunity*

**Illustration:** Developments in the community provide the forward-looking psychiatrist with an important *window of opportunity*.

**Meaning:** Once again, there isn’t enough to go around. But there could just be a few hand-outs if you toe the party line.

**Discussion:** In the black art of propaganda as practised by NHS managers and their henchpersons, a valued and much used technique is *persuasive redefinition*, sometimes referred to as the *positive re-frame*.

The example used here is a popular one, “the window frame”. The metaphor is architectural in inspiration. The speaker is cast in the role of prophet or leader, permitted to glimpse some exciting challenge. Those addressed, to stay with the metaphor, may be too busy propping up the building itself to look out of the window indicated.

Windows of this kind are invariably small. Not everyone will enjoy the view.

**Response:** Defenestration?

*Ring fencing*

**Illustration:** (By the power vested in this advisory committee), I propose that we *ring fence* this tranche of monies.

**Meaning:** Let's play at being in control of the budget.

**Discussion:** A ring fence is a magical construct, a spell used by people wishing to protect their budget, or a portion of it, from evil spirits. Once a novelty, its introduction into common usage has been a major achievement of the recent management restructuring; and ring fencing has largely replaced the use of the pentagram in budget management, though the latter is still used in isolated parts of Britain such as mid-Wales.

The ritual of ring fencing is engagingly simple. It takes place in a committee setting. All it requires is for one person to utter a prayer or invocation containing the magic words "ring fence"; and for the rest of the committee to respond "Hear! Hear!", nod their heads, or stir fitfully in their sleep. Some authorities have argued that the intention is more important than the actual form of words and recommend that the invocation should be uttered by a committee member known for devoutness and simplicity.

Be that as it may, and we await the definitive managerial discussion document on this topic, the remarkable effectiveness of this procedure as it stands at present is more than borne out by the figures. These show conclusively that there have been

no new cases of budgetary demonic possession since Griffiths.

**Note:** A major research effort is required to develop a whole new generation of broad-spectrum spells that would protect budgets against possession by colleagues.

*Nucleus development*

**Illustration:** Region has taken on board the revenue consequences of the new service. *Nucleus development* has been authorised at selected centres. Funds have been made available for two administrators and a part-time staff-nurse.

**Discussion:** This is, of course, a synonym for underfunding and is another example of *persuasive redefinition*, the managerial technique for manipulating the gullible referred to earlier. It sometimes occurs in the form Nuclear Development. Which form your district favours depends on the relative extent to which pathologists and radiologists have succeeded in infiltrating the local management structure; and is known as Beattie's Sign. The combined prevalence of the forms in -us and -ar gives the Usar Rating for a district, which can come in handy if you want a change from Jarman.

**Historical note:** Hans Jurgen Beattie is a Swedish philologist of Scottish descent. His recent paper 'Det Moedel Herrenvolks Sprachslip' or 'Linguistic Drift as a Middle Management Strategy' bids fair to become a classic of its kind.

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## Results of Limerick Competition

You may recall that we set a competition in the Christmas edition of the *Bulletin*: Complete a limerick beginning with one of the following first lines:

"There was a disciple of Freud . . ."

"I've been to the Maudsley she cried . . ."

"There once was an MRCPsych . . ."

We received some 50 entries to this competition which ranged from the erudite to the banal. Clearly, those who entered had a lot of fun and in some cases

applied a high measure of inventiveness. Several people sent in multiple entries and one entrant submitted ten efforts! The majority of entrants were male but chauvinism did not seem to play a major part.

The panel of judges were given a free rein and their hard work is much appreciated.

We will print the winning entries in beauty competition style, starting with tenth place and ending with the three winning entries.