

## Words—Do You Really Know What They Mean By That?

Isn't it interesting how our language (specifically American English) is constantly changing. In fact in the last few years we have been bombarded with a bunch of new words that never existed before. Most of these can be directly related to the advances in technology. Let me give you a few examples:

*Google*—now this is a verb we can use to search for things on the internet

*Text*—used to be just the words on the page of a book, now it is an action we can take to communicate quickly with another person via our cell phones

*Bling*—all the fancy jewels and accessories we use to adorn ourselves

Now, I want you to think about some words that have left our language. Of course they still exist in the language, yet we seldom hear these words anymore. A few examples would be *stewardess*, *carbon copy*, and *dungarees*.

Even more interesting to me is how many words have changed their meaning over time. These are some of my favorite more recent examples:

*Sick*—is now a good thing and has nothing to do with illness (Your new jacket is just sick. I wish I had one just like it.)

*Gay*—is now a sexual preference not a state of being when one is jolly

*Way*—is no longer the direction one might walk. It is now an affirmation that something is correct.

So what are we to do? How do we keep up with the changes in our language?

My words of advice include the following tips when writing to your customers, clients, or coworkers.

- \* Make sure all of your correspondence has a positive intent. Our goals should be to help, serve, inform, clarify, or instruct.
- \* Read and then re-read your documents to see if your readers will quickly get your message.
- \* Use simple basic language rather than \$50 words that you thought might impress your readers.
- \* Get to the point and don't make your readers search for details.

We need to remember to use our language as a tool to accomplish our goals. So always ask yourself after you write a document, ***“Will my reader get my message and take the action I wanted them to take?”***

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