



The Case for Jargon (Seriously)



Kirsten and a power saw

I love power tools: table saws, electric drills, sanders, and nail guns. The right tool and the skill to wield it, helps me turn my vision into reality. So, what about all the communications “tools” promised to me in my email inbox?

Tools to help you reach more people, “The 5 five tools you need to hone your message”, or “This new tool is perfect for your next project.”

Any legit DIY-er knows that it isn’t about owning every tool (who has the storage?) – it is about using the right tool for the right job.

There is a tool in your communications toolbox that you are probably using wrong, and it is doing more harm than good. *(Please scroll down to read more.)*

Upcoming online classes at The Goodman Center		
<p>PLAN CAMPAIGNS</p> <p>Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter</p> <p>March 31 & April 2 11am - 12pm PT</p>	<p>GIVE PRESENTATIONS</p> <p>The Platinum Rules of Presenting</p> <p>April 21 & 23 11am - 12pm PT</p>	<p>TELL STORIES</p> <p>Storytelling: Tapping the Power of Narrative</p> <p>July 7, 14, 21, & 28 9am - 10am PT</p>

frank2026 Montgomery



Our friends from the [frank conference](#) are going local this year with a three-city tour. Your first chance to join these communications superstars will be in Montgomery, Alabama on April 30th. This year, they're exploring the theme "Out of Bounds," and celebrating the disruptors who reject the status quo

and forge unlikely alliances to solve "wicked problems."

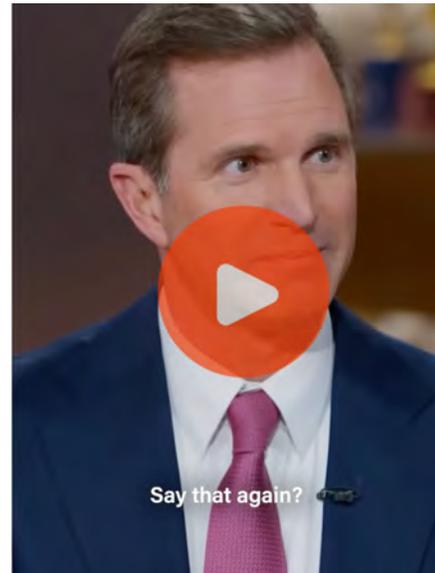
Readers of this newsletter can get a [hefty discount](#) (\$175 off). Get an empty notebook ready to fill with ideas and inspiration at frank x Montgomery.

The Case for Jargon (seriously) (cont.)

That tool is jargon. Those of you who have been a part of The Goodman Center community for a long time, might be surprised to hear me even call it a tool instead of imploring you to STOP USING JARGON, like [Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear asked democrats to do recently on the Daily Show](#).

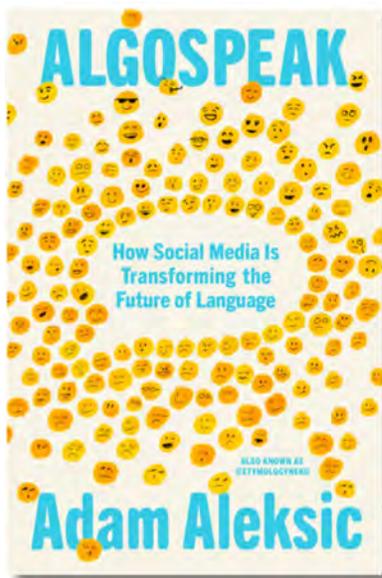
Beshear makes some great points, but I think Jon Stewart has a better take. "It's about connecting." When we are speaking to a wider audience, or to people outside the inner sanctum of our issue, then jargon is confusing, off-putting, or as Andy Goodman always likes to say, "Jargon jars."

But, hear me out here: jargon has a purpose. As long as humans have been speaking to each other, we have invented words that not only communicated content, but also belonging. We've created euphemisms, slang, and codes. We create words and phrases that tell us more than the facts, they tell us what we believe about those facts. Jargon isn't always legal-ese or scientific acronyms you'll never use. Jargon can be insiderlanguage we use for issues we care about.



Let's take the example of "the unhoused." American culture has coined many words and phrases to describe our neighbors without houses over the years, like "tramp," "hobo," and "bum." Those words got replaced when there was broader recognition of how dehumanizing they were. "Homeless" gained popularity in the 1970s and 80s, and then in the modern era, we changed to person-first language: "people experiencing homelessness," and it hasn't stopped there. Some people prefer "houselessness," "unhoused," or "unsheltered". No doubt we will be using different terms in years to come.

In the Daily Show clip, Beshear acknowledges that often jargon is coined to beat stigma, and I'm glad he says that. However, he implies that speaking with jargon isn't speaking like a "normal human being," and I have to disagree. As a social species, humans *love* to create safety by forming in-groups and out-groups with our language. That has evolutionary value, and it has strategic communications value. Nothing could be more human.



In his book, [Algospeak](#), etymologist Adam Aleksic shares that using insider language is a signal that we have "accepted certain shared cultural norms." At a nonprofit conference we might talk about "justice-involved populations" because it indicates that we care about systems change. In other contexts, we are likely to leave our audience confused.

British advertising tycoon David Ogilvy said, "If you're trying to persuade people to do something, or buy something, it seems to me you should use their language, the language in which they think."

The National Gallery of Art has recently crafted a perfect example of this. Alison Luchs has gone viral with a combined 9 million views of her art explanations in Gen Z slang. The museum is seeking to attract content creators who will reinterpret the galleries collection through a social media lens. [She's speaking their language.](#)

Time will tell if the viewing numbers will translate to their submission goals. What I love about this series of posts is that they are using insider language purposefully, and the theme is organically connected to the project they are working on.

Jargon and insider language have purpose. They can be used to form bonds and quickly establish shared values *between the people who already know that language*. Jargon is a specialty tool best used with people in your field and, like any tool, used with caution.

When you want to connect to the people who aren't yet experts at what you do, use the concrete language of storytelling. As a comms DIY-er, I can tell you, *that* is the most powerful tool to turn your vision into reality.



I Couldn't Have Said It Better Myself

"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart."

Nelson Mandela

About Us

This edition of *free-range thinking* was written by Kirsten Farrell and edited by Jasmine Elist. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

To reach the Goodman Center directly, please call (323) 272-4737 or send an email to kirsten@thegoodmancenter.com.

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