

THE RIGHT WORD

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Last spring, the American Congress on Surveying and Mapping (ACSM) issued a policy to promote nondiscriminatory language and advertising in the literature of the mapping professions.

Robert Todd, then an ACSM Board Member and Surveyor-of-the-year, circulated to State ACSM Affiliates along with a booklet entitled *The Right Work; Guidelines for Avoiding Sex-Biased Language*.

The Right Word is published by the Section of Women in Public Administration of the American Society for Public Administration. The twelve-page booklet was first brought to ACSM's attention in 1987, at which time some Board members, particularly a few conservatives from ACSM's member organization the National Society of Professional Surveyors (NSPS), opposed a ban on sexist language, and those who promoted a policy on nondiscriminatory language were labelled "radical, negative troublemakers." However, a 1988 outburst of blatantly inappropriate advertising offended even the conservatives and prompted both organizations into sudden action.

Grateful for the guidelines and the policy, several surveying and mapping publications are following suggestions offered by *The Right Word*.

According to the booklet, "While sex biased language is sometimes deliberately employed, often writers are simply unsure what other terms to use; they dislike the he/she lexicon or substituting "person" for "man" in many words. Yet, they are willing to correct the sex bias in their language if they can be shown the way."

The first section of the booklet deals with "Avoiding Stereotypes." Writers and speakers are warned against the following concepts:

- Thinking of women in trade or professional positions are exceptions to the rule. This may be exhibited through using such terms as "lady lawyer," or thinking, "she's a good doctor, for a woman."
- Regarding "concern for employees" as a feminine trait...
- Associating women's physical stature with managerial competencies. Size is no reflection of talent. If you find yourself presuming a petite coworker can't handle a tough assignment, the shortcoming may be your own.
- Having different terms for or ways of interacting with women on and off the job. If you say "woman" at work and "girl" at home, you probably haven't changed any attitudes, but have merely altered your behaviour at work.

The section concludes "Stereotyping through sex-biased language can produce losses of academic potential, self-esteem, and career potential. In erasing sex-biased language from our texts and speech, we are helping end its harmful impacts in society."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The next section of the booklet offers suggestions for workplace equity:

- Develop a policy statement about avoiding sex-biased language in agency or company reports. One federal agency suggest staff consult with an editor "if there is any doubt" about whether a statement could be interpreted as being sexist....
- Enforce such a policy statement by letting staff know you are aware of language usage and will not sign letters or issue reports with sex-biased language in them.
- Screen photographs and other visual aids...Photos convey especially strong messages, and those in which all or most employees shown are white men will tell readers that that's the way it's intended to be.

- Replace specialized agency/company terminology with neutral terms. "Man years" thus become "staff years" and we stop talking about "manpower planning" and start doing "workforce planning."
- Set up an example for others by using the salutation "Dear Colleague" (or something similar), rather than "Dear Sir," when you are not sure of a person's sex. If you're writing to a woman and she has not expressed a preference for Miss or Mrs., it isn't necessary to inquire; marital status is irrelevant in a business setting, and you can easily employ the neutral title of Ms.
- Avoid giving female staff those assignments which require "special attention to detail." Instead, be sure that substantive special projects are spread equally among the men and women in the office.

SUBSTITUTE TERMS

The booklet next offers substitutes for sexist terms. Finally, the reader is offered a chance to test his/her ability to spot and correct the gender-biased sentence. The Right Word acknowledges that "there are times when the preface "man" is appropriate Many English words derive from the Latin word "manus" meaning "hand" (such as manual, manuscript, manufacture, manage, and manipulate).

The booklet contains an extensive list of references and states, "The English language has come a long way since 1972 when the American Heritage Publishing Company released the first dictionary which made a conscious effort to correct the sex biases that exist in common English usage." The Right Word was first published in 1979. The updated version is available from the Section for Women in Public Administration, P.O. Box 6165, McLean, VA 22106, and range in price from \$0.50 to \$1.50 per copy, depending upon quantity ordered.

According to *The Right Word*, "Seeing lists does not give the full sense of how relatively easy it is to avoid sex-biased language."

Examples offered by the booklet are as follows:

- **BIASED:** The average American drinks his coffee black.
RECAST: (1)The average American drinks black coffee.
(2)Most Americans drink their coffee black.
- **BIASED:** Man works to utilize his skills to the fullest extent.He takes pride in his accomplishments.
RECAST: People work to utilize their skills to the fullest extent. They take pride in their accomplishments.
- **BIASED:** The employee is expected to do well in training courses. He is to gain technical ability from attentive study and should become highly skilled.
RECAST: The employees are expected to do well in training courses. They are to gain technical ability from attentive study and should become highly skilled.
- **BIASED:** In public dealings, the employee should use extra courtesy. He should build solid relations with his clients.
RECAST: In public dealings, employees should use extra courtesy. They should build solid relationships with their clients.
- **BIASED:** If men would work harder to attain peace than to build weapons, mankind would be more likely to witness the 21st century.
RECAST: If people would work harder ... they would be more likely ...
- **BIASED:** Businessmen must become familiar with computer systems or they will be bypassed by men more familiar with technology.
RECAST: Entrepreneurs must become ... or they will be bypassed by those more familiar ...

The following is a partial list of sex-biased terms and their suggested substitutes as published by *The Right Word*.

Bachelor Degree	Undergraduate Degree
Brotherhood	Community, kinship, friendship
Businessman	Executive, manager
Chairman	Moderator, chair, head,presiding officer
Cleaning woman/lady	Office cleaner, custodian, janitor, maintenance worker
Co-ed	Student
Congressman	Member of Congress, Congressional Representative
Councilman	Council Member
Craftsman	Skilled Worker, Artisan
Draftsman	Drafter
Forefather	Forebear
Foreman/Forelady	Supervisor
Fraternal	Collegial, communal
I'll have my girl do it	My secretary will do that
Insurance man	Insurance Agent
Manhole	Utility hole
Manhood	Maturity, Adulthood
Manhours	Staff hours
Mankind	People, humanity
Manned	Staffed
Manpower	Workforce, labour force, workers
Man-to-Man	Face-to-Face
Old wives' tale	Folklore, Superstition
Policeman	Police Officer
Right-hand Man(Gal Friday)	Key Assistant
Sissy	Sensitive Child
Sportsmanship	Sporting Attitude
Statesman	Diplomat
Tomboy	Active Child
..trix (as a word ending)	Usually the "-or" ending will suffice, i.e. executor instead of executrix
Watchman	Guard
Workman's Compensation	Worker's Compensation
Workman	Worker