

Gibberisk: Risk's Mangled & Made-up Words



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Have you ever exuberantly crooned the chorus of a popular song and later discovered that you had mangled the lyrics? Today's music fans can use a search engine to quickly verify the lyrics of a favorite tune. But when I was a kid (!), I recall being completely surprised by the actual lyrics of a song upon reading the liner notes of a new album. According to popdust.com, some of the most commonly misunderstood song lyrics include:

- "Hold me closer, Tony Danza" – instead of "Hold me closer, tiny dancer" (Elton John)
- "The sheep don't like it, rockin' the cat box" – instead of "Shareef don't like it, rock the Casbah" (The Clash)
- "How's about a date?" – instead of "Eyes without a face" (Billy Idol)

I recently heard a new mangled song lyric while listening to Sirius XM host and author Lori Majewsky. She recounts that one of her listeners admitted to believing that The Go-Go's biggest hit was titled "Alex the Seal" instead of "Our Lips Are Sealed."

Some of us accidentally mangle song phrases and words, but other people make up gibberish on purpose. Making up words and adopting familial phrases is pretty common, according to Rinee Shah, author of *The Made-up Words Project: An Illustrated Collection of Invented Family Phrases*. In the book's introduction, Shah explains that made-up words are a tradition that "almost every family has but rarely talks about." In this quick, fun read, Shah pairs each made-up word with a creative illustration, which heightens the hilarity of each term.

Made-up Words

Here are five of my favorite made-up words from Rinee Shah's collection.

- **Feep** – n. The nasal whining of a bored or frustrated dog. Ex. "Your dog keeps staring at me and letting out **feeps** while I eat." I can't wait to use this one next time I hear my Mum's dog Chester whining during a family meal.
- **Foof** – v. To blow on food to cool it down. Ex. "Don't forget to **foof** your pho or you'll burn your tongue." Since my daughter loves pho and it's always super hot, I'm definitely going to use "foof" next time we go out for pho!
- **Geedunks** – n. Junky snack foods. Ex. "Mom's got a secret stash of **geedunks** in the pantry behind a bag of rice." My sister will be gobsmacked when I tell her that her pantry is full of geedunks!
- **Cack-racks** – n. The creases on your face or chest from sleeping on a pillow or blanket. Ex. "Did you take a nap? You've got **cack-racks** on your face."

- **Incogneedo** – n. Something you didn’t know you needed until it was marketed as an absolute need. Ex. “A fridge that tells you when you’re out of milk? Sounds like an **incogneedo**.” Sounds like a marketing strategy for [NRMCMC’s new risk assessment tool](#)!

Made-Up Phrases in Risk Practice

Although not every risk thought leader agrees that new terms are needed or beneficial, our team finds value in these standouts in our risk vocabulary: *risk-aware*, *risk appetite*, and *risk oversight*.

- **Risk-Aware** – We use this term at NRMCMC to describe an important goal for risk leaders: to be aware of risks, and to consider risk while making decisions. We find *risk-aware* to be more potent than the common term, *risk mitigation*. We’ve encountered a few dynamic definitions of risk mitigation, such as “...developing options and actions to enhance opportunities and reduce threats...” (Source: [Referencing Project Risk Mitigation](#), Mitre), but most nonprofit risk professionals use *risk mitigation* to refer to any action that reduces the likelihood or potential severity of risk’s negative consequences. *Risk-aware* is compelling and motivating: shrinking risk is impossible in many instances, but it’s always appropriate to learn as much as you can and prepare accordingly.
- **Risk Appetite** – Our newest book, [World-Class Risk Management for Nonprofits](#), includes a chart from our colleague Diana Del Bel Belluz, comparing how six organizations define the term *risk appetite*. Defining your nonprofit’s risk appetite enables decision-makers across the organization to take risks that align with the level of risk deemed acceptable by the board and senior management. The NRMCMC team concurs with COSO: “Risk appetite should be descriptive enough to guide actions across the organization.” We also agree with Diana’s standards for gut-checking your decisions against your organization’s risk appetite. When aligned with accepted risk appetite, a team member’s decisions should: *feel* right; be aligned with the nonprofit’s mission and culture; represent good stewardship of resources; and support progress toward achieving strategic goals.
- **Risk Oversight** – We use *risk oversight* to refer to the “responsibility for overseeing an organization’s approach to identifying and responding to critical risks...” We find the term very useful when discussing the board’s role—versus management’s role—in risk management. [World-Class Risk Management for Nonprofits](#) explains that, “While *management* refers to the process of controlling things, processes or people, *oversight* is a better fit for an evolved governing board committed to keeping its nose in and fingers out.” Today’s nonprofit boards are keenly interested in the top risks facing their organizations; but it’s the job of management to help the board discharge its duties related to risk. In the NRMCMC team’s experience, risk oversight provides the path and boundaries for doing so.

New from NRMCMC: The Risk Jockeys

Earlier today my colleague Derek Symer and I recorded the first episode of a new resource: a podcast on nonprofit risk. Our first episode explores three terms in the risk biz. Spoiler alert: the terms we discuss are not the ones described in this edition of the RISK eNews. To listen to *The Risk Jockeys*, Episode 1, [click here](#).

I invite *you* to share your favorite misunderstood, mangled or made-up risk phrases, and how they help your team face uncertainty each day.

‘When **I** use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.’

‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you **can** make words mean so many different things.’

‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master — that’s all.’

– *Through the Looking Glass*, Lewis Carroll

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. Melanie welcomes your thoughts about the language of risk or your favorite, made-up familial expressions at Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org or 703.777.3504.