



Avoid the L Word

Treat this word like the plague.

By Max T. Russell

I can't tell for sure what they're saying, and you can't either – not if we're honest.

Storeowner Rafael said, "I wrote the mayor, and I was like, 'Somebody needs to take responsibility for these aggressive, out-of-town panhandlers.' And she was like, 'Have you talked to our office that addresses those issues?' And I was like, 'Which office is that?'"

This is ridiculous conversation. How can we know exactly what was said? This is the kind of communication you must avoid in your public messages, and yet this problem with the L word has become more prevalent during each of the past 10 years.

The words you need are *said* and *thought*.

Example: I wrote the mayor and *said* that somebody needs to take responsibility.

Example: When she asked whether I had checked with the right office, I *thought*, "Hmm . . . which office is the mayor talking about?"

Or maybe, in the second example, Rafael meant *said* instead of *thought*, but how can we know unless he first gets away from the L word and into the habit of saying what he means? He can't represent our organization or persuade us to back his cause until we know what in the world actually transpired in the conversation – and in his head.

The craziest part of this problem is that journalists nowadays are keeping the L word in their reporting, rather than clarifying with the people they quote. So, we still don't know what was said or not said, even though the reporter is reporting the exchanges. We need to know. Reporters

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could take time to clarify with the speakers' assistance and replace the L word with specific verbs. The ones that immediately come to mind are . . . um . . . *said* and *thought*.

Those simple words blow away a whole lot of fog. So, help your team stick to them. You can persuade more people to support you, join you, and work for you when you say things as clear as a bell. Beware the L word. 

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Defog Your Messages

Remove clouds of ambiguity with clear, simple, straightforward words. For more insights, take a quick look at these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

- What the Heck Are You Trying to Say?** (Vol. 34, No. 2)
- How Jargon Undermines Communication** (Vol. 27, No. 2)
- Keep the Main Thing Up Front** (Vol. 36, No. 1)
- Is Your Website Clouding Your Message?** (Vol. 36, No. 3)
- Writing Well by Doing LESS** (Vol. 30, No. 5)
- Get to the Point Fast** (Vol. 37, No. 1)
- Cynicism Rx: Authentic Communication** (Vol. 24, No. 6)