

Did I Mis-something?

Written by Justine Knight Monday, March 14, 2011

From her column *Around the Corner*

Warning-Word Reconstruction Ahead!

A "word" has been defined as "the smallest unit or vehicle used to convey meaning." Can't remember if that definition came from Webster, Wikipedia, or Wikileaks. But it gives one pause when we learn that words that have been a mainstay of communication for centuries, are no longer acceptable for conveying. So, we must "*tweak*" our thoughts, our understandings, even our vocabulary, to avoid making others uncomfortable.

We've heard a lot about "political correctness" and "civil rhetoric." A political candidate who overstated his accomplishments, simply *mis*-spoke; and the athlete who forgot the truth in an investigation, just *mis*-remembered. Concerning complaints that government is *mis*-spending, we're just *mis*-thinking words like "*earmarks*" and "*pork*."

Following behind a slowly-driven automobile (*a gasoline-powered conveyance*), I had time to read several affixed bumper stickers. One urged, "Go Green-Save the Environment." Another screamed, "NO POLLUTION-Keep the Air Clean!" The driver held his cigarette outside the window, presumably so the smoke wouldn't pollute his interior environment. Is smoke really *green*?

If a politician makes an argument the exact opposite of something he said a few months ago, not to worry, he's no longer hypocritical, insincere, nor dishonest; he's *dis-ingenuous*-sounds more civil. And, we don't investigate or scrutinize candidates, we "*vet*" them.

"Spanking clean," doesn't make the cut, either-too violent. Might damage a mind. Can't have that. And, we no longer "exaggerate" facts; we "embellish" them. My children often accuse me of the embellish thing. One columnist wrote, "We apparently have a new constitutional right not to be offended." You think?

Actually, words *are* vehicles which convey meaning, so we shouldn't find it surprising that Scripture abounds with warnings and advice concerning the important role they play in forming or reforming attitudes.

"Let the *word* of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom..." (Col. 3:16). Again, "Let the one who has my *word* speak it faithfully" (Jer. 23:29).

Recently, attempting to truthfully evaluate a performance, I said, "I *bombed*." Politically-correct says, "Select another word, please; 'bomb' is not allowed. Might incite someone to become a *population control expert*" (terrorist). You can't be serious!

Second try: "I did really *bad*!!" Psychologically-correct says: "Don't say 'bad,' it lowers self-esteem!" Guess I *mis-spoke*.

Third try: "I was a total *failure*!" Correct-word czar says: "Sorry! 'Failure' isn't acceptable. Say *pre-achieved*." Oh my! What was I thinking?

What is it with all these offensive "vehicles of conveyance"? I'm confused. Could I get a *break*—I mean *help*? Maybe we could *cut* a deal (uh-oh, can't say that either). Okay, let's make a *deal*.

Now, the word *deal* might sound ugly (visually challenging) to some, but being a true *wingnut*, (conservative), it seems workable to me. Here's the deal, if you read from my *Correctness Guide for Speaking and Living* (the Bible), I'll re-try this "civility" thing.

How's this for a rhetoric retake? Proverbs 15:21: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh *word* stirs up anger."

Or, this in II Timothy 2:14: "Warn them against quarreling about *words*." Hmmm?

Probably shouldn't mention Hebrews 4:12: "For the *word* of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword" (that would never pass the civility test).

The solution seems simple. We follow the admonition of the psalmist: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer" (Ps. 19:14).

Undoubtedly, I *missed* something. But tell me, did I *mis-speak*, *mis-think*, *mis-understand*, *mis-remember*, *mis-quote*, *mis-underestimate*, or all of the above? I'll work on it.