



# Our Take:

## OG's Point-of-View On Best-Seller Business Books

November 2007

### In This Edition We Review

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## ***Words That Work***

*It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear*

Dr. Frank Luntz  
Hyperion, 2007

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## A Little Background

*Words That Work* is a fairly provocative new political/marketing book. The author, Dr. Frank Luntz, is best known for his political work with Republicans over the past 15 years. However, his firm also has experience with a number of Fortune 500 companies.

Given Dr. Luntz' Republican pedigree, it's not surprising that the reviewers on Amazon.com were divided in their opinions about *Words That Work*. One claimed "...the book as a whole truly reads more like a manual for right-wing positioning." But in contrast, 51 of the 77 Amazon.com customer reviews gave *Words That Work* four or five stars (on a five star scale).

On the back cover, Al Franken was quoted with an excellent back-handed compliment for Dr. Luntz:

"Language is like music. Unfortunately, the Republicans have a Paul McCartney in the person of Frank Luntz. Somehow, we Democrats got stuck with Yoko Ono."

And among other things, the publisher claims that:

"...Dr. Luntz not only raises the curtain on the craft of effective language, but also offers priceless insight on how to find and use the right words to get what you want out of life."

All of this told us *Words That Work* would be an interesting, and hopefully a useful business book. Since one of the core offerings of OG is marketing communication effectiveness, we are particularly interested in what Dr. Luntz does, and how he does it, and anything new we could learn for the benefit of our clients.

## The Basic Premise

*Words That Work* covers a wide range of subjects, including:

- The ten rules of effective language
- Preventing message mistakes
- How "Words That Work" are created
- Be the message
- Words we remember
- Corporate and political case studies
- Myths and realities about language and people
- What we REALLY care about
- Personal language for personal scenarios
- Twenty-one words and phrases for the Twenty-first century

## Where We Agree

*Words That Work* is one of the best marketing books we've read in years. Dr. Luntz is an exceptional author, with a comfortable, easy-to-read and easy-to-understand writing style.

We found that the comparisons between the political and corporate worlds make *Words That Work* more engaging and memorable than most marketing books. Perhaps it's a function of the personal connections most of us have with American politics...

In addition, it's terrific that most of the examples Dr. Luntz presents are topical – a shortcoming in many marketing books, which use the "same old" case studies to reinforce their points-of-view.

# Our Take: OG's Point-of-View On Best-Seller Business Books

A good summary of our agreement with Dr. Luntz, and our appreciation of his book is what he calls The Ten Rules of Successful Communication:

1. Simplicity: Use Small Words
2. Brevity: Use Short Sentences
3. Credibility is as Important as Philosophy
4. Consistency Matters
5. Novelty: Offer Something New
6. Sound and Texture Matter
7. Speak Aspirationally
8. Visualize
9. Ask a Question
10. Provide Context and Explain Relevance

## Where We Disagree

The one area where OG respectfully disagrees with *Words That Work* is the belief in the value (and over reliance on) qualitative research, specifically focus groups, as a research tool. On pages 74 and 75, Dr. Luntz states:

“That’s why I am a committed disciple of focus groups in general and the “Instant Response Dial Session” in particular.”

“...a well-run focus group is the most honest of all research techniques because it involves the most candid commentary and all of the uncensored intensity that real people can muster.”

Over the past six years, OG has successfully employed its IdeaLoopz® methodology for creating and optimizing marketing ideas, communication messages and key visuals. And importantly, IdeaLoopz® is based on a fundamentally different research philosophy than that espoused by Dr. Luntz.

The truth is we believe in and trust in quantitative research as the foundation for our work much more than qualitative research. While this should not be interpreted as an absolute, “either/or” statement, (we do use qualitative research as a diagnostic tool for many of our clients), we have found there are critical advantages with quantitative research, including:

- The ability to make business decisions with statistically-reliable facts. As Dr. Luntz concedes on page 75, “True, they (focus groups) do have their limitations, most important among them the scientific inability to project the results of a discussion with two or three dozen people to a population of thousands or millions.”
- The ability to use consecutive research studies to build proprietary databases. And with those research databases, to conduct meta-analyses which can help answer strategic business and marketing questions. It is impossible to build a qualitative research database.
- The elimination of subjectivity in interpreting research results. In our thirty years of experience, we have seen far too many instances of focus group videotapes being edited to “prove” a preconceived point-of-view or to sell a particular “conclusion”.

# Our Take: OG's Point-of-View On Best-Seller Business Books

Importantly, it's the issue of subjectivity that takes our belief in the primacy of quantitative research to its conclusion. When clients hire experts like Dr. Luntz, they expect to be the beneficiaries of his considerable experience and skills. But at the same time, these clients have also created a barrier to exit. They are dependent on the interpretations of the research expert in connecting the results of multiple studies.

That's why we are "committed disciples" of quantitative research, and helping remove the emotional and political barriers to producing better marketing decisions and marketing communications.

## Our Top 20 Quotes from *Words That Work*

Because we found this book so broad-ranging and informative, we couldn't limit ourselves to the usual Top Ten quotes list. So this time we offer you twenty quotes, which are listed in no particular order:

- "Words that work, whether fiction or reality, not only explain but also motivate. They cause you to think as well as act. They trigger emotion as well as understanding."
- "What a tragedy that their (corporations') language is trapped in a Harvard Business School textbook from the 1950s instead of a plain-speaking John McCain-esque twenty-first century approach."
- "Just pick up almost any 2007 annual report and leaf through to the standard CEO letter. Circle the words, phrases, and concepts you don't understand, you don't like, or you aren't quite sure about. You'll need a lot of ink."
- "A few – very few – publications have explored the strategic intersection between politics, business, Hollywood, the media, and communication."
- "Finding a good message and then sticking with it takes extraordinary discipline, but it pays off ten-fold in the end."
- "...there is one word in the English language that automatically triggers the process of visualization. That word: imagine."
- "Too often, corporate chieftains have used language as a weapon to obscure and exclude rather than as a tool to inform and enlighten."
- "It's hard to tell who is in greater demand today: the Madison Avenue branding experts who are brought in to teach political parties how to define themselves, or the political consultants who are brought into corporate boardrooms to teach businesses how to communicate more effectively."
- "I return to the Warren Beatty mantra once again: "People forget what you say, but they remember how you made them feel."
- "By all means, show don't tell...reveal your personality...be the message, rather than narrating it, but above all, be authentic."
- "The company persona is the sum of the corporate leadership, the corporate ethos, the products and services offered, interaction with customer, and, most importantly, the language that ties it all together."
- "And when the message, messenger, and recipient are on the same page, I call this rare phenomenon "language alignment", and it happens far less than frequently than you might expect. In fact, virtually all of the companies that have hired my firm for communication guidance have found themselves linguistically unaligned."
- "...but when you have your sales force promoting a message that has no similarity with the advertising campaign, it undermines both. The language in the ads and promotions must match the language on the street, in the shop and on the floor."

# Our Take: OG's Point-of-View On Best-Seller Business Books

- “Using several different statistical testing techniques, my firm determined that the two demographic characteristics that best predict how a woman is likely to vote: family status and employment status. Age, education, and income – the traditional demographic targets for women – are less important in determining how to speak and appeal to women than knowing whether they have kids at home or whether they work full-time outside the home.”
- “Men are the exact opposite. Family status and career barely matter, while age, income and education matter considerably.”
- “When an advertisement asks the audience to “imagine”, it’s inviting them to take ownership of the product or service being sold – to make it their own.”
- “In fact, Americans prefer a “hassle-free” product to a “less expensive” one by an impressive 62 percent to 38 percent.”
- “People may demand that companies take responsibility, but they don’t want the companies themselves talking about it. By doing so, a company has already conceded too much...and has begun to confirm the public’s worst fears.”
- “Describing your company and products as “innovative” is far better than saying they’re “new and improved”.
- “Spending” is morally neutral – it could be good or bad, responsible or wasteful. “Investment” is by definition reasonable and responsible. “Investment” is also by definition forward-looking, whereas “spending” implies instant gratification.”

## OG's 1-9 Rating

With IdeaMap® research, we ask respondents to rate concepts on a 1 to 9 scale, where 9 is the most positive ranking.

Using this 1-9 measurement scale, OG gives *Words That Work* a 9.

Without reservation, we found *Words That Work* to be the best book about communication we’ve read in years. Maybe ever.

But at the same time, we philosophically disagree with Dr. Luntz’ reliance on qualitative research for on-going business and marketing decision-making.

That one editorial comment aside, we recommend *Words That Work* as a “must-read” business book.