# On this we agree: no more corporate speak

By Kelsey Smith and Sam Ali, Fidelity Central Staff Writers 5/9/2018

In the spirit of our [Leadership Principles](#), "Telling It Like It Is" and "Thinking and Working Across Fidelity," Sam and Kelsey tackle the issue of Corporate Speak and how it hinders our ability to collaborate with one another and bring our true selves to work each day. Part of becoming a digital-first company means communicating more authentically and avoiding jargon is a good first step.
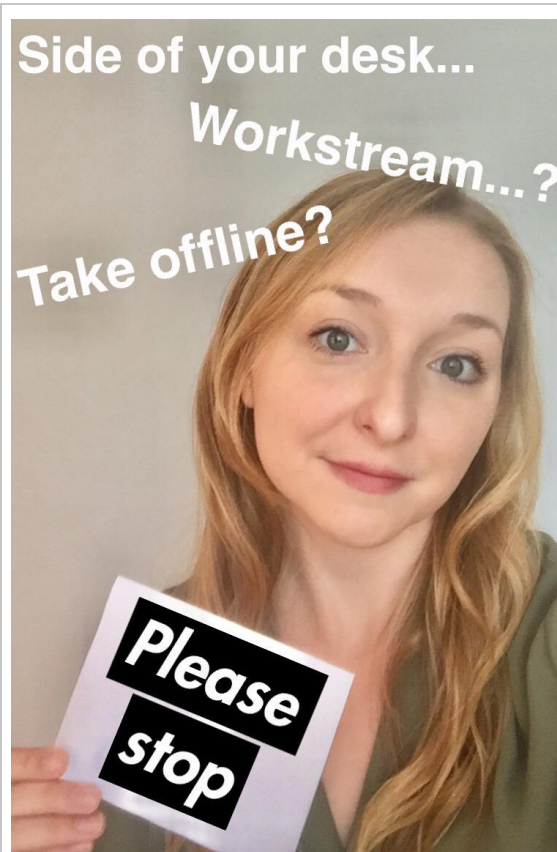
Joining a company like Fidelity can feel like assimilating into a new society. You have to learn our culture's customs, from how we dress and what we value, to how we communicate.

When I first joined Fidelity as an intern,

I'm probably going to date myself here, but I came of age as a reporter when Arthur Levitt Jr. was chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission

In 1998, under Levitt's leadership, the SEC issued a white paper on "plain

most of these things came easily. But one thing kept tripping me up: Fidelity's language.

In most meetings, I'd be scouring Fidelity Central's Acronym Tool, trying to keep up with (or should I say decode) the conversation. In addition to abbreviations, my colleagues were using phrases that just didn't make sense to me. PowerPoints (called "decks"?) were heavy with corporate lingo, and I spent all summer wondering if "take this offline" meant they really wanted to log offline and talk in-person, or just drop it.

Corporate Speak can leave you feeling ignorant and embarrassed to speak up in your own voice. So we figure there is one solution: learn the language.

This inevitable adoption of Corporate Speak is driven by a pressure to fit in and "sound" professional. After all, if you don't sound like the person at the front of the room, how could you expect to one day be in their position? It's like a prerequisite for career success that no one talks about.

But shouldn't professionalism hinge on the ability to communicate successfully and get a point across?

Having a unique company culture is valuable, but let's take a second look at Corporate Speak. It's a barrier to inclusion for new hires and external audiences, and leaves even tenured associates confused.

I've come to realize Corporate Speak is not something to learn, but rather

English" writing. The [59-page handbook](#) was Levitt's attempt to persuade publicly-traded companies and funds to "speak to investors in words they can understand."

As a young journalist trying to make sense of the world of finance and banking, I brandished that handbook like a swordsman whenever I interviewed senior business leaders, research analysts, and Wall Street executives.

The introductory comments in the handbook were penned by Warren E. Buffett, who wrote that he liked to pretend he was talking to his sisters Doris and Bertie, whenever he wrote his famous shareholder letters.

And he invited anyone who didn't have siblings to borrow his own (as a form of inspiration) when writing and talking. I often think about Doris and Bertie when I write, and I also use my own mom as my muse when tackling a complicated issue.

All this to say, I'm pretty hardcore when it comes to speaking and writing plainly and replacing business jargon, clichés, and Corporate Speak with straightforward phrases. The whole idea of communicating, after all, is to make sure the other person understands what you're trying to say either in writing or verbally.

When you say things like "leveraging cross-silo synergies" you're actually putting up barriers that prevent people from understanding what you're really trying to say.

something to actively avoid. I'm aspiring to be a leader who communicates with clarity, authenticity, and efficiency. Plus, I'm hoping my non-Fidelity friends quit giving me blank stares whenever I talk about my "bandwidth," "value-adds," and "deliverables."	Bottom line: the next time you're tempted to say "out of pocket" or "external stakeholders," "leverage a best practice" or "SME," my advice is...don't.

Tips for handling Corporate Speak in the workplace:

- **Avoid buzzwords.**
- **Avoid acronyms.**
- **Think that sounded pretentious? It probably did. Try rewording.**

And if you're on the receiving end of really confusing business jargon, don't be shy. Raise your hand and ask for clarification. The room will thank you. Truly, the number of associates who are also scratching their heads is larger than you think.

Share your Corporate Speak pet peeves with us in the comments below.