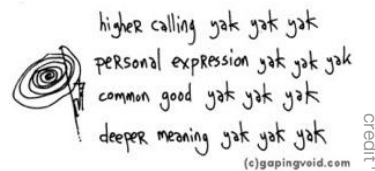


# “Authentic” is dead. And so is “is dead.”

*What should you do instead?*

**It’s time to retire the following phrases.** They should no longer be used in any context except derisive mocking:

- The Holy Grail of
- Designed with you in mind
- Putting customers first
- All new
- Win-win
- Proven track record
- Fast and easy<sup>2</sup>
- The leading provider of<sup>3</sup>
- And more<sup>4</sup>
- For everyone<sup>5</sup>
- The go-to choice for \_\_\_\_\_
- Transforming the way you \_\_\_\_\_



- Designed with ❤️ in \_\_\_\_\_
- The future of \_\_\_\_\_ is here
- Everything you think you know about \_\_\_\_\_ is wrong
- \_\_\_\_\_ considered harmful
- \_\_\_\_\_ is broken
- \_\_\_\_\_ is dead
- \_\_\_\_\_ sucks<sup>6</sup>
- Saves you time, so you can get back to doing what you do best.

Also eschew these words, as devoid of meaning as a yogi’s mantra and as useless as a simile that doesn’t contribute new information:

- **Authentic**
- Solution
- Turnkey solution
- Genuine
- Powerful
- Secure
- Simple
- Innovative
- Insight
- Revolutionary
- Unsurpassed
- Unparalleled
- Cutting-edge
- World-class
- State-of-the-art
- Game-changing
- Ground-breaking
- Value-add
- Disruptive<sup>7</sup>



**These words have been corrupted by those who claim to honor their meaning but do not act accordingly.**

When a company claims to “put customers first” but then uses “Level 1 support” as a shield<sup>8</sup> to prevent customers from intruding on profits, we realize talk is cheap.

When a company claims to have “secure” payments but then 100,000 credit card numbers are stolen, we realize you don’t need a permit to claim that you’re secure.

When a company claims to be “innovative and disruptive”<sup>7</sup> but then pitches an idea you’ve heard ten times in the past month, it reminds us that if you have to say it, it’s probably not true.<sup>9</sup>

When 78% of “About Us” web pages claim “the leading provider” of something, we are no longer impressed.

Like a song over-played on the radio, like a restaurant over-hyped in the magazines, **repetition of even powerful, wonderful phrases will kill them.**

Oh I know 21% of you stopped reading as soon as you saw that “authentic” made the list, and shot over to Twitter to unleash a scathing missive explaining how “authenticity” is the prime mover<sup>10</sup> of modern marketing, honorable salesmanship,<sup>11</sup> and meaningful relationships.

I agree! In fact all these words and phrases *theoretically* carry meaning, but theory is for people who don’t need to sell \$2,600 more software by next Friday so they can make rent.

And sure, it actually *is* good to be “authentic.” I respect the work of all those bloggers and Twitter-ers and lecturers and consultants who drove this word deep into our psyches. Indeed, it is a gift: bringing genuine authenticity and the give-first-sell-later behavior, in contrast with to traditionally sterile, aggressive, non-engaging, selfish world of sales and marketing. The more people honor this code of conduct, the better for us all.

Nevertheless, it’s time to retire words like “authentic.” The misuse is too widespread, the abuse too deep.



“Buzzword jargon buzzword, hyperbole buzzword buzzword, trite rhyming platitude... Yep, looks good.”

credit 12

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO INSTEAD?

### Be specific.

Many of the dead words weren’t especially illustrative to begin with. As far as I know, a “solution” just means “product and/or service,” so the word isn’t adding information. Instead, inspire me by being specific.

- Instead of “easy” say “so straightforward, you won’t need a manual.”
- Instead of “inexpensive” say “just a dollar a day.”
- Instead of “powerful” say “processes 6,253,427 requests daily.”
- Instead of “secure” say “blocks 96 million attacks daily.”
- Instead of “disruptive” say “72% of our customers say they’ll never go back to a normal email client.”

- Instead of “beloved” show your NPS or CSAT or G2 rating or a massive wall of real, unsolicited testimonials, like tweets.

Here’s more about being specific.<sup>13</sup>

## Show, don’t tell

Some dead words are descriptive, but they don’t paint a picture. “Powerful” sounds nice I suppose, but how does that change my life? *Showing* something in action is more evocative than *describing* it.

- Instead of saying it’s fast, show a speed test (especially against competitors).
- Instead of saying it’s easy, have a video demonstrating your tool solving someone’s problem in 60 seconds flat.
- Instead of saying you have eager, responsive, intelligent tech support, put a “chat now” bar on every page of your website.
- Instead of saying that customers love you, show testimonials from 100 customers. (No one will read them all, but you can impress with sheer quantity.)
- Instead of saying “we’re innovative,” show your change-log, impressing the viewer with your product velocity.
- Instead of a bullet-list of benefits, quote actual customers describing your impact on their lives.
- Instead of generic-sounding testimonials, reproduce unsolicited tweets that show genuine love and gratitude.
- Instead of saying you value your customers,<sup>8</sup> tell them to call you to test it out, and then answer the phone on the second ring.

## Name & Embrace

My favorite way to start a sales pitch is to make fun of typical sales pitches.

What I always said at Smart Bear:

I know you were hoping for a 22-slide PowerPoint deck with our mission statement and company history. I’m really sorry to disappoint! ‘Cause I’m just going to start the demo and let you interrupt me with questions.

And:

People claim that peer code review tools will do magic things like make your developers smarter or fix existing social problems with the team. Actually, if anything, code review can magnify latent social issues! However, I do believe our tool will save you time and aggravation in these 4 specific ways [...], so as we go through the demo, see if you agree.

Because you’re willing to say the quiet bit out loud, to say what others hide, especially when we all know the truth, you earn credibility. (And often some laughs.) Now folks are more open to your claims—even those that are well-worn.

## Own it completely

You *can* still use an abused word if you totally, 100% own the concept.

You can claim “legendary customer service” if you back that with first-ring, human phone service, online chat from your home page, quick-response Twitter monitoring, and 15-minute turn-around time on tech support emails even at 3am on a Sunday. Be sure to communicate all that too, because if you *lead* with the dead phrase I’ll leave before you get the chance to prove it.

“*Be the change you wish to see in the world.*”

—Gandhi

When old ideas become cliché, that’s an implicit call for new ideas. This time around, can you lead instead of follow?

Of course this is unfairly difficult. Quick: Come up with a compelling new philosophy for human interaction and global communication, marketing, sales, and relationships!

Yeah it’s unreasonable, and not certainly required, but remember the best ideas often aren’t reasonable (excuse the clichés) ground-breaking, innovative, out-of-the-box, Earth-shattering epiphanies. **Often great ideas are a synthesis of other ideas** with just a smidge of novel insight, or just **putting into words what others sense but cannot articulate.**

This is the hardest and most time-consuming way to break out of the mundane, but also the most rewarding. And if you do come up with something, then your who will love you for it,<sup>14</sup> and then help you grow and thrive.<sup>15</sup>

You’re a little company, so act like one.<sup>16</sup> And enjoy the love.

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*Current version of this article:*

<https://longform.asmartbear.com/authentic-is-dead/>

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