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TRAINING IN MANAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION SKILLS

In Form

Our newsletter, **In Form**, keeps you up-to-date with our training services and new initiatives.

In Form no. 33

Poodles, alligators and persuasive power

Just about all of us have heard the story about the old lady who put her pet poodle in the microwave after giving it a bath because drying the dog with a towel was too slow. And do you remember the one about giant alligators living in New York's sewers? When NY residents' pet alligators grew too large to keep at home they apparently dumped them in the city's sewer system - where they survived, multiplied and grew to an enormous size. And even today school kids repeat the story about the faked Apollo Moon landing. Sorry to disappoint, but these are all urban legends. Fun stories, but just not true.

Urban legends are apocryphal second-hand stories that are just plausible enough to be believed. Most of these stories rely on supposedly trustworthy sources to convince you of their veracity. 'It really happened to a friend of mine', for example, is a particular favourite. Nowadays the Internet is a great place to catch up on the latest stories doing the rounds. How about:

- Barack Obama is a Muslim. (False.)
- The Dirección General de Tráfico has installed devices that call your mobile when you're driving - and fine you when you answer. (False - I hope.)
- Tom Cruise is gay. (Well, who knows?)

Most of us feel we're too smart to be taken in by urban legends. Only the truly gullible fall for these stories, right? That's certainly what we thought, but we were wrong. We now know that our courses have regularly featured an urban legend that is repeated by almost everyone in the field of communication. On our courses we quote a study by Yale University to discover the 12 most persuasive words in the English language. The 12 words are:

1. You
2. Easy
3. New

READ MATTHEWS Lope de Vega 36, 28014 Madrid, Spain

e-mail: rm@readmatthews.com - **Voice:** (+34) 914 292 115 - **Fax:** (+34) 913 691 965

© Read Matthews · Last updated on Wednesday, September 2nd, 2009 @ 8:52pm CEST

4. Save
5. Free
6. Help
7. Money
8. Results
9. Love
10. Proven
11. Discovery
12. Guarantee

Or at least we thought they were. It turns out that no such study by Yale University exists. Apparently a US advertising executive cooked up the list around 50 years ago. The reference to Yale University was simply to give it one of those supposedly trustworthy sources. And we all fell for it!

So, time for an apology and some changes to our courses? No way. Even though the list is an invention, we like it and we're sticking with it. We've always loved the idea that *you* is the most persuasive word in English or any other language. Future studies may produce different lists of words, but *you* will always be Number One with us. Simply put, good communicators say *you* more often than *I*. Giving your message a strong *you* focus will forge a stronger connection with your listeners and boost your persuasive power.

One word that is not on the apocryphal list of persuasive words is *because*. This is a pity as a real study by Harvard University social psychologist Ellen Langer and her colleagues shows that *because* has true persuasive power. In one study Langer had a stranger ask someone waiting in line to use a photocopier, 'Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine?' In these cases, 60 percent of people agreed to let the stranger make copies ahead of them. When the stranger included a reason for the request, however (e.g., 'May I use the Xerox machine *because* I'm in a hurry'), an overwhelming 94 percent agreed. So, always remember to explain the reasons for your requests with the word *because* - even when you think the reasons may be obvious - if you want to increase your chances of getting what you want.

If you'd like to learn more about persuasion and influencing, just sign up for one of our ***Communication & Interpersonal Skills*** courses. More information at www.readmatthews.com/courses/communication.php