

## Prospering in our Information Age

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### The film: The Winning Edge

In English we often use the expression, "to have an edge over our competitors." This means to be a little better than the next enterprise in the marketplace which offers a service in the same sector.

The film "The winning edge" confronts the viewer with the question, "Does the horse that wins a major race run 10 times faster than the horse he beats by a nose?" Clearly, the answer is no. However, he is rewarded with 20 times the prize money. He may be only a tiny bit better but this winning edge makes all the difference. It is the difference between earning \$30,000 a year and \$300,000, or even \$3,000 000. In the industrial context it means that one small piece of information could be extremely valuable. And as so much business is conducted in English it is vital to equip yourself and your colleagues with the requisite skills to maintain or establish this winning edge.

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### Benefits of a wide vocabulary

One of the main ways to protect your business and your future is to guard against becoming obsolete. And one way to do this is to develop a system for generating new ideas. The more you develop the more chance you have of having a good one. Interestingly, we only recognise ideas if we have the necessary words to describe them. In other words you only see what you know.

An experiment from the former Soviet Union illustrates this point. Two groups of children, one group from a poor background, the other from a more well-off family were shown a picture of a butterfly. They were then asked to draw what they had seen from memory. Those with a better background and better education were able to draw with greater detail. It was discovered that this ability had to do with the number of words they had available in their minds.

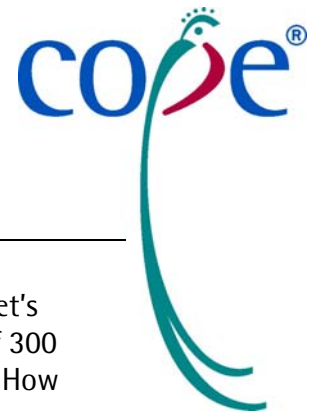
The children from the poor background were then taught the words needed to describe the butterfly. When they knew these words they could then draw the picture in much greater detail. They were only able to recognise the patterns on the wings of the butterfly when they had the words to describe them.

So, to transfer this to daily business the more you know the more you recognise. On a linguistic level, if you know 5000 words you have more chance of recognising patterns and generating new ideas than someone with a vocabulary of 1000 words.

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#### Impressum:



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**Clarity of goals** This means you know which skills you need to achieve it. Let's imagine you need to be able to speak in English in front of 300 people at an international conference. on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2001. How would you go about this?

**IMPORTANT:** You would ask yourself the following questions:

- What skills do you need?
- Who do you know who has these skills?
- Do you know an expert who could train you?

Then you could break down the task into sub-tasks which could be:

Step	Action
1	Find 6 relevant anecdotes which my audience would appreciate.
2	Learn the linguistic/rhetorical phrases you need in English. These act as a skeleton for your talk.
3	Write a first draft.
4	Get feedback from a person with the specialised know-how to give feedback on content. Get an English coach to polish up your English skills.
5	Rehearse in front of 3 friends.
6	Write a second draft.
7	Put the talk onto tape and listen to it in your car.

These are just a few suggestions and show how much easier a big task is if you break it down into bite-sized bits.

How do you eat an elephant? - One bite at a time

Only by a commitment to continual improvement can companies maintain the edge over their competitors and ensure a successful, enjoyable and prosperous future.

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Good luck and until next time.

*John A. Doorbar*