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BUSINESS

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In business terms, what it means is ...

Author unfuzzifies jargon as he deciphers the language of deals

Ron Sturgeon was trying to raise money to expand his auto salvage business about eight years ago when a venture capitalist mentioned great

investors. The phrase was used to convey how deals invariably have a late-in-the-game "surprise" like an old hot dog frozen in a refrigerator.



CHERYL HALL

Mr. Sturgeon, a self-made millionaire with a high school education, entered the term into his PalmPilot. It was the first of more than 1,200 electronic entries — the jargon and colloquial lingo used

in business today.

It's also the name of his self-published dictionary, *Green Wines and Blue Diligence*, one of the funniest — and most useful — books to grow any deal in 20 years.

I love creative twists of the language. One I heard recently: "I'm not an executive office, an exceedingly opulent executive office. Then this treasure trove shows up. I simply had to talk to the guy."

His project started out as self-improvement.

"I'd pull out my Palm and put in a word," he says. "It got to be kind

of a job. 'Well, Ron's got another word. Tell him what it means.' I'd paraphrase the meaning until I could research it. I'd say 90 percent came in that way."

Mr. Sturgeon, who lives in Colleyville, is a 54-year-old entrepreneurial dynamo as court-tried as a fish.

His father died when he was a senior at Highland High School in 1971, leaving him with only a 1965 Volkswagen to share with his two brothers.

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Author has way with business words

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"My stepmom started charging us rent right after he died, so me and my brother moved out," he recalls. "I wanted to be a lawyer but didn't like school well enough to do the lawyer stuff."

Instead, he opened a garage that did VW repairs, paint and bodywork.

In 1980, Mr. Sturgeon opened an auto junkyard in Haltom City with one employee. When he sold it to a Ford Motor Co. subsidiary, Greenleaf LLC, 19 years later, his company had 140 employees at six Texas locations generating annual sales of \$15 million.

"How 'bout I say I sold for in excess of \$10 million?" Mr. Sturgeon says, then uses a phrase from his book: "It was bigger than a breadbasket but smaller than a car."

'Lots of words'

Mr. Sturgeon stayed with Ford for about 18 months but never warmed up to his corporate boss. "Learned lots of words, lots of words in that period."

Since then, he's done several lucrative transactions.

Most recently, he and a small investment group bought Greenleaf from Ford and sold it this month for \$23.5 million, according to public documents.

Three years ago, he self-published his first book, *How to Salvage Millions*, as a marketing tool for his small-business consulting practice.

He thinks *Green Weenies* will boost his credibility as a financial expert — as well as show off his colorful personality. "My business friends say they keep me around for the entertainment value."

Right now, the only way to buy *Green Weenies*, which went on sale midmonth, is on Amazon.com or

Mr. Sturgeon's Web site, www.greenweenies.com. He sold 100 copies last week, thanks in part to a favorable review in *BusinessWeek* magazine.

Green Weenies may not be self-published for long. Dallas literary agent Dedie Leahy got her hands on it and is hawking it to national publishing companies. She even envisions international editions.

Panel of experts

As part of Mr. Sturgeon's editing process, he gave the accounting section to his CPA to make sure the definitions were both academic and street savvy.

He also put a preacher, teacher, lawyer and corporate marketer on PC patrol. Their input resulted in an abridged version, cleansed of raw verbiage.

Mr. Sturgeon thinks his G-rated edition will make a dandy corporate gift in lieu of turkeys and gift baskets.

Gahan Wilson, whose distinctive cartoons are often published in *Playboy* and *The New Yorker*, illustrated the book. Mr. Wilson, who's 75 and certainly doesn't need the work, didn't come cheaply. Mr. Sturgeon paid \$40,000 for 70 illustrations.

But hey, what's \$40 grand to a rich guy?

"Well, I didn't get here by being silly," Mr. Sturgeon says. "But having Gahan illustrate my book doubled the market for it."

For example, three companies agreed to do speculative design work for the book cover the minute they learned Mr. Wilson was involved.

The artist, who lives in Sag Harbor, N.Y., says money never entered the equation. He wanted to illustrate the book because he thinks it's funny, instructive and suited to his playfully grotesque

and macabre style.

"Well, there are very dark aspects to business, don't you think?" Mr. Wilson says cheerily.

No phrase is too simple or trite for Mr. Sturgeon, who included a definition of *chief executive* along with such painfully overused phrases as *outside the box* and *paradigm shift*.

"You'd be surprised at the

words some people don't know and are too embarrassed to ask about," he says.

When I point out that he missed *pushing the envelope*, he says he'll add that to the 350 phrases he's collected for his next book.

I wish I'd kept my mouth shut.

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A (BUSINESS) LANGUAGE ALL ITS OWN...

Some definitions from *Green Weenies & Due Diligence*. Some of the definitions have been abbreviated with the author's permission.

All hat, no cattle: A big shot with no substance.



Gahan Wilson

Alligator property: Real estate where taxes, maintenance and/or interest rates eat up profits.

Burping the elephant: When a really big company divests a small division.

Chips and salsa: Hardware and software.

Creepback: When employees are let go and then rehired as consultants.

Don't change the dog food without talking to the dog: Don't go to market before understanding what the customer really wants.

Fuzzify: Make details less clear.

Hit and run management: The boss strikes and then quickly leaves the scene.

Leg sniff: The early stages of hiring an important employee or forming a partnership when all parties try to determine if it is a good fit.

Lipstick on a pig: You can't make something ugly look better than it is.

Mouse milking: Maximum effort for minimum returns.

Psychic income: Non-monetary compensation, such as pride of work.

Sharing teeth: Insufficient resources that have to be shared like geezers passing around false teeth at a dinner table.

Surgery with a butter knife: A botched performance.

Wallet biopsy: Sizing up a potential customer financially.

WOMBAT: Waste of money, brains and time.



Gahan Wilson

Why keep a dog and bark yourself? Why surround yourself with talented people if you bark orders at them?



Ron Sturgeon

Self-published author Ron Sturgeon used profits from his auto salvage business to feed his passion for expensive cars.