



Webwords 53

Forging professional identities

Caroline Bowen



Webwords anticipated a forthright answer when she asked Speechwoman what she thought of the title of Webwords 53.

“It’s open to more than one interpretation”, Speechwoman said tersely. “Why not replace ‘forging’ with a word like attaining, or building, or constructing, crafting, creating, developing, establishing, fashioning, forming, growing, h...” She went on a bit. Alphabetically. I mean, honestly and truly! The woman is a talking thesaurus.

“Pernickety and pedantic,” muttered Webwords, not quite quietly enough.

“I heard that, and no, I’m sorry, your title is ambiguous.”

“Deliberately so.”

“So you *want* ‘forging’ to imply ‘purposefully creating something strong, enduring, or successful’ and ‘faking it’?”

“Absolutely, because faking it can be a useful tool – especially for novices in a field, or newcomers to a specialised area within one.

“Says?”

“Says Athene Donald. She’s writing about career progression, confidence building and moments of transition to independence.”

“Ah.” Speechwoman is nothing if not a good listener, and now she was almost prepared to really, really listen. But not before allowing herself a final salvo, “If you’re including the part about pedantic and pernickety, you will have to put persnickety, persssssnikety. For your American readers. Since you like to speak to the international SLP/SLT community.”

“They’ll figure it out. Are you going to listen to this?”

Speechwoman composed herself as Webwords read from the screen the last couple of sentences of the piece that had caught her interest.

...faking experience and faking confidence are all good ways of coping with uncertainty and lack of knowledge. You will know you’re doing it, but by practicing sounding calm and certain, over time when you find – with luck – that the world has not crashed around your shoulders and that you are indeed moving forward rather than back each time you do it, the fake will become the real thing. And then you are ready for the next challenge, and the next. Athene Donald, “Faking It”, June 2015

Fresh Sciences

Webwords 53, in the November 2015 issue of the *JCPSLP*, “Fresh science and pioneering practice”, is flanked by an

exciting array of articles: uniquely interesting because they are the outcome of student project findings. Based on honours and quality improvement projects, and units of independent study, they were completed in the 2014 academic year by speech-language pathology (SLP) students enrolled in undergraduate or masters level professional preparation programs in university courses around Australia.

If Webwords guesses correctly, most of the authors will have put their student personas to one side, for the time being at least, to embark on careers in speech pathology — or, to wait for a **full-time job**² to come up (HWA, 2014, p. 30). Some will be bitten by the research bug and go on to be doctoral students, post docs, early career researchers, and so forth; most will pursue a clinical career; a handful will do both; and many will eventually assume administrative roles. Inevitably, they will struggle at times with issues around work-life **balance**³ and setting professional **boundaries**⁴, or enjoy the challenges they pose. A significant number of them will leave the field (McLaughlin, Adamson, Lincoln, Pallant & Cooper, 2010), or leave and **return**⁵.

Whatever the case, all will need a periodic boost to spur them on whether they are primarily high self-reinforcers, or whether they generally look to others for support and encouragement. Everyone needs a fillip from time to time. So this seems like a good opportunity for Webwords to hunt down a selection of wisdom tucked away in blogs and books, and helpful online resources, for SLPs/SLTs at all stages of their careers.

Blogs

Little wonder Speechwoman became closely attentive at the mention of British academic, engaging blogger and steady Tweeter, Dame Athene Donald, Professor of Experimental Physics at the University of Cambridge.

In February 2015, she **blogged**⁶ reflectively on eight matters she wished she had been on top of as a student and early career researcher. 1) Don’t be fooled or intimidated by a supremely confident demeanour in another, and 2) beware of the dangers of over-confidence in yourself. 3) By all means plan, but understand that an inflexible 5-year plan may lead to missed or unnoticed opportunities along the way. 4) No matter how irrelevant skills and facts acquired at school or as an undergraduate may seem now, most will be useful at some point. 5) Don’t feel the need to emulate someone else’s “right way” of doing something successfully; find a way that that builds on

your strengths and suits your style: it may even be superior. 6) and Seven (for perfectionists): you *can* cut corners, but know the angles; and show willing when opportunities arise, even when you are aware that you are not the perfect person for the job, *now*: work hard at on-the-job training. 8) Asking a question (once, mind!) is not an admission of weakness, but a sign of strength.

Akin to public **speaking**⁷, answering and asking questions publicly can be fraught with participation anxiety, and the calmly named Serena at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, presents six strategies that helped her when she was a student, too scared to raise a hand in class in order to **answer**⁸ a question. By contrast, Dorothy Bishop at the University of Oxford addresses the (mainly female) participants at professional meetings who ask questions inside their heads but keep schtum when called upon to **ask**⁹ one out loud. Irritated by the passivity she perceives among these particular women, and attempting to explain it, Bishop refers to Virginia Vallan's compelling 1999 book **Why so slow?**¹⁰

Blogs can be sources of clinical guidance too. Take for example Pamela Snow's "I'm behaving at you! **Are you listening?**"¹¹ in which she reminds the reader that all behaviour is a form of communication, and that the behaviours associated with certain emotional states and skill deficits are easily mistaken for poor engagement, uncooperativeness, rudeness, or lack of motivation.

Books

Helpful advice and information are often neatly summarised, or presented as top tips, in blog posts about books. Lois Kelly's **review**¹² of *The Small Big: Small Changes that Spark Big Influence* includes a list of thought-provoking nuggets about persuasion, under the headings of communicating, influencing decisions, forming relationships, getting commitments, meetings, and building your network. Webwords found the idea of a book written by the "dream team of persuasion science" so enigmatic that she downloaded an electronic copy, and quickly appreciated why 77% of readers gave it a five-star rating. Publishers' websites often hold "think pieces" by their authors, and one that stood out in June 2015 was Eiki Satake's article on adopting an evidence-based **approach**¹³ in the clinical decision-making process. The article is in the Plural Publishing blog, providing a taster for Satake's 2014 book.

Resources

Every month since June 1998 Speechwoman has selected a speech-language pathology / speech and language therapy related **site of the month**¹⁴. Sometimes it is not so much a site, as a page, blog entry or resource within a site

that is worthwhile celebrating here. At the time of writing, 206 winners were listed. The Internet being what it is, many have disappeared, but many are alive and thriving so that Webwords can include them in an A to Z (respecting Speechwoman) selection of useful, interesting, entertaining or downright amazing web resources.

References

HWA (2014). Health workforce Australia: Speech pathology in focus. Retrived 3 July 2015 from http://www.hwa.gov.au/sites/default/files/HWA_Speech_Pathologists_in_Focus_V1.pdf

McLaughlin, E.G., Adamson, B.J., Lincoln, M.A., Pallant, J.F., & Cooper, C.L. (2010). Turnover and intent to leave among speech pathologists. *Australian Health Review*, 34(2), 227–33.

Satake, E. (2014). *Statistical methods and reasoning for the clinical sciences: Evidence-based approach*. San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing.

Links

- 1 <http://occamstypewriter.org/athenedonald/2015/06/07/faking-it/>
- 2 <https://theconversation.com/too-many-graduates-not-enough-jobs-universities-profits-and-clinical-need-13482>
- 3 <https://rachelmdavenport.wordpress.com/2014/04/27/work-life-balance-and-the-doctoral-journey/>
- 4 <http://judystonegoldman.com/im-saying-no-and-i-mean-it-do-i-the-challenge-of-boundaries/>
- 5 <http://pilesowashing.blogspot.com.au/2010/07/once-speech-pathologist-always-speech.html>
- 6 <http://occamstypewriter.org/athenedonald/2015/02/11/i-wish-id-known-then-what-i-know-now/>
- 7 <http://www.duarte.com/blog/public-speaking-for-introverts-6-essential-tips/>
- 8 <https://studyskillstips.wordpress.com/2011/03/07/help-i-have-participation-anxiety/>
- 9 <http://deevybee.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/cmon-sisters-speak-out.html>
- 10 <http://www.amazon.com/Why-Slow-The-Advancement-Women/dp/0262720310>
- 11 <http://pamelasnow.blogspot.com.au/2014/03/im-behaving-at-you-are-you-listening.html>
- 12 <http://www.foghound.com/blog/2015/04/27/learning-from-the-persuasion-scientists/>
- 13 <http://www.pluralpublishing.com/wp/?p=2310>
- 14 http://www.speech-language-therapy.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25

Webwords 53 is at www.speech-language-therapy.com with live links to featured and additional resources, including the A to Z selection mentioned above.