

Learning and teaching in context

Reflections on learning and teaching vocabulary, and on the language of leadership

When you travel to a foreign country for the first time, do you pack a grammar book or a phrase book? Most of us take a phrase book. It's basic vocabulary we need to survive. And it's this simple principle which has always made me want to put the lexical horse in front of the grammatical cart.

How do we learn vocabulary?

Let's start not with the what, but with the how. How can students effectively learn vocabulary? Which are the most effective techniques? One of our main responsibilities is to help students develop the tools to learn vocabulary efficiently.

Important questions to ask students:

- How many words do you know in English?
- How many words do you need to know?
- What is your language competence goal?
- How do you learn new words? Students can learn a lot from each other here, how they organize or which tools they use.

› Steve Flinders is a freelance writer, trainer and coach based in Malta, and is the author of *Leading People* in the Delta – York Associates International Management English series.



- How many new words a day can you realistically learn? Learning three words a day means learning more than a thousand words a year. Is this realistic?
- How do you choose which words to learn? Helping students decide what is useful can save them a lot of time and wasted effort. Selecting words based on frequency of occurrence is a key vocabulary learning skill.
- How do the words you are learning typically combine with others? I encourage learners to look and listen for collocations. Collocations are the bridges we build between single words and complete sentences.
- How can you activate the words you've learnt in order to consolidate your learning: by welcoming visitors to your organisation; leading their tour of the factory; volunteering to take them to lunch and dinner; or committing to taking part in a certain number of telephone calls and conferences every month?

And finally:

- What do you do when you can't think of a word? Developing personal coping strategies helps bring a sense of familiarity in an uncomfortable situation. As with everything else we do, we have to put vocabulary learning into the context of our ultimate aim, which is to be able to communicate successfully.

Available material

Material which helps students optimise what they can say with the language they possess is important, yet sometimes challenging to find.

Vocabulary-based activities should provide high frequency lexis which is relevant to the professional context of the learners. This culturally neutral material should be presented and practised in a lively and engaging way. There are an increasing number of books on the market which offer useful lexical sets for different professional activities – marketing, medicine, etc.

What was intriguing about the idea that Delta Publishing and York Associates had, and which led to the creation of the International Management English (IME) series with the four titles of *Leading People*, *Managing Projects*, *Managing Change* and *Working Virtually*, was that it set out to meet the needs of people working internationally who have to exercise **management skills** in English, including communication skills, in order to lead people and projects. Non-native speaking professionals had been saying things like: "I know the vocabulary I need for my job, but I don't have the language to manage organisational change or lead a virtual meeting."

The challenge of writing *Leading People* was to identify the language of leadership. Indeed, all four IME titles provide input and practice in all the main skills used by people who communicate internationally: language, with a major focus on vocabulary; communication skills like presenting and meetings; intercultural skills; and professional skills like influencing and coaching.

The eight units cover a range of topics which leaders working in diverse international settings need to understand; and identify the language which enables them to work successfully in these areas. The books in the series are also designed to help trainers understand both the skills and the language presented.

Collocations

Collocations play a central role in vocabulary development in every unit of the book. Right from the start, Unit 1 has an exercise to help learners understand various ways the word 'manage' can be used, combined with an exercise on management qualities.

Indeed, verb + noun collocations are so crucial to fluency that there are two pages of additional exercises dealing on this area alone.

8 Match the verbs (1–10) with the words or phrases (a–j) to make a list of management qualities.

A good manager ...

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 has | a clearly. |
| 2 builds | b objectives. |
| 3 gets | c mistakes and recognises this. |
| 4 implements | d roles clearly. |
| 5 adds | e shocks. |
| 6 communicates | f value. |
| 7 makes | g a vision. |
| 8 sets | h trust. |
| 9 defines | i strategy. |
| 10 absorbs | j results. |

Leading People, Unit 1, page 9

Learning in context

I take learning vocabulary in context to mean three things:

- 1 Learners and trainers taking responsibility together for identifying, practising and consolidating students' understanding and use of the vocabulary they need for their jobs.
- 2 Trainers helping learners to understand the linguistic context in which key terms are used, particu-

Retaining vocabulary

Each of the eight units in *Leading People* has a Language Reference section with language learning tips. Here is an extract from the section on learning vocabulary in Unit 6. Consider which techniques you use and which suit you best.

How do you remember words?
Some people:

- like to learn words by heart.

Business word combinations

Verb (A–E) + noun Match each verb from the box with the set of nouns (a–j) it combines best with.

achieve	adopt	boost	bring about	carry out
deal with	develop	enjoy	establish	extend

- | | | |
|---|-------|--|
| a | ..... | a customer / an emergency / a (difficult) question / a problem |
| b | ..... | confidence / morale / productivity / sales |
| c | ..... | a decision / duties / a plan / a survey |
| d | ..... | a competence / a partnership with / a process / a team |
| e | ..... | contact with / a precedent / (good) relations with / a timetable for |
| f | ..... | a plan / a policy / a proposal / a suggestion |
| g | ..... | change / an improvement / an increase / a satisfactory outcome |
| h | ..... | a deadline / a warm welcome to |
| i | ..... | an aim / a breakthrough / progress / little |
| j | ..... | (good) relations with / a (good) reputation / success / the support of |

Leading People, page 88, additional collocation practice

larly in relation to verb + noun collocations typically used in business.
3 Learners activating the vocabulary they have learned in the real-world contexts of their working lives.

- like to read a lot.
- associate words with particular images or sounds or smells and then remember the words through the association.
- look at the word's etymology: its origins and history.
- make links between new words and words they know in other languages.
- take each group of new words and put them all into a story ...

Get your students thinking about what vocabulary they need to learn and how they can learn it. We hope that *Leading People* and the tips here can set an example on how to learn vocabulary in context.

Mehr entdecken!



› **Leading people**
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