

The logo for PIXL, featuring the word "PIXL" in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. The letter "i" is lowercase and has a white dot above it. The background is a vibrant orange with various circular patterns, including a large circle with a grid of small dots in the top right and concentric circles in the bottom left.

IGNITING LEADERS
CHANGING LIVES

JARGON MONOXIDE

TRANSCRIPT

JARGON MONOXIDE

In 2003, the team at Merriam Webster dictionary started to analyse searches on their online dictionary and, from what they found, they started to compile a **'word of the year'**. Since then, the concept has taken off and they are not the only ones doing such a thing. Although this may sound like just a little fun, over time, what it shows us is really very interesting. Although the 'word of the year' award is a new thing, the concept of new words coming into our lexicon is not.

In the 1920s, we had new words like 'bees knees', 'demob', 'perm', 'nail varnish' and 'charleston'; all reflective of what was happening at the time, the words reflect the change in fashion and beauty and in dance.

In the 1940s, the tone of the words changed and we had new words such as 'big brother', 'Molotov Cocktail' and 'blitz', perhaps not surprising with a backdrop of war, threat and surveillance.

Then we fast forward to the end of the 20th century – these are our words, we have lived through these ones. We have words like **'blog', 'alcopop', 'botox', 'dotcom', 'hotdesking', 'google' and 'homepage'**. These words reflect the rise of new forms of media, the internet and new ways to communicate. People now have a voice that can reach the world through their blogs and homepages. We can now search for anything using google and, in theory, work from anywhere using hotdesking. This is also the start of addictive substances being named and packaged in a form that appeals to younger audiences.

In these words we can see how society is changing and how the forces around us are changing not only the way we think and understand but the way we speak too. TV, films, comedy and global disasters are all shaping our language and our shared understanding as well as summarising our collective experiences. Some words need no explanation for why they are there, we remember why: in the last 20 years we have had 'bovvered', 'credit crunch', 'simples', 'vax', 'gaslighting'.

So, if the words we use reflect what we are thinking, our experiences and what is on our mind, then what are we thinking right now? What are the most commonly searched words across our online dictionary platforms and what does this show us about what we are literally and metaphorically searching for now?

In 2023, the Oxford University Press word of the year was **'rizz'**. And, without wanting to sound like I'm ancient, this is apparently **'Gen Z slang for style, charm or attractiveness or the ability to attract a romantic or sexual partner'**. **'Rizz'** is a shortened form of **'charisma'**, which is unusual in itself as abbreviations are usually taken from the start of words, not the middle. **'Rizz'** was made popular by YouTubers and influencers, and was made famous by actor Tom Holland who said, **"I have no rizz whatsoever, I have limited rizz"**. **'Rizz'** beat off stiff competition from some other contenders such as **'situationship', 'de-influencing', 'Swiftie' and 'beige flag'**.

Another dictionary chose **'the ick'** as their word of the year. Getting **'the ick'** means, according to them, a sudden feeling of disgust or dislike, often in response to the actions of another person.

Merriam Webster's word of the year was **'authentic'**. Dictionary.com and the Cambridge dictionary both selected **'hallucinate'**. **'Hallucinate'** in this context is used in an artificial intelligence capacity and is defined as **'to produce information contrary to the interest of the user and present it as if true and factual'**.

Perhaps those of us who don't use these words may call it slang or **'jargon monoxide'**, as ideas from popular culture make their mark on the English language and change it, perhaps in your opinion, lessen it or enrich it. Even if we don't choose to use these words ourselves, it gives us an insight into our society which is at least interesting. **'Rizz'**, **'authentic'**, **'the ick'**, **'hallucinate'** all have a link. But can you find the words to identify it?!

APPLICATION

What is interesting about the word of the year exercise is that we see what people are thinking about as a collective. In the 1920s words were linked to fashion, in the 1940s they were linked to hostility, but what about 2023/2024? It seems to me that all the new words are to do with appearance vs reality. What might we be able to learn about these new popular words and what is happening in our society?

- 1) **Charisma ISN'T everything.** Despite how popular the term **'rizz'** is, we have to be careful not to put too many eggs in the charisma basket. Of course charisma can be a strength – it can help with communication, persuasion, making change, galvanising people, being popular, creating excitement and, when it is genuine charisma with substance, it can be great – BUT it can also be abused. Sometimes people have charisma and nothing of substance to say. Sometimes people use their charisma for their own personal ego and gain. Sometimes people use their charisma to misuse, abuse and manipulate other people – surely, that should give us, to use a new term, **'the ick'**? *Some people may have plenty of 'rizz' but we have to ask ourselves, what's behind it?*
- 2) **Knowing what you stand for and stand against is essential knowledge.** *That is one of the things people mean by the word 'authentic'. Interestingly, other words in this family were also found in the top word searches, words such as 'core values' and 'alignment' also appeared. Perhaps we are searching up these words because deep down we know that we feel a little unsettled when we meet people who are not authentic, whose words and actions don't match and who don't seem to align with our own values. Perhaps, some of us are seeing that some of what we are 'sold' may not always be real and, it only takes one or two experiences of that to make you a little more discerning in the future.*
- 3) **We need to check what we think we know!** The word **'hallucinate'** is a warning of what is going to come thick and fast as AI advances. False evidence appearing real is now widespread. As Dictionary.com says, **"this word perfectly encapsulates technology's continuing impact on social change, and the continued discrepancy between the perfect future we envision and the messy one we actually achieve"**. Other words that got close in the most popular category were also linked to this idea of appearance versus reality. One was **'situationship'** which is a relationship but not yet committed so is in no man's land. The other is **'para-social'**, a word that describes the false sense of intimacy many people feel with well-known people even though they do not actually know them. Sometimes it is worth checking what we are being told, what we are assuming or what we feel – is it based on the perfect view or the messy reality?

QUESTIONS

You may have got this far and be wondering what this has to do with you and your leadership! Well, A LOT is the answer! Here are some things to explore in our own leadership and lives around these words.

- 1) **Look back over the last few years of your leadership and give each year a 'word'** which summarises that year. What do those words tell you about what you have been through and how it has changed you? What is your intentional word for this year, before it even happens?
- 2) **What is your relationship like with the charismatic people you work with or for?** Are you too quick to follow without questioning? Or are you too cynical that even if the person is genuine, you set yourself against them? How do you work out for yourself if what glitters, really is gold?
- 3) **It is so easy to fall into echo chambers** or to find ourselves in situations that appear better than they really are. In your leadership, how are you going to ensure you remain discerning, thoughtful and considered so you can work from the messy present and lead into a better future?

As we think about words and their impact on our thinking, it is worth a reminder that the words we talk over ourselves and say about ourselves, really matter.

Be kind to yourself in the way you speak to yourself. Speak with the compassion, kindness and generosity you would always speak to others with. *Because maybe the words we use about ourselves, are the most important words of all.*



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