

Fondly compiled by the staff of **PUBLICAFFAIRS**

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The Peter Osnos Lexicon

or a guide to understanding the boss

The Lexicon

“The train is leaving the station.” A warning to his staff that much is expected of them, it’s going to be a lot of work, and there’s no predicting the outcome. Frequently said about midway through publishing a list when a third of the books are late, a third have yet to be written, and a third are still to be announced.

“All politics is local.” An apparent reference to the personal concerns of his authors, especially when it’s unclear why they want what they want. Frequently used in conjunction with an oft-told anecdote about Tip O’Neill.

“Have you seen all of our Bumpf?” A question frequently posed to unwitting visitors to the offices of PublicAffairs who have already received multiple copies of the catalog, audiocassette, postcard, and company brochure, but may not have actually bothered to read or listen to them.

“Send them the whole catastrophe.” Instructions to staff regarding Bumpf.

“What have you done lately?” An obscure way of telling his employees that they are doing an excellent job and should keep up the good work.

“What took you so long?” Please see “What have you done lately?”

“No one said it would be easy.” The seven-word pep talk.

“Every day in every way.” The five-word pep talk.

“You have to put air in the balloon.” Instructions to staff for getting started on a project when no details are offered and it’s unclear what has already been said in previous negotiations.

“He puts them on one leg at a time.” Frequently used in reference to notable PublicAffairs authors as a reminder that they are people just like the rest of us with their own hopes and fears and worries (e.g. multibillionaire George Soros).

“Couldn’t find his ass with both hands.” A carefully-worded denigration of another’s skills or capabilities. Never used in reference to George Soros.

“I hate to be the one to put the turd on the table.” Acknowledgment that the hearer will not appreciate what is about to be said.

“Take it where you can get it.” Used when a success is achieved no matter how small.

“Everything changes when it changes. That’s for sure.” Unclear.

“One brick at a time.”

“Never take anything for granted.”

“It’s a business of a million details.”

“You know, I said we were going to do this one book at a time.”

“You know, I said we were going to take our books door-to-door.”

All references to the labor-intensive nature of book publishing and a reminder to his staff that they have been hired to tend to such details.

“If it’s a horse, it’s a horse.” Instructions to staff to avoid becoming mired in said details of book publishing.

“If I were a camel, I’d have a hump.” Advice to staff when fretting needlessly about said details of book publishing.

“Camel shits, caravan moves on.” Offered to staff when a mistake has been made (a detail has not been tended to) and there is nothing anyone can do about it. Usually occurs after staff has listened to either “If it’s a horse, it’s a horse” or “If I were a camel, I’d have a hump.” Also, a deep-seated philosophical approach to life.

“You can’t put the turd back in the bottle.” Another scatological reference with same meaning as “Camel shits, caravan move on.”

“The key is, you gotta hire smart people.” A business strategy unparalleled in our time.

“Plan ahead and be flexible.” The operating strategy for PublicAffairs and all who work with us.