

THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

# May I, Like, Help You?

“If you, like, still have your receipt, you can, like, bring it back in, and we’ll exchange it for you, or you can just, like, get a refund.”

I’m thankful that conversation didn’t happen in my store. I overheard it between an employee and a customer in another store not long ago. The word “like” has somehow outpaced “cool” and “awesome” in our social colloquy. So many people use the L word habitually — English majors, grandmothers, parents talking to their children, schoolteachers, my 3-year-old daughter. Even politicians use “like” in abundance.

I remember when I was growing up and everything was “rad.” I interjected “rad” as much as I could, and my mother said it drove her crazy. “Like” has since taken on a life of its own, and it’s more popular than rad ever was.

I now have a habit of counting how many times someone uses “like” in a sentence or in conversations. I know, it’s a little obsessive. But I’m not the only one who thinks uttering “like” is a nasty grammatical practice. Google “overuse of the word like,” and 1.5 million related topics pop up.

I started observing its overuse during a recent discussion with one of my part-time desk staffers. I then listened to her explain our music lessons program to a potential customer. When asked about our make-up policy, she answered, “Well, if you, like, miss a lesson without notice, there is no, like, make-up, but if you call or are out sick with, like, a cold or something, we’ll make it up for you as long as you, like, call to cancel.” She was answering questions correctly, but she came across as if she were unsure of herself. She would’ve sounded much more professional had she omitted the “likes.”

## CURBING ‘LIKE’

There’s no place for “like” in the retail environment, so how do you combat it? I look for it in the initial job interview. I point it out during performance reviews. It’s not necessarily a nervous gesture. It may be a habit that will continue on the sales floor. I’ve found that I can introduce the topic during staff meetings.

Implementing proper grammar and eliminating improper terminology don’t have to be uncomfortable tasks. How about making it a game? Urge employees to chip in a quarter or dollar every time they use “like” in a sentence. Try it for a month. The person with the fewest infractions wins the entire pot, or you can donate it to charity. I’ve heard of retailers doing this for cursing. It brings to light how many times an offensive word gets used without someone having to point it out.

A few years ago, a friend pointed out that I used the word “right” to end a lot of sentences, as if I were asking for agreement. Once he called my attention to it, I monitored it and corrected myself. I was surprised how much I said it, how I’d never noticed it, and I was thankful my friend had the guts to point it out.

You wouldn’t text in the middle of a eulogy or sleep during church. There’s a time and place for everything, including proper communication. Imagine if President Barack Obama used “like” in his inaugural speech.

“My fellow citizens, I stand here today, like, humbled by the task before us, grateful for, like, the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors.”

Sounds ridiculous, right? **MI**



**Use of the word ‘like’ has taken on a life of its own. Best to nip it in the bud at your store**

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