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A Lesson in Language

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Annually, several of the larger purveyors of dictionaries release lists of new words that will be added to dictionaries moving forward. It's always an interesting exercise to see which words make the cut and which do not. I've no doubt that back in 2020 and now in 2021 we will see some significant changes to the English language. If you can't wait that long, however, I'm offering this handy-dandy short form lesson in language for those who remain either confused, or stubbornly resistant to, words that have changed meaning over the course of this pandemic.

We'll start with Pivot: No longer a term associated with either ?a fixed point on which something turns or balances? or even, ?a person or thing on which something depends,? pivot is now firmly a part of the new pandemic lexicon and refers to our ability to literally adapt to new circumstances CONSTANTLY, always on short notice and/or whenever Mr. Ford decides it's time for a new interpretation of the word ?lockdown.?

Cross-Border Shopping (CBS). You might have fond memories of those times when you'd head off to Buffalo for a ?girls' weekend,? or some ?back to school? shopping at fabulous discounted prices and unique finds not available here in Canada. These days, cross-border shopping has taken on a whole new meaning and is much more ?local.? CBS now refers to those folks still hunkered in our homes during lockdown (that would be us Caledon) who decide to hop across the border into York Region, or take a trip ?up north? to Orangeville just so we can hit up one of their open stores or restaurants. Stay in town. Yes, we know you're sick of it but with some of our brightest stores and restaurants here in Caledon struggling to stay afloat and to serve us curbside, STOP cross-border shopping! PS ? You might just stop the potential spread of this godforsaken virus too.

Shop ?Local.? See the paragraph preceding this one. Shopping ?local? doesn't mean hopping across the border to a region that is open while yours is still in lockdown. You don't need anything that badly! It means supporting those from whom you would normally purchase your goods and services, and hopefully, when this all ends, they'll still be around for you to continue doing so. When you are finally allowed to get your hair cut and styled again, will you find your local salon ready and waiting? We certainly hope so. But if you continue to go elsewhere, there's a chance you won't.

Here is one of my favourites, and by ?favourite? I mean that I hate it because frankly, I think we have all heard the phrase a few times too often. What are the words? ?Unprecedented Times.? I actually think there is a very good chance this phrase will end up almost as famous as the Charles Dickens line from A Tale of Two Cities, ?It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.? In fact, for those of you who know the remainder of the quote, ?unprecedented times? is an oddly accurate summation. Perhaps Mr. Dickens was channelling the future when he further wrote, ?it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.? Perhaps ?unprecedented times? actually requires no revision of meaning.

Zoom. Formerly this was a sound you made while playing with hot wheels cars with your kid, or that you sang along to the nursery rhyme ?zoom, zoom, zoom we're going to the moon.? Now, Zoom has become synonymous with a Brady Bunch collection of faces in squares on your computer screen. It's also associated with a whole new fashion statement: work wear on top and pj's on the bottom, the better to appear presentable when in meetings with clients and co-workers. Finally, with apologies to American Sign Language practitioners everywhere, it's also become known for a host of signs and hand signals to indicate to fellow Zoom participants, ?you're on mute!? and ?we can't hear you? and ?turn on your **&$% microphone!?

There are just a few more. We'll try to keep them brief. Next up is Self-quarantine: Basically, this refers to our apparent inability to follow the rules. It should mean, stay in your house ? especially if you have recently travelled (which you weren't supposed to do) or if you think you were exposed to COVID-19.

However, instead it appears to mean, ?I'm totally self-quarantining except for when my brother-in-law came over to watch the Super

Bowl but we were totally safe.? This one is followed closely by doctors explaining our need to Flatten the Curve. For some of us, attempts at flattening the curve used to mean working out in a feeble attempt to lose weight and obtain that elusive flat belly. Thankfully, due to being in lockdown and Zoom viewing us only from the waist up, no one can see me anymore so I don't give a gosh darn about flattening any curves!

Finally, I'll end with everyone's favourite and the future we are all anxiously anticipating, Herd Immunity. Here's what the term used to mean: When herd immunity is achieved for a disease, it can help protect vulnerable people from contracting it. Diseases like chicken pox and measles and polio are examples of diseases that were once common but are now rare because of vaccination. As for the new meaning of herd immunity - the term ?irrelevant? comes to mind. Here's why it's irrelevant: since it appears there are just enough anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theorists, climate deniers and QAnon followers who, for a variety of reasons, will refuse to get vaccinated, herd immunity (typically requiring a minimum of 70% of the population to be inoculated) will never be achieved. I guess that renders any definition of the term meaningless?