

## Editor's notes:

When you raise your glass of cheer this New Year's Eve and search for something pithy to say that reflects events of the past year, consider this from the wit of Mark Twain, "*Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are putting us on or by imbeciles who really mean it.*"

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By the way, January derives its name from Janus, the Roman god of gates, doorways and new beginnings. This deity is often pictured on coins or in sculptures with two faces -- one peering to the past, the other to the future.

Here are a few dates in January to peer into:

**Diet Resolution Week. January 1–7** -- For weight watchers, the Vegetarian Awareness Network uses this week to emphasize the importance of focusing on the type—not the amount—of food eaten. Resolve to consume minimally processed, less-refined carbohydrate foods.

**Trivia Day, January 4** -- A day to acknowledge and celebrate those who know all kinds of obscure facts (including this one!).

**Twelfth Night, January 5** -- The evening before Epiphany. Twelfth night marks the end of the "twelve days of Christmas."

**Burns Night, January 25** -- Hundreds of Scottish clubs and societies will meet to honour their favourite poet, Robert Burns, born in 1759. Dinners begin with "piping in the haggis," a procession of people wearing kilts, led by a bagpiper. (Haggis is a large sausage.) Then the master of ceremonies reads Burns' poem called "To a Haggis," cuts the haggis and says the famous Selkirk Grace, composed by Burns:

*Some hae meat, and canna eat,  
And some wad eat that want it:  
But we hae meat and we can eat,  
And sae the Lord be thankit.*

The evening finishes with Burns' famous "Auld Lang Syne."

**Organize Your Home Day. January 12** -- Held every year on the second Monday in January, it's a day to devote to organizing your home and clearing out clutter. For ideas and tips, visit [www.lifeorganizers.com](http://www.lifeorganizers.com) or [www.realsimple.com](http://www.realsimple.com).

**National Hugging Day. January 21** -- Today's a good excuse to give somebody a hug. Go to [www.nationalhuggingday.com](http://www.nationalhuggingday.com) and nominate the "most huggable person" you know.

**Chinese New Year, January 26** -- The Chinese Year of the Ox begins on this day. Festivities last until the Lantern Festival on February 9.

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## Step right up

What would prompt you to walk more than 2,000 steps—the equivalent of a mile—per day? Apparently, according to a Stanford University study, a pedometer—that inexpensive little device that counts the number of steps we take. Simply monitoring how many steps we take can increase our physical activity by 27 percent (which, in turn, can help with weight loss and improved blood pressure). Using a log to keep track of the number of steps taken is another important aspect of getting and staying more active.

## Making Stews

While you are hunkering down for the cold, long winter, keep warm with some hearty, tasty stews. Opt for aged beef because it has more flavour. Even if it's tougher than other cuts of meat, the long cooking time will tenderize it. Here are some more tips:

- Dip the meat in flour and brown it before adding it to the stew. The flour will thicken the gravy and the browning will add colour and taste.
- Toss in a peeled garlic clove but put a toothpick in it so it's easy to retrieve later.
- Add a tablespoon of molasses for a tangy, rich taste. Or add 1/4 cup of wine.
- If the stew is too salty, drop in a whole peeled apple to absorb the extra salt. Then discard the apple.
- To thicken the stew, add a grated potato.
- Add fresh or dried herbs just before serving so prolonged cooking doesn't diminish their piquancy.

## 6,100

That's the number of years humans have been consuming chili peppers. They are the first condiment food that has been traced that far back. Researchers say chili pepper use may stretch back even further into history, but so far the origin of the domestication of the fruit remains unknown.

## Quotable Quotes

We are all worms, but I believe I am a glow worm.

-- Winston Churchill

The only thing I regret about my past is the length of it. If I had to live my life again, I'd make the same mistakes, only sooner.

-- Tallulah Bankhead

It is far more impressive when others discover your good qualities without your help.

-- Judith Martin (Miss Manners)

# B\*U\*S\*I\*N\*E\*S\*S S\*H\*O\*R\*T\*S

## ***Podcasts still strive to go mainstream***

Podcast downloading is on the upswing, according to a survey of Internet users by the Pew Internet & American Life Project. Nineteen percent of all respondents said they have downloaded a podcast to listen to or view at a later time. Those numbers have been climbing steadily: In April 2006 only 7 percent reported ever having downloaded a podcast; that number jumped to 12 percent in August of the same year, and grew to 19 percent in August 2008.

While the number of podcast users has grown, so has the offering of podcasts. For instance in 2006, there were more than 26,000 podcasts with more than 1 million episodes available. Today those numbers have nearly doubled to 43,000 podcasts and well over 2 million episodes.

Even so, though daily podcasts are available for many publications, including The Wall Street Journal and The Economist, and many colleges now offer podcasts of lectures, listening to podcasts is far from a daily routine for most Internet users. Only 17 percent of the survey respondents said they download a podcast on a typical day.

## ***Truth gets sketchy in e-mails***

It's well known that e-mails are a source of misinterpretation and miscommunication because they lack nonverbal and behavioural cues. However, two new studies at Lehigh University reveal that e-mail is the most deceptive form of communication in the workplace. Perhaps more surprising, though, is the finding that people feel justified in lying when using e-mail.

In one study, MBA students were given \$89 to divide between themselves and a fictional party, who knew only that the amount of money to be divided was between \$5 and \$100. The students sent e-mails to the fictional parties stating the amount of money to be divided and how much the other party would get. However, the students using e-mail lied 92 percent of the time about the total amount being divided, while students who used pen and paper lied only 64 percent of the time. In another study in which the students were more familiar with whom they were e-mailing, researchers wondered whether the familiarity would reduce the e-mailers' impulse to lie. But the lies continued at about the same rate.

"These findings are consistent with our other work that shows that e-mail communication decreases the amount of trust and cooperation we see in professional group work, and increases the negativity in performance evaluations, all as opposed to pen-and-paper systems," says researcher Terri Kurtzberg. "People seem to feel more justified in acting in self-serving ways when typing as opposed to writing."

## ***The lowdown on getting 'sacked'***

There are numerous slang terms for being terminated from work: getting the pink slip, getting fired, getting axed,

canned, or cut. So how did it come about that we say someone is getting "sacked"? According to David Feldman in *Who Put the Butter in Butterfly?* (HarperPerennial), the ancient Romans didn't believe in mollycoddling criminals.

Those convicted of especially heinous acts like murder were tied up in a sack and dumped unceremoniously into the Tiber River, which instantly solved all problems with the troubled individual. Eventually, getting sacked came to mean meeting a quick and brutal end at the office.

## ***When silence isn't golden***

Sometimes there is wisdom in saying nothing. However, saying nothing can run its own risks when there is something that needs to be communicated. If you're the silent type, experts say you run the risk of unnecessary misunderstandings if your lack of communication is merely an avoidance tactic. Saying nothing, especially when emotions are involved, is akin to handing someone a blank slate — that person may fill in the void with the script that is undoubtedly unfolding in his or her mind. Instead, a few well-chosen words can bring clarity and relief to all. You don't have to say much, but ignoring trouble may guarantee what you're trying to avoid — more trouble.

## ***What Will 2009 Bring?***

In last month's newsletter, I wondered if I was the only one who missed the simpler, more family oriented Christmases of the past. I was pleased to get a number of emailed responses. It turns out that there are others, like me, who look longingly backwards on occasion. I won't disclose details of these emails because of their personal nature, but I can say that they also contained expressions of optimism, reassurances that the frustrations we all face from time to time will be supplanted by gratification as our kids grow up and show us that they had been paying more attention to our coaching and the example we provided than we might have expected.

As we enter the year 2009, we may need that feeling of hope for better times and circumstances ahead. We are at the cusp of what could be the worst economic downturn in our lives, or perhaps ever. Sure, things could settle down a bit and we could get a few more years of relative calm before things deteriorate again. Time will tell. Whatever the ultimate scenario, however whatever happens might affect us all individually, we must have hope and optimism. We need confidence in ourselves and in our ability to cope and even prosper.

Whatever happens in our future, Helix Courier Limited will be here to serve you. And so too, dear customer, will you be. We wish you the very best -- not just for the troubled future immediately ahead, but for a rosier and more satisfying time beyond. Happy New Year from all of us at Helix!

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*Sieg Pedde, President -- Helix Courier Limited*

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