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Workplace lessons from the Scripps National Spelling Bee



Photo: Julie Elliott-Abshire

Every year, word nerds get to see an event that, for them, is as enjoyable to watch as the [Super Bowl](#) or the [World Series](#). But the [Scripps National Spelling Bee](#) is not just a little word porn—there are also [workplace](#) lessons that we can learn from the event and its contestants.

Don't be ashamed to ask questions. During the Scripps National Spelling Bee, contestants aren't shy about asking questions—like the origin of a word, its definition, and how it can be used in a sentence—which can help them complete the job at hand. As children, we have no problem asking questions—and lots of them—but as we get older, we [fear](#) that this is somehow a sign of weakness. It isn't. In the workplace, sometimes we need to ask questions to get the job done and it shows our colleagues that we care about the quality of our work.

Don't take yourself too seriously at work. The contestants of the National Spelling Bee make mistakes—but they don't seem to take them too seriously. They laugh and make jokes—sometimes at their own expense—which helps them enjoy the experience. Although we do feel the need to save face so that we don't look like complete idiots, there's no reason to take ourselves so seriously once we've grown up. Mistakes happen in the workplace all the [time](#)—it's the way that you handle them that can impress the people around you.

Never stop learning. Anyone who has ever watched the Scripps National Spelling Bee can tell that these are young people who love to learn—particularly a spelling list—and they seem to soak up new words like a sponge. No matter how long you have been in a job or on a career path, there is always something new to learn. People who think they know everything in the workplace are not only annoying—they will also end up being a liability to their employers because their skills and knowledge base will have an expiration date. Smart workers know that learning in order to keep their skills and knowledge up to date is one of the most effective ways to rise up the ranks in a career.

Beware of spell checkers. Once upon a time, people needed to know how to spell, or at least use a dictionary, to [write](#) their documents. Now we're all dependent on spell checkers, which are far from perfect, to catch our mistakes. As a result, we slowly forget how to proofread documents—or spell certain words all together—because we have put so much [trust](#) in spell checkers to find our mistakes for us. Anyone who has ever seen documents circulate around the workplace with embarrassing errors knows why this is a bad idea.

And of course, spell checkers cannot do one thing that can help our writing tremendously—regularly learning new words. That's not to say that we have to memorize the entire [dictionary](#) or make up a spelling list and keep it with us all the time. But subscribing to a word-of-the-day list via [e-mail](#) can go a long way to expanding our vocabulary, which can help to sharpen the written communication skills that we need in the workplace.

This article originally appeared on my [Workplace Communication Examiner](#) page on June 13, 2010.

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