

A culture of en-title-ment

By [James Campbell](#)

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What is it with the new trend towards stupidly euphemistic and self-aggrandising job titles? Life is just loaded with ironies. And if memory serves it was Alanis Morissette who sang all about this on the track *Ironic*. Remember, the one where she carries on about flies on her Chardonnay and rain on her wedding day, and so forth?

More to the point, in the modern business environment there's an unmistakeable trend towards dressing down. And while it's certainly an international phenomenon, some say that in South Africa at least, Nelson Mandela may have had a lot to do with it, forsaking as he did the hideous suits and creaking formality so beloved of his stuffed-shirt Nationalist Party predecessors. And if you're old enough, you might also remember the utterly hilarious hats worn by NP ministers and their wives for occasions such as the opening of parliament.

But ironically while formal workwear and even ties are fast going out of favour, the trend towards casual dressing is being countered by a local and global trend towards stupidly euphemistic and self-aggrandising job titles.

At the lowest level, for instance, the invariably spotty young character helping out in the local DVD or pizza shop is no longer an "assistant." Oh no. He – or she – is almost invariably a "trainee manager."

Canker has spread

The canker has spread to the automotive trade, too, and where once upon a time you had "salesmen," you now have "sales executives" – never mind that until recently the word "executive" conjured up images of Chivas-supping, silver-haired corporate titans reclining behind mahogany desks. Not beer-bellied, polyester-jacketed purveyors of decaying Ford Sierras. Fascinatingly, you'll very often find that these same "sales executives" no longer sell used cars, but "pre-owned" cars or, heaven help us, "pre-loved" cars.

Another chronic offender is the publishing industry. Only a decade ago, the person on a magazine responsible for laying out the text and pictures was called, obviously enough, a "layout artist" or a "designer." Now the same person is almost invariably "chief creative director" – even if they're in a department of one. Mere journalists, meanwhile, are very seldom just that these days. Instead they're often "associate editor" or "copy editor" or "mayoral tea party correspondent" or some such nonsense.

Even the criminal fraternity is not immune to this trend. Today, even the lowliest grease-ball drug-runner furtively skulking on a street corner is a "drug lord." Just read the newspapers and you'll realise this. And never mind that the term "drug lord" once conjured up images of linen-suited, ponytailed South American cartel heads hunkered down in vast fortified

estates.

Just a few other especially absurd flights of folly include “domestic assistant” for maid, “sanitation engineer” for rubbish-bin man and the now-ubiquitous “corporate affairs manager” for public relations officer.

“We have noticed this trend over the past few years and we find it faintly ridiculous,” concurs Robyn Thornhill, marketing manager of the Durban-based IRS (Industrial Relations Specialists) and a relatively youthful veteran of the corporate world. “So we make a point of staying away from the more euphemistic titles. For instance, we call our site agents just that: site agents. Not ‘executive labour facilitators’ or something equally foolish...”

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