



turning managers into leaders

Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – March 2009

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Merge Gupta-Sunderji turns managers into leaders. Through engaging keynotes and facilitated workshops, she gives people specific and practical tools to achieve leadership and communication success. Contact her at www.mergespeaks.com or 403-605-4756

Humuhumunukunukuapua'a

No, despite your first reaction, my cat didn't accidentally step on my keyboard. But given the complexity of the word, it's completely understandable if you might have thought so.

Humuhumunukunukuapua'a is the Hawaiian word for the reef triggerfish, also the state fish of Hawaii. While it has the dubious honour of being one of the longest words in the Hawaiian language, the uninitiated visitor will find just as many tongue-twisters in street and place names in the Hawaiian islands. I was in Maui recently, and I got a very valuable lesson in speaking the Hawaiian language from a new friend. "Don't let it overwhelm you," she said. "The Hawaiian language is very easy as long as you remember to break each word down into one- or two-letter syllables and take your time with each syllable." She obligingly illustrated as she broke the daunting trigger fish down into twelve syllables:

Hu-mu-hu-mu-nu-ku-nu-ku-ap-u-a-a

"Now try it," she said. And she was right! Separated out into each syllable, the word wasn't as difficult as it looked. I continued to try this approach during my time in the islands, and before I knew it, the seemingly complicated street and place names were rolling off my tongue.

On the plane journey back home to the mainland, I had an insight. I realized that the lesson I got in speaking the Hawaiian language was also a terrific approach to take with challenges in the workplace. How many times have you been faced with an issue or problem that seems formidable and overwhelming? What if you were to break that issue or problem down into a series of one- or two-step subtasks and take your time with each subtask? Within one day of returning to my office, I tried this approach on two looming setbacks, and I quickly discovered that breaking them down into "syllables" made the problems seem much less unwieldy, and a lot easier to overcome. Try it for yourself!