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How to speak Tycoonese

By Nury Vittachi

Photo: Brian Ching

When I was young, I wondered what it would be like to meet a real, living billionaire. Now I am adult, my dream has come true.

Eeew! What a bunch of losers.

Oh yes, billionaires have more money than the rest of us. But they also have more worries. Most are tense and grumpy, and seem to enjoy life much less than the smiling cashier who makes my kids laugh every time we visit our local ParkNShop.

I was talking about this last week with a money manager friend who has several billionaire clients. The layer of charm on ultra-rich people is often very thin, he said.

"They talk in Tycoonese," he said. "You have to listen to what they say and translate it in your head."

Anyone who ends up as an accountant, consultant or financial officer to a business mogul will need this instant useful Tycoonese phrasebook.

I asked the money manager why he worked for people like that. He replied: "It's stressful, but there's one Tycoonese phrase I really like: 'I put a little something extra in your pay packet.' The word 'little' is Tycoonese for 'massive'."

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Tycoonese	Translation
We have a small problem	You have a massive problem
I want you to revise some paperwork	I need you to set up a huge network of nominee companies to hide something
I have high hopes that our relationship will be very fruitful	You're about to get some wildly unrealistic targets
You'll find I am perfectly willing to spend money as long as the investment is worthwhile	I'm not putting a cent into that
You'll adjust to my style of working very quickly	I now own you 24 hours a day
We always go by the book	We have accountants and lawyers looking for loopholes on a full-time basis
Our business is going through a paradigm shift	We've been caught out so we're laundering some money
I want you to feel you can say anything to me	As long as it is exactly what I want to hear
My staff are intensely loyal to me	My staff are terrified of me
I have gone beyond the stage where making money is the key aim	We both know I am talking rubbish, but nod anyway
Let's put on our marketing hats	How good are you at selling toxic investments?
I'd like your buy-in on this	I need someone to blame if this goes belly-up and you have been chosen
We are going to leverage our resources	You will be doing the work of six from now on
I want you to interpret the financial model for me	I can't use Excel