

**F**ish stinks from the head! I love that expression. I first heard it from a guy who went to the same gym as I did, to describe the owner of the gym, after I mentioned how nice the owner was and what pricks all his employees were. I think about that expression every time I see a boss trying to play the nice guy while forcing an underling to play the ogre.

I also think about how cool it is that an old Yiddish expression still resonates in another language in today's world. You can even change genders and a great expression's meaning isn't diluted. *Give a woman a fish and she eats for a day. Teach a woman to fish and she eats forever.* See.

I'm a big fan of old quotes and expressions. It seems like there are a lot of well-known expressions about fishing, farming, and fortitude. I guess using these sayings makes us feel better about ourselves than using expressions about impotence or the adult reality of settling for 2nd best.

Sometimes we quote an old expression to add gravity to what we're saying. "As the old (Italian, American Indian, Congolese) expression goes...." Of course, some things are crap in any language, and translating them doesn't make wise that which is worthless. I wrote that myself-I swear! A lot of these expressions are also clearly contradictory. *The early bird gets the worm.* Oh yeah, well, *sometimes a pioneer just gets an ass full of arrows.*

An important expression may not have even started out very seriously. My friend Eutzie once jokingly said about hooking up with a girl, whom you don't really like, *"once is nice, two times o.k., but three times---no way."* Maybe it's not, *the tree of liberty must be watered with the blood of tyrants*, but for everyday bachelor life, it's probably more useful.

You can always find some humorless spoilsport who likes to ruin a good expression with realism. Do fish stink from the head? Is that ornithologically correct? Does a fish's brain start to smell before his tail? Who cares? It's a witty, silly, memorable little saying.

It's not very creative to use too many old expressions or quotes from other more interesting and perceptive people. TV news guys use a lot of quotes, I guess, hoping that Benjamin Franklin's wisdom will hide the still emptiness beneath their helmet-like anchor's haircut. I was going to say, "reveal the emptiness of the man behind the curtain", but enough is enough.

Of course, I have a well worn (that's an expression much used to make one seem worldly) copy of Bartlett's Famous Quotations that I just found in my parents' basement. It was with some things that I stored there when I quit being a salesman. Salesman love quotes because manipulation and exaggeration are better received via metaphor or in Olde English.

I started to think about these expressions, aphorisms, old-saws, whatever you want to call them, because it's just after election day here in the United States, and we've heard a lot of them lately. Of course, I'm assuming that this column has a global readership. If you know an Irish expression about delusions of grandeur, insert it here.

It's almost impossible to listen to today's political rhetoric because you know that virtually nothing is spontaneous or sincere. It's all been written and re-written, think-tanked and focus-grouped to arrive at just the right tone of patriotism and empathy. When I hear Bill Clinton speak, I can literally hear the horse shit hitting the ground.

Some day I'd love to be known for a memorable quote or some helpful wisdom. How do you accomplish that? Do you work to come up with something memorable or does something just come out one day? With as much as I say, you'd think I'd have said something memorable by now.