

Chief Cook and Bottle Washer

“Chief cook and bottle washer probably alludes to the only worker, not in a restaurant kitchen, but to someone who performed many duties on a sailing ship, doing everything from the cooking to washing bottles.

It may be that the original expression was “chief, cook, and bottle washer” rather than ‘chief cook’ and ‘bottle washer,’ thus referring to someone who was in charge but also performed many trivial tasks. It has been used as an idiom since at least the 1830’s” (idioms.online). Bobbi-Jo thinks, “It originated as descriptive of the duties of a wife and mother. After all, who else washes bottles?”

In any given vocation there is often a “feeling” that individuals perceive themselves as “the only person that keeps the business alive,” and “feel” underappreciated in their labors. In general, the phrase was not originally used in a negative context, but simply applied to versatility and capability of the subject, i.e., “whatever needs to be done, I can do it.”

Another misapplied phrase is the Pareto principle, when usually stated, is that “20% of the people do 80% of the work, and those who state so generally believe they are in 20% and thereby overly burdened with the lion’s share of work.

The Pareto principle simply put is not a negative, but rather positive observation of productivity: “the 80-20 rule states that 80% of results come from 20% of effort” (<https://money.usnews.com/investing/term/80-20-rule>).

What can be learned from using positive words to depict a negative connotation?

When Jehovah sent the prophets to Judah, they were not seen, nor received, as a positive presence: “And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of Jehovah? then shalt thou say unto them, What burden! I will cast you off, saith Jehovah. And as for the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of Jehovah, I will even punish that man and his house. Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbor, and every one to his brother, What hath Jehovah answered? and, What hath Jehovah spoken? And the burden of Jehovah shall ye mention no more: for every man's own word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of Jehovah of hosts our God. Thus shalt thou say to the prophet, What hath Jehovah answered thee? and, What hath Jehovah spoken? But if ye say, The burden of Jehovah; therefore thus saith Jehovah: Because ye say this word, The burden of Jehovah, and I have sent unto you, saying, Ye shall not say, The burden of Jehovah; therefore, behold, I will utterly forget you, and I will cast you off, and the city that I gave unto you and to your fathers, away from my presence: and I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.” (Jeremiah 23:33-40).

“Neither murmur ye, as some of them murmured, and perished by the destroyer. Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:10-12). Do not burden the Lord, nor His word. Ross