Jack of all trades, master of none

Autor:

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The shortened version "a jack of all trades" is often a compliment for a person who is good at fixing things, and has a very good broad knowledge. They may be a master of integration, as such an individual who knows enough from many learned trades and skills to be able to bring the individual's disciplines together in a practical manner. This person is a generalist rather than a specialist.

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"The complete saying was originally "A jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one." Formerly intended as a compliment, the phrase means that a person is a generalist rather than a specialist, versatile and adept at many things."

This is the problem with our habit of shortening things. We don't understand their original intention anymore. We shouldn't ignore the old adage but the new one (in this case, at least).

Origins

In Elizabethan English the quasi-New Latin term Johannes factotum ("Johnny do-it-all") was sometimes used, with the same negative connotation[1] that "Jack of all trades" sometimes has today. The term was famously used by Robert Greene in his 1592 booklet Greene's Groats-Worth of Wit,[2] in which he dismissively refers to actor-turned-playwright William Shakespeare with this term, the first published mention of the writer.

In 1612, the English-language version of the phrase appeared in the book "Essays and Characters of a Prison" by English writer Geffray Mynshul (Minshull),[3] originally published in 1618,[4] and probably based on the author's experience while held at Gray's Inn, London, when imprisoned for debt.

"Master of none"

The "master of none" element appears to have been added later;[5] it made the statement less flattering to the person receiving. Today, the phrase used in its entirety generally describes a person whose knowledge, while covering a number of areas, is superficial in all of them. When abbreviated as simply "jack of all trades", it is an ambiguous statement; the user's intention is then dependent on context. However, when "master of none" is added this is unflattering and sometimes added in jest.[6] In the United States and Canada, the phrase has been in use since 1721.[7]

In other languages

Sayings and terms resembling "jack of all trades" appear in almost all languages. Whether they are meant positively or negatively is dependent on the context. While many of these refer to a "jack of all trades," the fundamental idea they are trying to convey may be entirely different.[clarification needed]

Afrikaans: Hansie-my-kneg ("Man of all work"; "Johnny-my-servant")

Avañe'e: "Ha'e ojapopaite, pero ndojapokua'ai mba'evete" ("He does everything, but does not know how to do it")

Arabic:

Najdi Arabic: ???? ??????????? ("The one who knows two trades is a liar.")

Egyptian Arabic: ??? ????? ????? ????? ("The one who knows seven trades but is so unlucky.") Moroccan Arabic: ??? ????? ????? ????? ("The one who knows seven trades but has no wealth.") Syrian Arabic: ???? ???????? ?????????? ("Who does several trades, is incapable of managing any.")

Lebanese Arabic: ?????? ??????? ???????? ("seven occupations, with no luck/money")

Bengali: ??? ????? ????, ???????? ????????

Bulgarian: ??????? ?? ?????? ("Master of everything"), ??????? ?? ?????? ("Professor of everything"), ????????? ??

?????? ("Specialist in everything")

Catalan:

Catalan: Home de molts oficis.. pobre segur.. '(Man of many trades ... surely poor..)[8] although with a slightly different

meaning and being less genuine.

Catalan: Qui molt abraça poc estreny ("He who embraces too much, has a weak grasp")

Chinese:

Mandarin (Simplified): ??????? (Traditional): ??????? ("All trades known, all trades dull")

Mandarin (Simplified): ??? ? The "10,000 gold oil," also the name of Tiger Balm, can be used to refer to someone who

meets this description.[9]

Mandarin (Simplified): ??? ("He who knows Ten Thousand Things")

Shanghainese (Simplified): ??? ("A cat with only 3 legs")

Cantonese (Simplified): ??????? (Traditional): ??????? ("Equipped with knives all over, yet none is sharp")

Croatian: Katica za sve ("Kate for everything")

Czech: Devatero ?emesel, desátá bída. ("Nine crafts, tenth is misery.")

Danish: Altmuligmand ("All tasks man" - now used for handyman) Tusindekunstner ("thousand tasks artist")

Dutch:

Dutch: Manusje-van-alles[10][circular reference]("Jack-of-all", handyman).

Dutch:12 ambachten, 13 ongelukken also 12 stielen, 13 ongelukken [11]("12 trades, 13 accidents").

Dutch: Schaap met vijf poten.

Esperanto: Kiu ?asas du leporojn, kaptas neniun. ("Who chases two jackrabbits catches none.")[12]

Estonian: Üheksa ametit, kümnes nälg ("Nine trades, the tenth one — hunger"). Exact match for "Jack of all trades" is Iga asja peale Mihkel, where Mihkel is common name in Estonia.

Finnish: Jokapaikanhöylä ("Plane for all purposes"). Usually a compliment, but sometimes implies irony: a tool designed for all purposes is not really good for any specific purpose.

French: Homme-à-tout-faire ("Do-all man" but the meaning is now used more for the job of 'handy-man' than for anything else), Touche-à-tout, bon à rien ("Touch everything, good in nothing", negative connotation), Qui trop embrasse, mal étreint ("he who embraces too much, has a weak grasp", negative connotation), Avoir plusieurs cordes à son arc ("To have many strings to one's bow", positive), Avoir plusieurs casquettes ("To have many caps", positive), Homme-orchestre ("Orchestra man", neutral). Occasionally the expression Maître Jacques (fr) (literally "Master Jack") is used. German: Hansdampf in allen Gassen (literally: "Jack Steam in every alley," with "Hans Dampf" being a personal name from a novel), Tausendsassa ("thousand activities"). In a negative sense it can be said about a person: Er kann alles, aber nichts davon richtig. ("He can do everything, but nothing properly.")

Hawaiian: Mea m?kaukau i n? hana like ?ole ("One versed in many different kinds of work"). Laukua ("One skilled in many trades").

Hebrew: ???? ????? ?? ???? (short) or ???? ????? ????? ???? ???? (full) ("He who has seized a lot, has not seized" (short) or "He who has seized a lot, has not seized — He who has seized little, seized").

Hindi: ???? ????, ???? ?????.

Hungarian: Complimentary: Reneszánsz ember (lit. "Renaissance man") Derogatory: Mekk Elek (a reference to a 1974 Hungarian television series with the same named protagonist)

Icelandic: Þúsundþjalasmiður ("A craftsman of a thousand rasps").

Indonesian: Serbatahu (tapi tidak menguasai apa-apa) ("Know-it-all, understands nothing")

Irish: Complimentary: ilcheardaí (meaning of factotum, a person having many diverse activities or responsibilities)

Derogatory: gobán (old-fashioned, incompetent, tradesman; botch).

Italian: Esperto di tutto, maestro in niente ("Expert of everything, master of none").

Japanese: ????? ("Many talents is no talent")

Kannada: ?????? ????? ("A learned one versed in all fields")

Korean: ? ? ?? ?? ?? ?? ?????? ?? ("A man of twelve talents has nothing to eat for dinner")

Latin: ex omnibus aliquid, in toto nihil ("something from all, nothing in total"); omnis Minervae homo (literally, "man of every Minerva")

Lithuanian: Devyni amatai, dešimtas badas ("Nine trades [means that your] tenth [will be] starvation"). There is also Barb? devyndarb? ("Barbie of nine trades", feminine equivalent to "Jack of all trades"). Vis? gal? meistras (equivalent to "Jack of all trades", literally "Master craftsman of all ends").

Malay: Yang dikejar tak dapat, yang dikendong berciciran ("The pursued is not acquired, the held is dropped"). Meaning: Whilst seeking (something) we want, we may lose what we already have.

Malayalam: ????? ???????? ("Sarva Kala Vallabhan - The All Talented Vallabhan[King])

Marathi: ?? ?? ?????? ??????? ("Ek na dhad Bharabhar chindhya - Not one complete, just heap of rags")

Norwegian: Altmuligmann ("All tasks man" - now used for handyman) Tusenkunstner ("thousand tasks artist")

Persian: ??? ????? ???????? ("All trades and no authority")

used to describe a person who does all kinds of repairs.

Polish: Siedem fachów, ósma bieda ("Seven trades, the eighth one — poverty") if used with negative connotation, cz?owiek orkiestra ("One man band") if used with positive connotation. Z?ota R?czka ("The Golden Hand")

Portuguese: Pau pra toda obra ("Wood for every [building] work"); João-Faz-Tudo ("John-Does-Everything"); Homem dos sete ofícios ("Man of seven trades"). The expression "quem tem jeito para tudo, não tem jeito para nada" ("Those who are talented at everything, are talented at nothing") conveys a similar meaning; O pato anda, nada e voa, mas não faz nada direito ("The duck walks, swims and flies, but does nothing right").

Romanian: Bun la toate ?i la nimic ("Good at everything and at nothing")

Russian:

? ????, ? ????? ????? ("And tailor and reaper and pipe player") — means that person tries to be or actually is a specialist in many unrelated professions.

??????, ?? ????? ????? — just opposite of the previous one meaning that person is good at nothing. ?????? ?????? ?????, ? ????, ? ????? .— combination of the previous with one below.

?????? ????? ("Master in all hands") or ?????? ????? ("Master in his own specialty/job/trade") or ??????? ????? ("Golden hands") — used only as a term of praise.

? ?????? ?????? ("A peg for every barrel") — someone who wants to add his word to every discussion (very often has negative meaning, used for someone who is annoying).

Slovak: Diev?a pre všetko. ("A girl for everything") Hodinový manžel ("An hour-rent husband") - especially used for someone adept at all kinds of common repairs.

Slovene: Deklica za vse. ("A girl for everything") Spanish: Hombre orquesta ("One-man band")

Chile: Maestro Chasquilla ("Fringe Master") (This term has no negative connotation.)

Spain, Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Chile: Quien mucho abarca poco aprieta ("Who grabs too much, has a weak grasp")

Spain, Colombia, Uruguay: Aprendiz de mucho, maestro de nada ("Apprentice of a lot, master of nothing")

Spain: Maestro Liendre, que de todo sabe y de nada entiende. ("Knows everything but understands nothing". This has a clearly negative connotation.)

Spain, Mexico: Aprendiz de todo, maestro de nada. ("Apprentice of everything, master of nothing")

Spain: Un océano de conocimiento de una pulgada de profundidad ("An ocean of knowledge of an inch deep")

Peru: "Mil oficios" ("One thousand jobs")

Mexico: A todo le tiras, y a nada le pegas ("You aim for everything, but you hit nothing")

Mexico: Chambitas ("Little jobs")

Mexico: Mil usos ("One thousand jobs")

Mexico: Todólogo ("Handyman")

Colombia: "Todero" (From Todo -everything-)

Sinhala: ?????? ??? ??????, pronounced as "Siyalla dath, Kisith nodath".("Knows everything yet, doesn't know anything.")

Swedish: Mångsysslare ("Multi tasker") Tusenkonstnär ("thousand tasks artist")

Turkish: "On parma??nda on marifet (olan ki?i)" ("(Someone who) has ten different skills on his/her ten fingers")

Tagalog: Marunong sa lahat, magaling sa wala ("Knows everything, good at nothing")

Thai: ?????????? ("Know like duck") -- ducks can walk, fly, and swim but they are good at nothing.

Ukrainian:

in positive meaning: "??????? ?? ??? ????" ("Master in all hands") - a person who can do all kind of tasks in negative meaning: "?????? ?? ????" - a person who starts a lot of tasks, but is unable to successfully finish any of them.

Urdu: ?? ?? ?????" (literally: "Every talent lord"). Also commonly used in Hindi sentences/phrases. Vietnamese: M?t ngh? cho chín, còn h?n chín ngh? ("Being master in one job is better than being average in nine jobs"), or Nh?t ngh? tinh, nh?t thân vinh (Sino-Vietnamese, ??????) ("Mastery in one job brings glory and success")

See also

Amateur Polymath

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External links

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