
Jack of all trades, master of none

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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 ojaopopaité, 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 řemesel, 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: Schaap met vijf poten.

Russian:

?????? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? : ? ? ? ? ? , ? ? ? ? ? , ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? ? . — combination of the previous with one below.

?????????? ???????? ???????? ("Specialist in wide range") — being an oxymoron widely used with irony or sarcasm, though some people can use it in positive sense (it depends on how it is pronounced).
?????? ?? ??? ????? ("Master in all hands") or ?????? ?????? ????? ("Master in his own specialty/job/trade") or ????????
???? ("Golden hands") — used only as a term of praise.
?? ?????? ??? ?????????, ?? ????? ?? ????????? ("Starts ten things/trades, finishes none")
? ?????? ?????? ???????? ("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).
??? ? ?????????, ??? ??? ?????? ????????? ????? ("The master is one, who can do everything with no help")

Serbian: Devojka za sve / ???????? ?? ??? ("A girl for everything") if used with a negative connotation. Specijalista opšte prakse / ?????????????? ?????? ???????? ("General practitioner") used with a negative connotation, though rarely because of the medical professional with the same title. Majstor svih zanata / ?????????? ?????? ???????? ("Master of all trades") if used with a positive connotation.

Slovak: Dievča 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: "Toderó" (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")

Tamil: ?? ??????? ?????????? ??? ?????????? ?????????? ("They who study many trades, not one trade will they complete.")

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?i 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

References

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^ "There is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Johannes Factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country."

--Groats-Worth of Wit; cited from William Shakespeare--The Complete Works, Stephen Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller, editors, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002, p. xlvii.

^ "Geffray Minshull (Mynshul), English miscellaneous writer (1594? - 1668)". Giga-usa.com. Retrieved 2014-04-02.

^ Essayes and characters of a Prison and Prisoners originally published in 1618. Books.google.co.uk. Retrieved 2014-04-02.

^ <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/jack-of-all-trades.html>

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^ "Random House Dictionary of Popular Proverbs and Sayings" by Gregory Y. Titelman (Random House, New York, 1996)

^ Pedro Labernia y Esteller (1840). Diccionari de la llengua catalana ab la correspondencia castellana y llatina. En la estampa dels hereus de la V. Pla. pp. 18–.

^ "Baidu article on Tigerbalm (in Chinese)". Baike.baidu.com. Retrieved 2014-04-02.

^ nl:Manusje-van-alles

^ <http://www.vlaamswwoordenboek.be/definities/term/twaalf+stielen%2C+dertien+ongelukken>

^ Rob Keetlaer. "Robkeetlaer.nl". Robkeetlaer.nl. Retrieved 2014-04-02.

External links

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