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The Language Perfectionist: Quotation Quota

By Don Hauptman

Every few years, my friend Mardy Grothe assembles a new collection of quotations. The defining characteristic of these anthologies is that all the entries share an interesting or quirky theme.

His latest work, *Neverisms*, just published, is generating a lot of favorable attention in the media and among his many admirers, myself included.

A *neverism* (Mardy coined the word) is a quotation beginning with the word "never." The book's subtitle is "A Quotation Lover's Guide to Things You Should Never Do, Never Say, or Never Forget."

The entries are organized by topic, in chapters that include human relationships, sports, business, the entertainment world, and much more. Among the hundreds of quoted people are Winston Churchill, W.C. Fields, Lewis Grizzard, Steve Jobs, Martin Luther King, Jr., Harvey Mackay, Richard Nixon, Sophocles, John Steinbeck, and James Thurber.

In the Introduction, Mardy notes that aphorisms and proverbs and words of wisdom that are intended to influence or advise or inspire are usually phrased positively. An example is Jack Welch's maxim: "Change before you have to." But others are expressed negatively, commanding the reader to avoid or reject certain activities or things.

You might be surprised, as I was, to discover how many neverisms, both serious and humorous, exist. Here are a few samples from the book:

"Never lose yourself when you find another person." - *Anonymous*

"Never practice two vices at once." - *Tallulah Bankhead*

"Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity." - *Robert J. Hanlon*

- "Never tell a young person that something cannot be done." - *John Andrew Holmes*

"Never invest in any idea you can't illustrate with a crayon." - *Peter Lynch*

- "Never work for anyone more insecure than yourself." - *Roger Rosenblatt*

"Never argue at the dinner table, for the one who is not hungry always gets the best of the argument."
- *Richard Whately*

But *Neverisms* is more than just a catalog of quotations. Mardy also relates the stories behind many of them. For instance, the origin of the famous magazine slogan "Never underestimate the power of a woman" makes for a fascinating tale.

Any criticisms? Just one: This is one of those books that might have been improved had it been shorter. It's packed with nearly 2,000 quotations, so perhaps it's to be expected that not all are gems. Some judicious pruning would have resulted in a briefer but sharper collection. Still, the author can justifiably boast that it's the most comprehensive and definitive volume on its subject.

Of course, you need not read the book cover to cover. It lends itself perfectly to browsing, especially when a chapter such as the one on "sex, love and romance" catches your eye.

Both informative and entertaining, *Neverisms* is a great gift for someone you know, or a treat for yourself. You'll also find it a useful resource when you need an appropriate quotation for a writing assignment or presentation.

This review originally appeared in Don's weekly column, "The Language Perfectionist," in Early to Rise, a daily online newsletter. For current and past columns, see: <http://www.earlytorise.com/author/don-hauptman>.

A PANGRAMMATIC LIMERICK

A. ROSS ECKLER
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Oscar Thumpbindle merits high praise.
Every WORD offers **so** many WAYS
(Palindrome, square,
'abjurer-nowhere')
To tickle us, vex or amaze.

