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From Your (saddened) Editor

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Dear Editor:

I want to correct an impression that John Secor conveyed in his *ATG* February '98 article entitled "Pandora's Box — Partnering: A Powerful 'What to Do' Management Tool or Just Another Fad." John and I have had a friendly debate on the term "partnering" for years, both in an informal way and, in the January 1997 *ALA Conference*, in front of an audience of librarians. In fact, I am the "senior executive of a library bookselling company" he disparagingly refers to on page 72. I did give my views on the use of the word partnering, but not quite in the way John tells it.

I do understand what partnering means, in the context that John has popularized it. I share his thoughts on the business strategy embodied in the way he uses the word. I agree that relationships between vendors and librarians require a close collaboration because the environment is changing rapidly and the solutions are more complex than in the past. Without a close, collaborative and collegial customer/vendor relationship, we are impeding communication and accomplishing far less than is possible. Anyone who reads my writings in the *ATG* column, *Issues in Library/Vendor Relations*, knows how strongly I support this viewpoint.

But words have both a rational and emotional content. Words mean things, often precise things, and we should use them carefully. My only quarrel with John on the use of the word partnering is that I think it is imprecise. It is, in my view, a buzzword, and an inaccurate buzzword. When I hear the noun, partner, I think of my wife (the more emotional aspect of this word, as in partner in life) or my colleague, Dan Halloran (the more rational aspect of the word, as in business partner). In both cases, the word implies equality and commitment. When cowboys used it, affectionately, in the old West, that's what it meant, and it still does on cop dramas in the movies and TV. It especially bothers me when a perfectly good noun is turned into a cumbersome verb. I happily stand accused of being a curmudgeon on language abuse. I dislike the word partnering because it is a bad verb derived from a good noun to describe a business relationship that does not, and should not, exist.

When a vendor pays a library to supply certain products or services the relationship can be, and should be, collaborative, congenial, collegial, and as cordial as both parties want. But the relationship is not equal, and it should not be. The vendor works for the library, at the librarian's direction, to standards established by librarians. Consulting together on problem solving, or bringing new and creative ideas to the process, is all to the good. But no matter how intimate or collaborative this relationship gets, it is not a partnership. The librarians retain the right to dismiss the vendor, with or without a good explanation, with or without civility. By definition, the relationship between a customer and a supplier is commercial and unequal.

We can create a new word, if we wish, to define the collaborative customer/supplier relationship, but let's not take an old one, full of rational and emotional content, and change both its meaning and its gender.

That is the point I made at the *ALA* meeting, and it is still my position.

Sincerely,

Barry Fast
(Vice President, *Academic Book Center*, 800-326-3080) <bARRY@acbc.com>
See page 94 for more letters.

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Yr. Ed. 🍀