

How Broadway Created Trump's Favorite Phrase: Bigly

The suspicion mounts that The Donald is actually referring to J.B. Biggley. But that means he would have had to have read a book. Or at least seen a play or movie.

by Marc Epstein



There was a moment in the [first presidential debate](#) when lots of people asked themselves: "Did Trump just say 'bigly'?"

Followed quickly by: "Is that even a word?"

Once again the news media has failed us. Instead of researching the word they default to snarky commentary.

First of all they misspelled bigly (sic). The proper spelling is Biggley, as in J.B. Biggley, president of the World Wide Wicket Company.

And if you know something about J.B. Biggley and what he stands for, you'll also wind up knowing what makes President Donald Trump tick.

J.B. Biggley and the World Wide Wicket Company are the fictive creations of Shepard Mead in his best-selling novel *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, most famously adapted into Frank Loesser's hit Broadway musical and movie that featured Robert Morse as J. Pierpont Finch and Rudy Vallee as J.B. Biggley, president of the company.

Finch is a man from outside the company, literally. He's a window washer on a scaffold peering into the comings and goings at the World Wide Wicket Company's skyscraper headquarters.

After picking up the *How to Succeed* book at a newsstand, he decides to put its how-to advice into action. He steps through a window, steps out of his coveralls, and encounters J.B. Biggley, who has no idea who he is.

Finch follows the book's instructions and capitalizes on his chance encounter with Biggley to secure an entry-level job in the mailroom. There, Mr. Twimble, head of mailroom, advises Finch on how to do things the "Company Way." After 25 years of loyal service, Twimble is being promoted to the shipping department. When Finch asks Twimble for the secret of his longevity, Twimble informs him that doing things "The Company Way" is the way to survive.

When I joined this firm

As a brash young man,

Well, I said to myself,

"Now, brash young man,

Don't get any ideas."

Well, I stuck to that

And I haven't had one in years! ...

I play it the company way.

The mailroom is clearly a ticket to nowhere, but it doesn't take long before Finch figures out that the key to getting his foot on the executive ladder is cultivating the right kind of relationship with Biggley's executive secretary.

From there the sky's the limit. By sticking to the book Finch is able to appear clubbable while violating every convention of the ossified white-male dominated corporate structure. So while he seemingly hews to conventions, even faking his attendance at Biggley's exclusive alma mater Old Ivy, Finch is really defying every convention.

His meteoric rise catches the attention of the executive cohort but by the time the executives realize Finch is a force to be reckoned with, it's too late.

Finch stares into the mirror in the executive washroom and sings "I believe in you" to himself, while a chorus of executives answers with "gotta stop that man, before he stops me."

If you were casting the play today I could envision casting the executives with #NEVERTRUMP neo-conservatives such as Bill Kristol, Bret Stephens, and Robert Kagan, just to name a few. There are a couple of #NEVERTRUMP letters signed by a few hundred names of the establishment that we could use to fill in the chorus line.

The executives don't stop their conniving and eventually set Finch up by getting him to advance a disastrous television

promotion in much the same way the “Dark Government” appears to be sandbagging Trump’s personnel choices and policy initiatives.

The final scene begins with Finch about to hand in his resignation in Biggley’s office to chairman of the board, Wally Womper, who is there to get to the bottom of the fiasco. When Finch and Womper engage in conversation it turns out that Womper started out as a window washer too!

Instead of being fired, Finch is leapfrogged over Biggley and becomes chairman of the board himself, as Womper decides to sail into retirement. *How To Succeed* concludes with the entire cast singing “The Brotherhood Of Man,” led by Finch. Today we would describe the song as an assault on identity politics.

Now you may join the Elks, my friend,

And I may join the Shriners;

And other men may carry cards

As members of the Diners.

Still others wear a golden key

Or small Greek letter pin.

But I have learned there’s one great club

That all of us are in.

There is a brotherhood of man,

A benevolent brotherhood of man...

To be sure, Finch-Trump are not identical twins. Finch tries to pass himself off as a product of Old Ivy (the Ivy League). He’s the classical arriviste. Trump on the other hand actually has an Ivy League degree from Wharton, along with two of his children, but decided early in the game that he wasn’t going

to become clubbable.

To those in the club, Trump's repudiation of it marks him as a disloyal black sheep. His persona appears to be akin to that of Rodney Dangerfield in Caddyshack, with a dollop of a Don Rickles nightclub routine thrown in.

I would suggest that his Groucho Marxian position that "I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member" plays a large role in the collective nervous breakdown the establishment is having over the outré Donald Trump actually becoming the CEO of the club.

He's the dictionary definition of the iconoclast knocking off all the hallowed conventions of the political club. So whenever you hear the president say Biggley, just remember that it doesn't mean huge, a word he is also quite fond of. It means that the J.B. Biggleys of this country better fasten their seatbelts.

First published in the