

Nostrum *(pronounced nos-trum) noun*

Definition

1. a medicine (usually of secret composition and sold by its preparer) with exaggerated claims or one that has not been proven effective; a quack remedy. 2. a pet scheme or remedy for solving social, political, or other problems, and one that is questionable or untested; panacea.

Main Example

- “How to Become a Millionaire Within a Year,” “Ten Steps to Regaining the Fountain of Your Youth,” “How to Make Anyone Fall in Love With You,” . . . With seductive titles such as these, authors of self-help books are busy peddling their **nostrums** to an overworked populace that yearns to make life more fun and less complicated.

Workplace Examples

- I was really disappointed in Jackie’s seminar on Effective Presentations. Some of her prescriptions are so naive. I certainly don’t buy into her chief **nostrum** that a presenter needs to make the audience laugh at least once every 4 minutes!
- The new manager proudly showed me his office today. It’s plastered with **nostrums** gleaned from the autobiographies of famous people he has read. I jotted down a few: “The way to do well is to do well”; “Patience Pays”; “When skiing, if you are not falling, you’re not trying” . . . I didn’t know whether to laugh or try to look serious.

Other Examples

- on noticing some in the audience smile skeptically at her plan to improve customer satisfaction, a manager saying: “Let me point out that this is not just some **nostrum**. It has worked very well for Wal-Mart, McDonald’s, and Office Depot.”
- the usual economic **nostrums** from the two major political parties: Republicans calling for tax cuts, Democrats urging more public spending
- with their nation in dire straits, many North Koreans completely losing faith in their leaders’ old ideological **nostrums**
- a colleague’s simpleminded solutions reminding you of one of Ross Perot’s famous and amusing **nostrums** regarding how he would strengthen the then-ailing economy: “I’ll look under the hood, find out what’s wrong, and fix it.”