

Jack of all trades, master of none

"Jack of all trades, master of none" is a figure of speech used in reference to a person who has dabbled in many skills, rather than gaining expertise by focusing on one.

The shortened version **"a jack of all trades"** is often a compliment for a person who is good at fixing 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.

Contents

Origins

"Master of none"

"Full quote"

See also

References

External links

Origins

Robert Greene used it in his 1592 booklet *Greene's Groats-Worth of Wit*,^[1] to dismissively refer to actor-turned-playwright William Shakespeare; this is the first published mention of Shakespeare. Some scholars believe 'absolute Johannes factotum' was referring to resolute Johannes Florio, known as John Florio. They have pointed out how 'Johannes' was the Latin name of John (Giovanni) and the name by which Florio was known among his contemporaries,^[2] the term 'absolute' was an alliteration of the nickname chosen and used by Florio in his signature (precisely the word 'resolute') and the term 'factotum' was a disparaging definition of secretary, John Florio's job.^{[3][4]}

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),^[5] originally published in 1618,^[6] 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;^[7] 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.^[8] In the United States and Canada, the phrase has been in use since 1721.^{[9][10]}

"Full quote"

In modern times, the phrase with the "master of none" element is sometimes expanded into a less unflattering couplet by adding a second line: "though oftentimes better than master of one" (or variants thereof), with some writers saying that such a couplet is the "original" version with the second line having been dropped, although there are no known instances of this second line dated to before the twenty-first century.^{[11][12][13][14][15]}

See also


- Amateur
- Competent man
- Multipotentiality
- Philomath
- Polymath

References

1. "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.
2. <https://www.resolutejohnflorio.com/2021/01/26/johannes-florius/>
3. Gerevini, Saul (2008). *William Shakespeare ovvero John Florio*. Pilgrim.
4. Gerevini, Saul. "Shakespeare and Florio" (<http://www.shakespeareandflorio.net>).
5. "Geffray Minshull (Mynshul), English miscellaneous writer (1594? - 1668)" (<http://www.giga-usa.com/quotes/lists/qubiomin.htm>). Giga-usa.com. Retrieved 2014-04-02.
6. Minshull, Geffray (1821). *Essayes and characters of a Prison and Prisoners originally published in 1618* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=iqVa6p6Q-H4C&q=Geffray+Minshull>). Retrieved 2014-04-02.
7. "'Jack of all trades' - the meaning and origin of this phrase" (<https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/jack-of-all-trades.html>).
8. *Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*, compiled by William and Mary Morris. HarperCollins, New York, 1977, 1988.
9. "Random House Dictionary of Popular Proverbs and Sayings" by Gregory Y. Titelman (Random House, New York, 1996)
10. The OED notes appearance in the *The Boston News-Letter* in August 1721 as "Jack of all Trades; and it would seem, Good at none."
11. David Epstein (2020). "How Falling Behind Can Get You Ahead" (<https://www.tedxmanchester.com/speakers-2020/david-epstein/>). "'Jack of all trades, master of none,' the saying goes. But it is culturally telling that we have chopped off the ending: '...but oftentimes better than master of one.'"
12. Haley Marie Craig, University of North Alabama (July 3, 2020). "7 Phrases You've Been Misquoting" (<https://www.theodysseyonline.com/7-phrases-youve-been-misquoting>). "This saying got cut short as well and originally said: "A jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one.'"
13. Tabitha Wasserman (Feb 4, 2019). "The complete saying was originally..." (<https://medium.com/@tabithawasserman/the-complete-saying-was-originally-a-jack-of-all-trades-is-a-master-of-none-but-oftentimes-5f4af01a72c6>) "The complete saying was originally "A jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one.'"

14. Charlene Dargay (January 27, 2017). "What is the origin of the phrase" (<https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-origin-of-the-phrase-Jack-of-All-Trades-Master-of-None-and-what-does-it-mean/answer/Charlene-Dargay>). "The complete saying was originally "A jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one.""
15. Martin, Gary. "'Jack of all trades' - the meaning and origin of this phrase" (<https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/jack-of-all-trades.html>). *Phrasefinder*. Retrieved 2020-11-24.

External links

-  The dictionary definition of *jack of all trades* at Wiktionary
-

Retrieved from "https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Jack_of_all_trades,_master_of_none&oldid=1025411344"

This page was last edited on 27 May 2021, at 11:55 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.