

## CLEAR, CONCISE WRITING IMPORTANT FOR SUCCESS IN BUSINESS

by Jerry Chautin, Sarasota Herald-Tribune

10 September 2006

<http://www.heraldtribune.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060910/COLUMNIST07/609100486/-1/COLUMNIST>

'Don't open the kimono until you ping the change agent for a brain dump and drill down to your core competencies,' Dogbert said. He spoofs being a consultant in the "Dilbert" comic strip that offers this example of really bad business communications.

Undoubtedly, Dogbert's gobbledygook will not get him many consulting assignments in the real world, unless he learns how to convey his message more clearly. But not so surprisingly, unintelligible communication is a disease that infects many business owners and corporate executives.

To compound the problem, businesspeople with limited communication skills think they can hide their ineptness by using lots of technical jargon and vagaries, leaving their subordinates too intimidated to ask questions.

"Executives and managers at every level are prisoners of the notion that a simple style reflects a simple mind," wrote William Zinsser in his book, "On Writing Well." "Actually, a simple style is the result of hard work and hard thinking; a muddled style reflects a muddled thinker or a person too dumb or too lazy to organize his thoughts."

Englewood-based journalist Mike Eisgrau agrees: "It does little good to use brilliant verbiage that many cannot understand. You don't want to talk at them, you want to speak with them."

The ability to convey your thoughts in writing is essential to communicating with employees and convincing prospective customers. Inability to do so greatly increases the probability of failure. In fact, studies by the Conference Board and Korn-Ferry determined that the capacity to clearly communicate your vision is the No. 1 skill necessary for business success.

Yet our universities are graduating technically adept students who do not have the ability to communicate

persuasively. Unfortunately, it will impede their careers.

So how can you write with the authority necessary to lead, manage and persuade employees and clients?

A good start is to ask someone you trust to critique your memos, e-mails and reports. You may have to hire a writing coach to give you a candid evaluation.

In some instances, a simple-to-understand, straightforward book on writing well, such as William Zinsser's, will do wonders. I bought mine used from Amazon.com.

I also found that the rhythm of my writing is important to move readers along, sentence after sentence. Well-written novels can help you appreciate the ebb and flow. Ernest Hemingway's cadence does it nicely for me.

Here are a few more tips.

- Less is more. Keep it simple.
- Photos and graphics create interest.
- Tell a story to keep readers hooked.
- Open with a sentence or headline that grabs your audience.
- Tell the readers what you are going to say and what is in it for them. Then say it clearly.
- Finish by telling them what you have told them.

"Remember, you are not writing the great American novel," Eisgrau says. "You are trying to communicate as simply and clearly as possible."

Learning how to convey your thoughts and choosing the right words are learned skills that can impact your bottom line.

As Mark Twain put it: "It's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."

*Jerry Chautin is SBA's 2006 "Small-Business Journalist of the Year." He is a local volunteer business counselor with Manasota SCORE, "Counselors to America's Small Business," offering free business advice. Contact Jerry with your business questions and stories through e-mail at [jkchautin@aol.com](mailto:jkchautin@aol.com). SCORE's phone number is 955-1029 and its Web site is [www.score-suncoast.org](http://www.score-suncoast.org).*