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Printed on page D3

Parkinson: How to use the new 'three R's' of business communication

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From time to time all of us are called upon to present ideas and recommendations to management, customers, and clients. Many times, the biggest problem with our presentations is getting to the point. Because we are so close to the situation and to the material, we know a great deal about it – much more than any audience would ever want or need.

One of the most difficult tasks is focusing the information by narrowing the topic so our audience will know precisely what we're saying. Here's a way to do that.

I call it a new application of the familiar 3 R's, but not the old Readin', 'Ritin', and 'Rithmetic. This time it's the 3 R's of Business Communication: Reason, Results, and Rationale. These will help you make your point easily by selecting and structuring your material.

When you have the opportunity to deliver a presentation or to write a paper, start by thinking of it as just that – an opportunity – not a chore or a punishment. You'll have a chance to stand in the spotlight and to show your "star power" through clear packaging and delivery of your ideas.

Here's how it works.

Begin with a short and simple writing exercise. In previous columns, I described the value of the discipline of writing, and it will work here too because no one can fool a blank piece of paper. If you can't write down an idea, it isn't very clear. And if it isn't clear, you won't be able to say it.

Begin by writing and completing this sentence: "The REASON I'm giving this talk is to..."

Is it to teach, persuade, inform, amuse, convince, inspire, or something else? There should always be an overriding and easily stated primary reason for delivering any presentation. If you can't identify what that reason is, the presentation will likely fail. It's your choice, but you must



make the choice early.

The next sentence you should write and complete is, "When I'm finished with my presentation the RESULT will be..."

This identifies what your audience will do or know as a result of what you told them.

Obviously, these first 2 R's are closely related. If your Reason was to persuade them, the Result will be their subsequent action. If it was to inform, they'll now be aware. You get the idea.

The final step details the RATIONALE – the evidence and the specific information you'll include to build your case. This could include items such as past history, budgets, consequences of inaction, benefits, problems, etc. These items provide the background, substance, and direction of the presentation. They explain and describe the need for the presentation. Without such information, your presentation might be seen as little more than an opinion. With it, however, you will be delivering a defensible position.

The Reason and the Results are the bookends; the Rationale provides the details.

As you prepare any presentation remember, first and foremost, the major factor is the Audience. Everything you say, do, or show must be for their benefit and not for your convenience.

It's in our own best interest to consider their needs, their priorities, and their time in order to honor and care for them. I remember seeing one of those inspirational pictures that usually appear in corporate hallways. Most of them are a bit simplistic, but the one I recall was powerful because it relates to every business.

It read, "If we don't take care of our customers our competitors will."

Clear, simple, and right on target.

In order to select the appropriate information to include in any presentation carefully define your audience before selecting any of your material. Ask yourself questions about them including these: Who are they? What do they already know? What do they need to know? What will they do with your information? How will they react to you and to your comments? What's in it for them?

The answers will enable you to focus on what's of value and importance to them not just what's comfortable for you.

Selecting and structuring material is always difficult, but the task will be a lot easier if you use these new Business 3 R's.

The old 3 R's worked well; so will these.

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