

Marilyn Manning and The Consulting Team's

Leadership Tips



NOTE FROM THE CONSULTING TEAM

Communications is a primary tool of leadership. Information on this vital subject is included in most of our training and coaching activities. It serves organizations and leaders in gaining trust, giving direction, coaching teams, and promoting products and services. It is also a skill that requires knowledge and practice to master.

In this issue of *Leadership Tips*, we focus on written communications. Though this topic can and does fill a four-year college major, we offer quick tips and tools to help leaders, managers, and employees plan for and create effective business writing that meets their readers' needs.

In October we will provide a practical application to improve your business writing. In November and December our issues will focus on verbal communications and presentations. We believe this series will help our readers to better communicate to their employees, customers, and stakeholders.

Our warm regards,
Marilyn Manning, Ph.D.
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Business Writing Basics *Meeting Readers' Needs*

"When a good writer is having fun, the audience is almost always having fun too."

~ Stephen King, Author

Effective business writers are knowledgeable, persuasive, and easy to read. Whether you need to inform or convince your readers, writing skills are essential to you as a leader.

The key to business writing success is to catch the reader's interest by being clear, concise, and meeting the reader's needs. Today's Information Age renders this no easy task.

As **Anne Lamott** states in her excellent book, *Bird by Bird*, the writer must,

"overcome the amount of material... so overwhelming that it can make your brain freeze!"

Since leaders rate communications as vital to success, most can benefit by reviewing the key components of an effective writing process and the many methods to make the task faster, easier, and more effective. We define the writing process as

1. Research your readers' needs
2. Outline your essential message
3. Don't sweat the first draft; and
4. *Edit, edit, edit...*



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Many writers research their subject, but they may not know what their readers' need. This information is as important as knowing what customers want from your product or service. Would you read a three-page letter on a business issue, even if the letter was from your boss? What about a 20-page proposal, written to persuade you on a certain decision? Most readers will wait until the last minute to skim only the executive summary and the last page.

Poll a few of your readers: Did the last letter, email, or report I sent you meet your needs for length; detail, depth, and completeness; ease of understanding; tables and graphs vs. written paragraphs; update intervals; etc.? Do you prefer executive summaries? Did you receive the material with enough time to read and respond? How you write is as important as your subject matter.

After you research your material and what your readers want, and before you begin to write, outline what you want to convey. A quickly drafted outline, be it formal or bullet points, will show you if information flows logically and if something is missing. Outlines are a necessity when you have a team project or you are writing at your boss's request. Other readers can quickly assess what you intend to write and provide suggestions before you have taken hours to pen a draft.

When your outline is approved, write your rough draft. The best advice we have found on this task is from *The Business Writer's Handbook* by **Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu**:

"Write the rough first draft quickly, concentrating entirely on converting your outline into sentences and paragraphs. Write as though explaining your subject to someone sitting across from you. Do not worry about a good opening. Just start."

In writing the first draft use what works best for you. Some people prefer to write their draft on paper. Others need to use a computer. Some

like to work with a team, where new thinking and perspectives can spark their ideas. Maybe you need to isolate yourself. Some even prefer to speak their drafts into a recorder or iPhone. They think better out loud. Once captured, the draft is easy to edit.

Editing is nobody's favorite task, but it is necessary. You also need to edit short emails before you press the send button. Plan your deadlines to allow for thorough editing. Here are six steps we recommend:

1. Always use spelling and grammar check tools with your online documents. Though not 100% accurate, they catch gross errors.
2. Put aside your draft document for at least 24 hours. Your next reading will reveal more areas that you might improve or need to edit.
3. In your first editing pass, simplify and clarify your copy. Keep sentences short. Avoid acronyms, jargon, and clichés. Choose active verbs. Use a thesaurus to find the exact words you need. Eliminate "zero" words like "every," "extremely," and most adverbs (words ending in -ly).

Remember this quote from *Mark Twain*:

"Substitute 'damn' every time you're inclined to write 'very'; your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be."

4. Recheck punctuation and grammar.
5. Read your piece aloud. You will "hear" errors you may not have "seen."
6. Take a last look at the document's appearance. Could the message be shorter? Is the letter centered on the page? Can tables, graphs, or diagrams display your information better? How about bullets?

With final edits, your well-written piece is now ready for your readers. We hope this process and these tips help you communicate better and increase confidence in your writing abilities.

The Consulting Team's Communications Resources

The Consulting Team provides workshops and services that help you improve written and verbal communication:

Speeches

The Consulting Team presents keynotes on many communications topics. Here is a partial list of our offerings:

- ▶ Power Communications
- ▶ Leading Positive Change
- ▶ Communicating Strategic Change

Communications Workshops

Business Writing Basics: Do people read your letters, reports, and emails? Does what you write influence decisions? Learn to write to your readers' needs and create effective messages with ease. Understanding different writing styles and the basics of business composition will increase confidence in your written communications.

Communicating Strategic Change: Are you and your organization implementing a major change? Do you need a clear roadmap and message to ensure success? This one-day workshop provides instruction on how to plan for change, how to create and present clear messages, and how to deal with resistance. We combine learning with help for you to develop a basic change implementation plan.

Leading Positive Change: This workshop helps you set realistic objectives, create strategies to overcome barriers, and implement initiatives for

success. Learn how to gain buy-in and motivate others to change. You will be able to identify stressors, modify negative patterns, manage conflict and challenging situations, and maximize communications.

Communication Services

Strategic Plan Documentation: We provide consulting sessions with your planning team to document your strategic plan and determine the most effective ways to communicate it.

Crafting Critical Communications: Our team can help you format and frame information for your critical communications.

Leadership Tips is a periodic newsletter to help deal with the difficult issues in today's busy and hectic work environment. To see past **Leadership Tips** go to www.theconsultingteam.com and select Newsletters.

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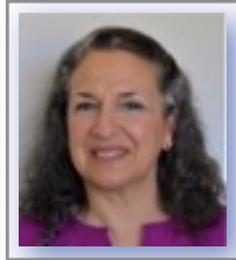


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For over 20 years the consultants of The Consulting Team have helped their clients solve difficult organizational and people problems. The Consulting Team, LLC was founded by international author, speaker, and certified management consultant Dr. Marilyn Manning. The Consulting Team members are recognized experts in many areas, including communication, training, facilitation, coaching, leadership development, change, conflict mediation, strategic planning, and team building. Our success is evident in that 94% of our work is repeat or referral business.

Business Writing References

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