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The Secret to Good Writing

By Marie-Claire Ross

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Skilful business writing involves getting your message across simply and quickly. This often means writing in a style that is easily read and understood by a broad audience.

Yet, writing simply is often difficult for most of us.

Why? The answer lies in our school education. We learnt that if we used big words and complex sentences, we were more likely to get an 'A' by our English teacher or University lecturer. The education system taught us that people who use a broad range of vocabulary are more intelligent than the rest of us.

There is nothing wrong with writing beautifully pieces of prose that feature a stunning range of vocabulary knowledge. However, such writing is unsuitable for a business market.

No business manager has the time to wade through material that meanders and weaves before a point is made. They are even less likely to have time to grab a dictionary to work out what the writer is trying to say.

When I used to work as a market research consultant, I had the impossible task of trying to write market research reports that seemed interesting. My immediate response was to write a report that would make my University lecturer's proud. Sadly, my colleagues all felt the same way.

It wasn't until we had a business writing consultant come in to train us about how to write at the level of a Year 8 student that we realised the folly of our ways.

Using my newly found skills of writing a report using simple English, I proudly produced my 'easy on the brain' report to my manager (who missed the writing class). He told me 'You write like you talk'. To this day, I still don't know if he was criticising my talking or writing ability, but I gathered either way he wasn't happy.

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However, from a communication point of view, this style of writing is perfect for getting your message across quickly.

Later on in my career, I worked at a company that prided itself on its easy to read reports. While this was true (to some degree), one of the directors loved to throw in a difficult word in every report he wrote to make the marketing manager reach for his dictionary. He thought this was really clever and that his clients would be in awe of his knowledge. I'm guessing his clients thought he was a tosser (interestingly, I met an ex-client years later who told me that when their company received one of his reports they would quickly scan it to find the unusual word and then erupt into hysterical laughter).

Articles that are written to impress your audience about how clever you are, do nothing more than distance them. No matter how learned your market is, they still prefer to read information that is easy to

digest.

A great way to test whether your writing is easy to comprehend is to read it out loud. If someone spoke to you, using those words, could you instantly understand what they were getting at or would you have to really concentrate?

Scripts for marketing videos are no different. In fact, they need to be extremely simple in order to quickly grab the attention of people walking past at a trade show, for example.

Writing that is heavy on technical terms and jargon can be a real turn off. The beauty of a marketing video is that it uses both pictures and words. The saying "A picture tells a thousand words" is a powerful concept with corporate movies. It means you can actually get away with saying less, but easily get your message across, because the pictures do all of the talking.

Surprisingly, clear writing can be quite a difficult writing style to master, but the effort is well rewarded. And look at the bright side, at least people won't burst into fits of laughter when they read your masterpiece.

Marie-Claire Ross is one of the partners of Digicast. Digicast works with organisations who are not satisfied that their marketing and training materials are helping their business grow. She can be contacted on 0500 800 234 (Australia wide) or at mc@digicast.com.au. The website is at www.digicast.com.au.

Secrets We Keep From Those We Love

By Timothy Cole

Everyone keeps a few secrets from a husband or wife, boyfriend and girlfriend. And people keep their secrets for a lot of reasons. Often people are embarrassed or they are fearful of a partner's hostility or possible rejection.

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And research shows that it is in one's best interest to keep some things private, especially when partners or spouses are likely to respond poorly to the truth. Being rejected, scorned, or stigmatized does not help any one work through a serious issue.

But, keeping secrets can also be harmful.

Keeping secrets often prevents people from dealing with the problem at hand. Keeping secrets leads to increased stress, anxiety, and it often makes people think about the issue (event or topic) more frequently.

For instance, people who have a secret crush on someone often dwell on their feelings more than people who are able to talk about their feelings out in the open. More often than not, keeping something secret makes it seem more important than it really is.

Likewise, revealing secrets is very helpful when it is done right; that is, in a safe, non-judgmental environment. Revealing secrets can reduce stress, it helps people let go of an issue and think about it more clearly.

If a secret is bothering you, it really does help to get it out – as long people don't respond negatively or use the information against you.

In fact, research shows that the simple task of writing down a secret, even if no one ever reads it, makes people feel better. Writing a secret down reduces stress – it is cathartic.

With this in mind, we have created a place where people can anonymously reveal the secrets they keep. Maybe you will find that letting go of one of your own secrets is helpful and not so embarrassing after all.

Article by Timothy Cole, PhD. Take a look at the secrets people keep from their romantic partners at



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