



Communication Culture

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER YOU WRITE HELLO?

By Helena Kaufman, *The Afro News Vancouver*

WE LAST LOOKED at tips on getting people to like you fairly soon after meeting so that you have the opportunity to share more of your message or perhaps begin a personal or business relationship.

Today's challenge? How to transfer all that in-person energy and positive potential to paper? How can we capture the communication blend of eye movements, gestures, body language and tone of voice when we sit down and write?

Some of it translates. Words, punctuation, sentence length and even layout can help animate your message in your absence, by remote on paper or online in text. You can affect the speed and understanding of a reading of your message. You can even influence the reader to see, hear and feel through images you conjure with your content.

The Dipster

You'll be given a chance, just as you are by a live audience, to get your message out. Today's reader however, demands that you do it faster – up front and in short order, literally, as they no longer dutifully read from start to end.

They “dip”. Typically they'll dive into your copy, surface, maybe skim and dip down again to read more only if you present clear, to the point and appealing content. What are they looking for? News, offers, information and suggestions of interest to-them! Self interest is the engine that moves their eye and keeps your readers' interest on your message.

Rapport can be written in. You can create interest, as if you were there, even when you've written in an entirely different time and place than where your reader is receiving your message.

VIP: A very important point is to envision your ‘conversation partner’ while writing. Friend, client or family member—imagine them. Remember no matter how many hits on your website or how many brochures you choose to print, your communication will always be received by ONE person at a time. Imagine that one and write to them, personally.

In-person to print shift – advantage and attitude

You can edit your words and refine your message, before you go public. After all, your impression and the imprint of your message may last a long time. The advantage is that you are generally not limited by time, access to language supports (grammar, thesaurus, and consults with colleagues) or possibly your anxiety about public speaking.

Let's review some of the elements present during in-person communication, what some people call chemistry, and how we can adapt them to written content:

Make it Personal

Face-to-face, you show your interest and capture your conversation partner's. In writing you can also show interest in their point of view, ask questions and offer ‘conversation’ or in this case correspondence that speaks to what your reader needs or wants specifically to know. Readers will feel your interest in them.

Try to use both the attitude and the word “YOU” more than the word “I”. Make your message about your reader and they will stay with your text longer and will not break “eye contact” with you and “walk away”.

Image

Your wardrobe is one way you project an image. With written content your choices are the colour and quality

of the paper, font size, font style and all these plus background images for your website or email.

Consistency and visual appeal are the messages and information normally presented by your wardrobe, team look, business card or physical setting. In writing it's your signature closing with complete contact information and the graphics that support your message.

Tone

In the absence of your voice your word choice will represent if you are formal, informal, open to humour or use of slang or regional language. Punctuation helps relay emotion (!!) such as enthusiasm, emphasis, surprise (??) doubt, intrigue.

Pacing

Short, to the point sentences keep a reader moving from one to the next. This gets your message out in manageable lengths and keeps reader interest. If you can't say your sentence out loud in one breath - then it's too long!

Space

Just as speakers give each other space to breathe, think and speak, so writers use white space. Your layout should not crowd the eye. Space in the margins, between paragraphs and around the text allows thinking room and shows the readers how much focus or time might be needed. Honour this need to entice longer reading.

Tell me how you did! Next time: How to hang these tips and attitude on a success structure.

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