

## Topic: Message Planning and Organization

Although many people view good communication skills as a gift, in fact good communication is grounded in careful organization and planning of what you want to say and how. Although it may seem obvious, the first thing you need when preparing to create a business message is to understand what your purpose is. This will inform you not only what you want to say, but why - what effect you want to have on those who your message is intended for. Who your intended audience is will impact what you say, how you say it, what medium you use to deliver it this message – your delivery mechanism. Begin writing by focusing on your central idea. Expand that central idea to an outline, and then flesh out the outline.

### Subtopics

- Message Planning: Purpose
- Message Planning: Audience
- Message Planning: Delivery Medium
- Message Planning: Idea
- Message Planning: Outline

### Subtopic: Purpose

Before you begin actually writing a business message you need to do some preparatory work. The first two vital questions you need to answer are: why you are sending the message and what you hope to achieve. For example, if you are writing an announcement that explains restructuring of an existing division, your purpose in sending out this message might be to get the information out to those people who need to know it, but the result you want to achieve might be to help increase buy-in to ease the transition process. Answering these two questions will provide you with your purpose.

Think of purposes as verbs or action words – to inform, to persuade, to entertain, to encourage interaction, to motivate and so on. What are you trying to DO with your message, doing words are action words, or verbs. The best purposes are not only verbs, but they are verbs in the second or third person; this means that the best purposes are verbs that you are trying to get the reader to do. For example, “to tell the entire team of the new industry regulations” is a purpose, but a much stronger purpose is “to get the entire team to adopt and embrace the new industry regulations.” It is likely that you might have more than one purpose, in which case you should prioritize so that you know your primary and secondary purposes.

{Subtopic text, in bulleted list format}

- The most important question to ask yourself first is, “Why am I communicating this to this person (or people) at this time?”
- After answering the “why” questions, the second question to ask yourself is, “What do I hope to achieve by communicating this?”
- Purposes are verbs or action words. Purposes might include: Disseminating information; Closing a deal; Encouraging social engagement; Solving Problems; Resolving conflicts; Building consensus; Generating buzz; Inspiring innovation; Inspiring goodwill; and so on
- Decide on what your primary purpose is – this will drive everything else that follows
- You will likely have one or more secondary purposes, which are subsidiary to the primary purpose

## Subtopic: Audience

Understanding who your audience is can help shape how you communicate your message in terms of shaping the words and choosing the proper medium. You need to communicate in the language of your audience; are you addressing IT people, sales people, marketing people, development people; they all communicate in unique vocabularies. Are you talking to an international audience, a US audience, a West Coast audience, a San Francisco audience, a Mission District audience? Each one should be addressed differently. Will your audience respond better to a formal presentation or a more casual form of address.

It is very likely that you will know the specific people you address your messages to. Even if you don't know the specific people you are addressing, you can make some assumptions about them. If you are addressing a Chief Operating Officer you can assume that your audience has a good ability to keep the big picture in mind while grasping the small details, that they quite possibly are frequently thinking ahead of the person addressing them, that they appreciate a straight shooter who tells the truth. Who do you know in your life who is like that? Substitute the person you know and write your message as if you were addressing you substitute.

You may find that your message has a second audience. If you send a communication with a series of technical specs and their various costs to a developer who is putting a package together for you, she might pass that communication directly on to the V.P. of her area. Writing for the eye of a V.P. might call for a little more formal language than your original audience. Understanding your secondary audience can also inform your style and means of communication.

Every person in your audience is asking themselves, 'what is in it for me?' Use this information by telling them exactly how this is of benefit to them personally.

- Profile or analyze your audience - know who you are addressing
- Some things to consider about your audience are: age, gender, economic level, educational level, occupation, culture, rapport, or expectations.
- Communicate in the language of your audience.
- Secondary audience
- Many times you will personally know your audience, use this information.
- Envision your audience - If you do not know the specific people you are addressing find a substitute.
- Adapt the message to the audience
- Everyone is always thinking 'what is in it for me?' Address that question directly.

## Subtopic: Delivery Medium

Business communicators need to move fluidly through a large range of channels. Choosing the appropriate channel, or medium can make all the difference in the success or failure of achieving your purpose.

To a great degree, what you know already, your purpose and your audience, will define for you the best delivery mechanism to use. The four scenarios below combine purpose and audience to arrive at the appropriate medium to deliver the message.

- Knowing the purpose and audience of your message strongly suggests the medium.
- Routine messages to confirm information, distributed to a large internal audience strongly suggests a memo
- Providing a record of a complaint to an external audience; suggests a written letter.
- A brief routine message across a large internal AND external audience calls for an email.
- A rapid response to discuss bad news with someone you personally know suggests a telephone call.

Other kinds of media might include fax, web page, voice mail, video conference, social media, oral presentation, in person meeting, and group meeting. There are many more and each is appropriate under the right set of circumstances.

- According to Daft and Lengel's media richness theory, the greater the amount of clarifying information (vocal inflection, facial expressions, body language, and so on), the higher the degree of media richness. And the higher the degree of media richness, the more effective your communications are likely to be.
- There are both formal and informal information channels in any organization, both have their effective uses.

### Subtopic: Idea

The communications process begins when the sender has an idea, some though worthy of communicating. But where do these ideas originate from and how can we develop the ability to generate ideas? Often the best way to generate ideas is to observe problems or deficiencies and come up with solutions for them; problem solve. Many of the great ideas throughout history have come in direct response to problems that the creators of those ideas observed.

- It is vitally important to develop good listening skills. Many of the best ideas have been inspired by the thoughts and ideas of others.
- Look to solve problems, improve the work process, and make life easier and more fun. These will be the ideas that will bear the richest fruit.
- Interview a target audience to get their clarification of the kinds of problems they face and the kind of answers they would like.
- Conduct an informal survey to explore new ideas or ways of looking at a problem.
- Brainstorm for ideas either alone or in collaboration with others.
- The central idea of your communication will lead to the secondary ideas (refinements and clarifications) and will help define the structure of the outline of your message.
- In addition to the context of the immediate needs and the situation surrounding it, the process of developing an idea can be affected by many factors including mood, point of reference, background, culture, and psychological makeup.
- After having the idea, the sender has to encode the idea, convert the thought into concrete words that clearly and specifically communicate both the overview and the subtleties of the idea.
- The idea has to be encoded into words that allow the receiver to decode the message.

### Subtopic: Outline

Creating an outline is essential to any form of communication, but particularly for any business communication. An agenda is an outline for a business meeting, which is a group

communications event. Just like an agenda will structure a meeting, an outline will help us to structure our thoughts and by doing so to make a cohesive argument. Some writers prepare to simply jot down their important points on a document called a scratch list, while others prefer the greater structure of an outline.

- Developing any good business message begins with an outline, whether that is speech, a report or paper, a conversation, a video chat, or a social media message.
  - Outlines ultimately support clearer writing that gets directly to the point by eliminating the possibility of leaving out essential ideas.
  - Having an outline allows the writer to concentrate on writing one phrase at a time.
  - Starting with an outline allows you to write without having to take the time to develop sequence or find your way from one point to the next.
- Beginning with a clear outline increases confidence whether the text is written or spoken.
- Messages which have begun as an outline offer the receiver a clearer and more concise message with more clearly drawn relationships between ideas.
  - An outline is to the final communication as a blueprint is to the building built from it.
  - Outlines offer both organization and structure.
  - Some writers like to work with a scratch list, while others prefer to work with an outline.
  - An outline contains a series of headers and sub-headers nested below each other in such a way as to trace a logical progression of thoughts.
  - To create an outline:
    - Define the main topic
    - Divide the main topic into component parts (three to five)
    - Break the components into sub-points
    - Have more than one single item underneath each component.
    - Separate items (do not let them overlap).

## Topic Review

This Topic, 'Message Planning and Organization,' addresses all of the important steps leading up to the creation of a business message. Whether you are communicating by paper, electronic delivery, social media, public address, or private conversation – these steps will always stand you in good stead.

Any communication begins with the thing you hope to achieve, your purpose. If I start a conversation with about the backlog in the delay of materials I could be: a) trying to pitch you a different vendor, b) requesting a material flow analysis, c) putting myself forward for the supply chain position due to be hired soon, d) supporting the prevailing view in my department or team, e) showing my support of the new VP who has addressed this issue in hopes to curry her favor, or any of a myriad of other things. But I have come to you with a purpose, a thing that I want – I may be addressing the thing that I want directly (as in answer d) or indirectly (as in the answer e).

Communications is a two way exchange. Once I have said something to you, you must understand it for the communication to be complete and effective; if you fail to understand the communication has failed. Imagine I have just told you something effectively and passionately, but I have told you in French and you don't speak French; the entire process is useless. In the same way, the more I understand who am I addressing and how they speak, the better I am able to get my message across. While a difference in language is an extreme example, subtle differences of dialect, idiom, body language or other

differences that might cause clearer communication are important to effectively delivering your message.

How are you going to deliver your message? The possible types of media range from informal conversation to formal presentation, informal written reports, formal written reports, emails, texts, and others. Knowing the purpose of your message and understanding your audience can help inform you of the most effective media to use.

With an understanding of your purpose, your audience, and how you plan to deliver your message, the next step is to clearly articulate your primary idea and the sub-ideas that support it. Using your primary idea and secondary ideas as your largest headings, you can begin outlining the presentation of your idea or ideas. The outline is the final step in planning and organizing your message. At this point the actual writing can begin.

#### Question(s) to Consider:

1. You have been tasked with getting the message out that an entire division will be shifting their procedures from filing all forms in hard copy to delivering all necessary forms and paperwork online via the cloud. As you begin to attack your task, what might you be considering?
2. You are presented with a chance to bring your new product to Shark Tank, seeking investors. How do you proceed in preparing your presentation to the sharks?
3. Does this study guide suggest that every casual conversation needs to be prepared for and outlined in advance?
4. You are a marketing consultant and your client is looking to expand an existing chain of pizza buffet restaurants into a new market in the Pacific Northwest. How do you begin to put together a campaign to help your client accomplish his goals?

#### Answers to Question(s) to Consider:

1. While you have been tasked with explaining the changes in procedure, your actual purpose is to generate buy-in and perhaps even enthusiasm, for the new system. In order to do this you need to understand who people's this division. What are their backgrounds culturally, socially, geographically, and in any other pertinent way? This information will prove invaluable in establishing how you shape this message and how you deliver it. In order to achieve your purpose (buy-in), you need to frame your primary idea, why this change is beneficial to everyone. Having determined your mode of delivery and your primary idea, you have a clear path to outlining your important points.
2. Simply saying that your product is great will not get the sharks to invest in your business. Your purpose, is to get one or more of the sharks to invest in your business. Your audience is five investment capitalists, whose areas of expertise and interest are well known to you. In this case, the media is determined for you; you will be giving an oral presentation. But your understanding of your audience will be immensely helpful in shaping the salient points of your presentation. Your primary idea is the uniqueness and marketability of your new product. In your outline you know that major headings will be describing the product, outlining financials to date, and future plans. You can no go ahead and prepare your presentation. If you just went in front of the sharks to tell how great your product was you would never get your investment.
3. Certainly every casual conversation cannot be outlined in advance. More importantly every casual conversation should not be outlined. However, every purposeful engagement, in which you hope to accomplish a purpose or get the person you are addressing to agree with behave in a way that is helpful to your purposes would benefit from being thought out in this way. We all engage in

casual conversation many times a day and frequently find ourselves trying to persuade people for or against a belief or course of action; but when we set out with the ability to articulate our purpose, we have a better chance of accomplishing our goals.

4. Assuming that your client has an excellent product, your purpose would be to get people to try his pizza places once, on the assumption that once they have tried it they will fall in love with his pizza's at his prices. Next you need to get a clear idea of who your audience is. Is there particular segment of the population that you are seeking out? Chances are this chain will may not tempt customers from fine dining establishments, but could win regular customers from fast food and other pizza restaurants. Knowing that you are looking to lure customers away from fast food restaurants and pizza joints on a trial basis, it might occur to you that a strategy of coupons placed in local ValPaks, and Grand Opening sales announced in local newspapers (county, village, and borough publications) may get accomplish your goals. Now you can great your primary idea, which is 'our pizza is the best, try it once and you'll love us for life.' Outlining this document will be very short, as these media do not allow for much text. Putting all of the pertinent information together you have developed your campaign, planned and organized your message, and done everything you need to in order to prepare to write the actual text.