

## EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

# Poor Writing Skills Lead to Lost Business and Career Paralysis

By JOANN KILLEEN

The high cost of poor writing skills to businesses each year has become the hidden epidemic that few professionals are willing to openly discuss. Billions of dollars in lost productivity can be traced to employees who are not capable of writing clearly and concisely with a focused message for their intended audience.

It doesn't matter how much education one has or how much money one earns, most professionals are challenged when it comes to writing. Clarity of purpose appears to be a lost art in business today.

How many times do employees read an email or a document from their supervisor and ask themselves the questions, "What does this say?" or "Am I supposed to do something with this information?" How many hours are lost in business when employees gather to guess or interpret what you tried to say?

In the book *Alice in Wonderland*, author Lewis Carroll set the goal for good business writing.

"Cat: Where are you going?

Alice: Which way should I go?

Cat: That depends on where you are going.

Alice: I don't know.

Cat: Then it doesn't matter which way you go."

In today's challenging business environment, does anyone have the luxury of wasting time trying to get there with his or her poor writing skills?

If you or your employees are making grammatical errors in written communications, you

most likely are losing business without knowing why. It doesn't matter whether you are a CEO, a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer, an artist, or a public relations professional, poor written communication skills are a distraction in the workplace and can be career limiting.

Despite the number of college-educated individuals, employers remain shocked that most people simply cannot write. Working with executives over the last 35 years in my public



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relations business, I typically am asked the same question: "What do they learn in college these days? People just can't write and it is costing my business."

While I can't defend the writing courses offered in colleges and universities in this country, I do know what I experience in teaching writing classes for the last nine years in the UCLA Extension Certificate in Public Relations Program.

Most people can't write. It doesn't matter their professional expertise, they aren't able to construct a clear message in a written format. They lack the skills to communicate clearly in business. Sadly we've become a society based on visual information delivered via instant messaging, texting and videos posted on YouTube or other forms of social media. Is it any wonder why the wrong messages are delivered and members of the news media report is that way?

Writing in business shouldn't be viewed as "it is done therefore it is right," but rather, "when it is right it is indeed done."

If you or your employees can't write, what do you do? Hire someone else to re-write his or her work? Do you reassign their work to a job classification that doesn't require writing rather than terminate them?

In today's competitive business environment, clear and concise writing is a must for financial success. If customers or clients don't understand what you've written or aren't clear what goods and services you are selling, how long do you expect to stay in business, let alone ever be profitable?

Consumers are overwhelmed each day with thousands of messages sent to them from busi-

nesses and organizations all asking for the same thing. Pay attention to us, buy from us, and please remember us the next time you want to make a purchase.

If your message is poorly written, unclear, not focused and full of typos or misspelled words, how do you expect the customer to think you are serious about conducting business with them?

Mutual respect in business is expected, and if your communication is missing the proper elements, your company or organization most likely will experience high employee turnover, high employee absenteeism, poor customer service, late project delivery, poor to no media coverage and ultimately the decline of your business profits.

To be competitive today in business, one must acquire the skill set to take complex information and write it in such a way that even your grandmother or kindergartener can easily understand it.

Professionals receptive to life-long learning have the opportunity to expand their writing skill set by enrolling in courses offered through UCLA Extension. Knowing where you want to go will help you define the road to get there.

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