



Communications Digest

Because Good Copywriting Should Grow on Trees!

Welcome Mid-August!

With summer now in full bloom, I'm delighted to pen this issue of "Communications Digest."

In last month's issue, I concluded my three-part blog posting, addressing the importance Seth Godin placed on "shipping" one's work, when our "resistance" would rather that we refine it endlessly and obsessively, as perfectionists tend to do.

In "Ask an Expert," I visited some recent tips from North American newsletter guru, Michael Katz, on better newsletter writing. And from "Word Nerd's Corner," I turned to etymologist Bryan Garner to clarify that confusing term, "mischievous."

In this issue, I feature articles on how to improve your efficiency and overcome insecurity. Some of my readers come from the mental health community, where I am an advocate. Often these folk are under-employed or unemployed individuals who lack confidence and worry about their capabilities. This month's issue is for them.

Enjoy the last few weeks of summer!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth

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Article One: **Are you Efficient at Work? Mark McCartney's Recommendations**

Executive leadership coach at Oxford's Saïd Business School and the School of Life in London, UK, Mark McCartney writes frequently for the UK newspaper, *The Guardian* (including a piece on June 6th that spawned this article).

Accomplished Saskatoon editor, Wilf Popoff, recently sent me McCartney's article, which presents some practical ways to work as efficiently as possible, in the shortest time possible. Here are McCartney's eight recommendations to do the most work in the shortest amount of time:

- (1) Make yourself scarce when it comes to others. McCartney says that multi-tasking really does not work and if we want to be productive we must remove ourselves from distractions ("lock yourself in a room away from others"). And we should focus fully on one task at a time. He says that research shows that those who multitask the most are "the worst at multitasking." The irony!
- (2) Work in short bursts with highly focused attention. McCartney observes that we're not good at fighting distractions, so that we should work intensively in short sessions, so as to make headway on one important project at a time. He says that we should be able to answer the question, at the end of the afternoon: " 'What did I get finished today that was important to me and the organization I work for?' "
- (3) Simplify your work life. Strive to reduce the number of tasks that you do, daily. "Habits drive us to continue doing tasks that don't need doing. Try not to take on more tasks without first asking, 'Why is this really important?' " So reduce the emails you respond to and keep reports brief and to-the-point.
- (4) Work at your optimal time: McCartney says that we should do our thinking early in the morning, instead of clearing emails. Consider spending our first hours thinking about one or two crucial tasks that we need to complete. We may even identify them the night before, to create our intention, and to prepare our brains to focus on "what is in its control."

- (5) Fortify your strengths. McCartney says that we'll get through work more speedily if we focus our work on what we're good at and practice getting "even better" at those tasks. Don't be a "jack of all trades."
- (6) Be wary of the robots: He notes that no one should try to get too efficient, because robots are the best at that and they are altering industries and stealing jobs from us. He recommends instead that you focus on "being effective, . . . working on the most important task—which requires you to think and be creative."
- (7) Be honest with yourself: be aware that the 21st century workplace is undergoing huge change. So we should be honest in identifying what firmly entrenched habits we have that are limiting our efficiency. Work actively to stop falling into those habits (e.g. sitting through long, poorly run meetings, or frenetically jumping from one task to another, etc.)
- (8) Don't read too much self-help: He reminds us that no one will complete all of the tasks we want to, in our allotted time. So avoid indulging in too many self-help books, which can never resolve that problem. Another irony: he writes that "if you stop reading this and get to work, that might be a good start."

What are your thoughts on your effectiveness at work? Can McCartney's above points assist you in becoming more productive? Writers like Seth Godin stress that "effectiveness" is not the same thing as "productivity."

What do you think? Please share your thoughts on the contact page of my website—but not 'til you've met your current deadline (haha)! I'd be delighted to continue this conversation.

Article Two: "Ask an Expert" with Minda Zetlin

Overcoming Insecurity . . .

Are you dogged by insecurity at work? Honest people will own up to this, at least at some point in their careers. From Inc.com, Minda Zetlin, columnist and author of *The Geek Gap*, writes, "Everyone's insecure: here are three ways to permanently boost your self-esteem":

- (1) Don't think that "Everyone's so successful. How come I'm not?" Social media has allowed rapid, excessive self-promotion. Zetlin says that it's "easy to get caught up in others' postings and think you're inferior to [them]." I'm also aware that "reality television" has caused unnecessary competitiveness and judgment to take over our modern lives. Zetlin writes that each of us can feel insecure about accomplishments and that we should instead focus on the ongoing processes of learning and (self-) improvement, rather than on accomplishments.
- (2) Don't think that " 'I haven't accomplished anything.' " If you've been thinking critically of yourself, it's easy to fall into this trap and wonder: "What have I been doing with my

whole life?” Zetlin reminds us that there is always someone younger and smarter than we are and that comparisons to others are self-defeating. She recommends not looking at what others accomplish, but instead considering your own track record—where you are in 2016 compared to in 2006 or in 2000. This kind of comparison is healthier, because it will uncover that you in fact have grown and have attained legitimate success.

- (3) Don’t think that “My goals are so far away. I’ll never get there.” This kind of defeatist thinking can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Zetlin recommends thinking, instead, in reasonable terms: “I can reach this goal” and “I know other people who have done this; I can get there, too.”

These points by Zetlin illustrate “negative self-talk,” a term coined by cognitive and behavioural therapists (CBTs, e.g. David Burns in his study, *The Feeling Good Handbook*, in the late 90s). Burns and his colleagues have stressed the importance of slowing down and changing the mental thoughts we send ourselves, by identifying their distortions and then “talking back” to those distortions with more constructive thoughts.

Creative people who think and work closely with artistic media (including words) can be especially subject to anxiety and depression. CBT specialists recommend making a recording of positive affirmations that can alter one’s automatic messages (e.g. “You are a good and worthwhile person.” “You don’t have to be perfect to be valued,” etc. Try making such a recording on your smartphone, so you can listen to it, wherever you are. Repeating it will strengthen your self-esteem.) Many standard texts on depression, anxiety and performance issues explain these insights in greater detail (e.g. Edmund Bourne’s many editions of *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*).

WORD NERD’S CORNER:



"Chortle" and "Galumph": Portmanteau words . . .

In his July 5th blog posting, American etymologist, Bryan Garner, explained "portmanteau words."

The term, he explains, was created by British writer Lewis Carroll who used it to describe words formed by combining the sounds and meanings of two different words.

Who doesn’t love portmanteau words, some of which work by being onomatopoeic—whereby words match their sound with their meaning:

Garner writes that “Carroll gave us ‘chortle’ (chuckle + snort)” and ‘galumph’ (gallop + triumph).”

Other examples are “avigation” (aviation + navigation)

Most portmanteau words, Garner observes, do not gain currency. But others become standard and unquestioned in our use, such as “brunch” (breakfast + lunch).

Here are some further examples, with varying degrees of usage:

advertorial (advertisement + editorial)

breathalyzer (breath + analyzer)

cockapoo (cocker spaniel + poodle)

docudrama (documentary + drama)

emoticon (emotion + icon)

frenemy (friend + enemy)

guesstimate (guess + estimate)

infomercial (information + commercial)

jazzercise (jazz + exercise)

labradoodle (labrador retriever + poodle)

mockumentary (mock + documentary)

motel (motor + hotel)

netiquette (internet + etiquette)

Oxbridge (Oxford + Cambridge)

perma-press (permanent + press)

radiocast (radio + broadcast)

simulcast (simultaneous + broadcast)

slumlord (slum + landlord)

smog (smoke + fog)

sportscast (sports + broadcast)

televangelist (television + evangelist)

So which of these (or other) portmanteau words do you find useful or amusing? Please share your usage ideas and bugbears with me; I’d be delighted to include them in future issues.

SHOP NEWS



Particular thanks this month to my brilliant web designer, Oliver Sutherns (Toronto) who has helped me to shorten the presentation of this newsletter, to make it more physically readable. It's great to work with a pro like you, Oliver: many thanks.

Special thanks also to Saskatoon's most accomplished editor, Wilf Popoff, for sharing articles and insights from his "google feed," and wide range of reading. Thank you, Wilf!

Thank you also (in no particular order) to fellow women of the Freelancers' Roundtable Group which I convene--Ashleigh Mattern, Katherine Duncombe, Julie Barnes and Leanne Bellamy. The support and friendship are great and we are planning a collaborative writing project that will demonstrate our interests: stay tuned!

ABOUT US

Since 2011, Elizabeth Shih Communications has provided B2B marketing and communications services on the Prairies and across Canada.

Do you need help writing your “marcom” materials?

Please contact me through my website, via the CASL-compliant email form, on the right-hand side of each page (www.elizabethshih.com).

After I have received your permission, I'll be pleased to discuss projects with you!

I help small-businesses and non-profits create success stories (case studies) and newsletters that position my clients as experts, enable them to communicate authentically and to leverage new and existing relationships to find better clients.

Please visit my website for more information (www.elizabethshih.com)