



Communications Digest

Because Good Copywriting Should Grow on Trees!

Welcome Mid-December!

With winter's hoary breath howling, I'm grateful to be seated in a warm office, where I'm penning this issue of "Communications Digest."

In last month's issue, I discussed how power can corrupt, as studied by psychologist Dacher Keltner. In "Ask an Expert," I visited Josh Bernoff on how some companies still need to write better. And in "Word Nerd's Corner," I addressed the particularly maddening jargon of "incentivize" and "incent."

In this month's eNewsletter, I visit the American Hospice Foundation's recommendations on "Coping with Christmas," for those of us who feel overwhelmed by the excesses of the season. In "Ask an Expert," I share some of coach Daphne Gray-Grant's recommendations on why writers (in fact everyone) should write daily. And in "Word Nerd's Corner," Bryan Garner resolves any confusion we may have over the terms "distinct, distinctive and distinguished."

Despite the world's many challenges, I hope that you as readers can take the time to enjoy the last weeks of 2016--giving thanks for the plethora of good books to read and good friends with whom to visit. I wish you peace this holiday season.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

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Article One: Can you cope with Christmas? Choose from these suggestions on how to survive the (not so) "Ho-ho-holiday season!"

For many of us, even if we have been raised to observe Christmas as a blessing, the holiday season can be painful. The pain may come from the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, separation from a significant other, health or financial difficulties, the excessive pressure to buy and give and so on. The so-called "holiday season" can be anything but "ho-ho-ho" in reality. . . .

A friend recently shared this holiday survival guide (originally from the American Hospice Foundation). It offers some ideas that may help us as we plan (or choose not to plan) Christmas or holiday festivities:

Christmas cards (choose one):

1. Mail as usual
2. Shorten your list
3. Include a Christmas letter that you've written
4. Skip it this year

Christmas music (choose one):

1. Enjoy as usual
2. Shop early, to avoid Christmas music
3. Avoid turning the radio on
4. Listen to the music and allow yourself to feel sad (or to cry)

Decorations (choose one):

1. Decorate as usual
2. Let others do it
3. Choose not to have decorations
4. Have a special decoration for a loved one, who may have died or left

5. Modify your decorations
6. Make changes, such as an artificial tree
7. Ask for help

Shopping (choose one):

1. Shop as usual
2. Shop early
3. Make your gifts
4. Make a list of gifts to buy
5. Shop through catalogues or the internet
6. Ask for help wrapping gifts
7. Shop with a friend
8. Give cash
9. Give baked goods
10. Ask for help
11. Go giftless and make a donation to charity

Traditions (choose one):

1. Keep the old traditions
2. Don't attend Christmas parties
3. Open gifts on the usual day
4. Attend a worship service
5. Attend a totally different place of worship
6. Visit the cemetery
7. Attend Christmas parties
8. Go to an entirely new place
9. Open gifts at another time
10. Do not attend a worship service
11. Light a special candle to honour your loved one
12. Bake the usual foods
13. Modify your baking
14. Buy the usual foods
15. Spent quiet time alone

Christmas Dinner (choose one):

1. Prepare as usual
2. Invite friends over
3. Eat in a different location of the house
4. Go out to dinner
5. Eat alone
6. Change time of dinner
7. Have a buffet/potluck
8. Ask for help

Post-Christmas and New Year's Day (choose one):

1. Spend the days as usual
2. Avoid New Year's parties
3. Spend time with only a few friends
4. Write in a journal about your hopes for the next year
5. Go out of town
6. Host a New Year's Party
7. Go to a movie
8. Rent a movie from the library
9. Go to bed early

Article Two: "Ask an Expert" with Daphne Gray-Grant: Why Writing Daily Improves our Lives

I've noticed over the past few years that writing becomes an intersubjective dialogue (even if never spoken) in our minds with others whom we know or care for. I frequently write to the voice I recall from a former therapist, of a cousin who lives in Europe and of numerous colleagues now separated from me by long geographical distances.

People who love writing could (and often do) write at least five days per week (some do seven), whether that writing takes the form of a memoir, a serious letter or email, or some form of academic or business writing (for publication or pay).

Colleague Daphne Gray-Grant writes that "if you relish the thought of becoming a better writer, or one who works with more ease and less angst," try writing daily. She offers these seven tips on why doing so will benefit you. I present (paraphrased) some highlights from her article:

(1) Writing daily makes it easier to write: Similar to exercising, making music, cooking or playing chess, writing improves in the doing and can "start to become second nature. You don't have to try as hard and you have more fun," Gray-Grant writes.

(2) Writing daily helps you to write with better quality: By repetition, humans learn to get better at things. If you find it hard to write, doing it daily "will allow you to pick up the tools and techniques to do it better." Figure skaters, dancers and singers all note that skipping even one day's practice can cause disrupt the flow of their skills, so that confusion and error result.

(3) "JUST DO IT." If you dislike the process of deciding what you'll do, it's because scientists have shown that decision making tires the human brain. Gray-Grant reports that "this is because we all have very limited amounts of willpower," and that willpower decreases "as each day goes on." But if you set as a daily habit that you'll write for 15 minutes, then you won't have to argue with your own mental inertia to act (effectively "psyching" yourself "out of it"). As the marketers at Nike say, "just do it."

(4) You'll prevent writer's block.

If you write daily as a habit, you'll quickly override the naive belief that what you're producing will be the next "blockbuster" (e.g. as in Stephen King). The process will be about getting comfortable with your writing voice and writing "quantity," not "quality." When that happens, you'll defeat writer's block, because writer's block results from perfectionism.

(5) Writing daily will help you think better.

Before you think of publishing or broadcasting your writing, it will help you to figure out what you're actually thinking on any given topic. As Gray-Grant says: "Society tells us that we should write in order to explain or persuade. In fact, it's just as important — maybe even more so — to write in order to learn what you think."

(6) Writing daily will give you "momentum."

You will find momentum comes from the comfort you feel with your own writing voice. And momentum makes it easier to get writing projects done, leaving you "happier and more relaxed."

(7) Writing daily doesn't require a huge commitment.

When you write daily, you don't have to write for hours on end! Gray-Grant recommends starting "with five minutes." Even if you start with only a few phrases or sentences, "the act of writing [a] single sentence is a step forward." If you keep writing regularly, you will shortly gather hundreds of sentences. And as psychologists have been saying for years, any large task can become manageable if we keep taking small steps, over time.

Given these insights from Gray-Grant, we can easily see that writing daily can easily improve our thinking and feelings (regulate mood and build self-esteem). That some of what we write may ultimately be shareable with others (through publication or otherwise) is really a bonus on top of a very healthy, life-enhancing practice.

Do you write daily? Could you start with only five minutes per day? Please share your experience with me in the "contact" page of my website. I'd be delighted to extend this conversation.

WORD NERD'S CORNER: The case of "distinct," "distinctive" and "distinguished" (with Bryan Garner)



Are you unsure of how to distinguish between these terms?! American etymologist Bryan Garner writes that “distinct” means “well-defined, discernibly separate” (e.g. “After treatment, the king had distinct speech,” refers to the speech as being well enunciated).

“Distinctive” means “serving to distinguish, set off by appearance” (e.g. “The queen wore a distinctive satin dress,” refers to something that is idiosyncratically different from others’ clothing—be it positively or negatively so). “Distinctive” is sometimes used in error, in place for “distinguished.”

“Distinguished” means “notable, famous” (e.g. “At the reception, a group of distinguished writers will debate the outcome of the recent American election”).

Do these explanations from Garner make clear the differences between “distinct, “distinctive” and “distinguished?” If you find these difficult to grasp, you may need to commit them to memory, until they become second nature.

Do you have language and usage bugbears? Please send them to me on my website and I'll use them in an upcoming blog posting or eNewsletter.

SHOP NEWS



Particular thanks this month to the hosts of Saskatoon's annual Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Day (December 2nd), which celebrated the business successes of those with a wide variety of disabilities. One takeaway for me is the essentialness of quality mentorship to all entrepreneurs.

So renewed thanks to the Raj Manek Mentorship Program (RMMP) for enabling me to continue to consult and share conversation with mentor, Monica Kreuger (Chief Visionary Officer of the Praxis School of Entrepreneurship).

A seasonal thank you and best wishes to Lori Jestin-Knaus and colleagues at Women Entrepreneurs of SK, for leading our monthly mentoring circle and for undertaking a new membership directory. It will now be easier for us all to stay in touch.

Warm regards and thanks, once again, to Saskatoon writer and editor, Wilf Popoff, for sharing his very wide range of reading and thinking with me.

Thank you also (in no particular order) to fellow women of my Freelancers' Roundtable Group-- Ashleigh Mattern, Katherine Duncombe, Julie Barnes, Leanne Bellamy and Amy Rederburg. We share highs and lows, best practices in freelancing and more.

I wish all of the above people, and you, good reader, the best of the holiday season and good health and happiness in 2017!

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 specialize in entrepreneurial storytelling, in which I chronicle how entrepreneurs may succeed against the odds to market their services or products and in ways that give back to our community. I tell such stories primarily through articles, case studies and eNewsletters, amongst other formats.

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

