



Communications Digest

Because Good Copywriting Should Grow on Trees!

Welcome Mid-February!

This week's mild temperatures are very welcome. Environment Canada has predicted that the worst of the prairie winter is now behind us. And with the daylight hours growing appreciably longer, I'm especially glad to send you another issue of "Communications Digest."

In last month's issue, I visited Rich Fernandez's writing on how to reduce stress and boost your resilience at work. And in "Ask An Expert," I cited Barbara Davidson's recommendations for how to increase your productivity there, too.

In this month's issue, "happiness researchers" Shawn Achor and Michelle Gielan make the prospect of increasing one's resilience in the workplace even easier. In "Ask An Expert," I visit a complementary article by guru Alex Soojung-Kim Pang on how building rest into your work schedule can build your productivity. And in "Word Nerd's Corner," Bryan Garner distinguishes between the terms "sensational" and "sensationalistic" (apropos, given the state of politics, these days).

Enjoy these days of moderate temperatures and increasing light! May the sunshine bring you renewed hope, as we progress through the last months of winter!

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

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Article One: Is Resilience about Recharging or about Endurance?

In my Mid-January enewsletter and, since then, in a recent blog posting (posted January 24, 2017), I have explored some theories about "resilience" in our workplaces and lives. The term is used often enough to make it a keyword for our times and culture—used to discuss topics that are diverse as Aboriginal survivors of the residential school system and the lives of busy managers of Fortune 500 companies.

In a recent issue of the *Harvard Business Review*, psychologist and “happiness researcher” Shawn Achor and positive psychology researcher Michelle Gielan (a former US news anchor, who is also Achor's spouse), contend that “resilience is about how you recharge, not how you endure.”

Both Achor and Gielan travel constantly for work and are also parents of a “2-year-old” toddler. The couple has learned that their work-related air travel depletes them: “We race to get all our ground work done: packing, going through [security], doing a last-minute work call, calling each other, then boarding the plane,” only to find “we get nothing done” onboard. They ask: “Why can’t we be tougher—more resilient and determined in our work—so we can accomplish all of the goals we set for ourselves?”

Based on the research they are doing, they find that the problem is not their hectic schedules or how crowded the seating is on planes, but “a misunderstanding of what it means to be resilient, and the resulting impact of overworking.”

Achor and Gielan say that misconceptions of what constitutes resilience are “bred from an early age.” Parents might celebrate a teenager staying up half the night to complete a school project, not knowing that a “resilient child is a well-rested one.” A sleep-deprived teenager will lack the

cognitive resources to do well on other evaluations, will have “lower self-control with his friends; and at home, he [will be] moody with his parents. Overwork and exhaustion are the opposite of resilience.” The “bad habits” of your youth only intensify when we enter the workplace. Both Achor and Gielan assert that “the key to resilience is trying really hard, then stopping, recovering, and then trying again.” Because “when the body is out of alignment from overworking, we waste a vast amount of mental and physical resources trying to return to balance” and thus to “move forward.”

Too much time spent performing and not enough spent recovering makes “you risk burnout.” It takes extra energy to mount an effort when you lack energy, so that “the value of a recovery period rises in proportion to the amount of work required of us.”

So how do we recover and build our reserves to be resilient? It won’t happen simply by stopping work, since “rest and recovery are not the same thing,” they write. “Stopping does not equal recovering.” You can stop working on your project but become embroiled in other, onerous activities. Other researchers have recently differentiated between “internal recovery” (such as short breaks and changing of tasks) and “external recovery,” in which actions take place outside of work, such as between workdays, on weekends or vacations. Achor and Gielan say that only with “external recovery” do our *brains* get a real rest, which is as needed as any physical rest.

To build resilience, then, they argue that we must “strategically stop during the day by using technology to control overworking.” They cite Amy Blankson of the Yale Business School, who says that distractions over your smartphone can gobble up as much as (or more than) 2.5 hours, daily. She recommends apps like “Offtime” and “Unplugged” to help you use “airplane mode” as a part of your daily life. Additionally, they say that taking a “cognitive break” every 90 minutes will help you to recharge your mind. For instance, try eating lunch outdoors (when climate permits) and among friends, but not to discuss work!

They also recommend taking “all of your paid time off, which not only gives you recovery periods, but [also] raises your productivity and likelihood of promotion.”

Achor and Gielan now practice what they preach: they now use airplane time as a “work-free zone” in which they allow themselves to recover: “Now . . . we relax, meditate, sleep, watch movies, journal or listen to entertaining podcasts. And when we get off the plane, instead of being depleted” by the work we’ve struggled to do, “we feel rejuvenated and ready to return to the performance zone.”

What do you think of Achor and Gielan's definition of resilience as a process of recharging and not one of endurance? What strategies do you use to build resilience and keep yourself performing highly? Please respond on the “contact” page of my website (www.elizabethshih.com) . I'd be delighted to extend this conversation.

Article Two: "Ask an Expert"----Alex Soojung-Kim Pang on the Importance of Rest

Silicon Valley entrepreneur and author Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, was interviewed recently by writer Kristen Marano of YouInc.com, on the importance of getting sufficient rest. In his book, *Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less*, Pang argues that reclaiming rest in both your work and personal lives actually enables you to perform more effectively and to be happier overall.

So why are so many of us entrepreneurs and professionals trapped by busyness?

Pang says that “busy” has become a “boastful” word, since technology and the financial industries make overwork look profitable and even sexy: in these fields, it seems like being “busy” pays off, because a 100 hour work week will yield you a big house, fancy car and tropical vacations.

Another reason for overwork is that we are no longer working in the traditional, industrial economy, in which “periods of work are discreet and well-defined.” Professionals and knowledge workers “live in a world in which the work is never done, in which the standards for good performance are just fuzzy enough to [make] us want to make things a little better, or to try to deliver a little bit more improvement on whatever we’re working on.”

With the end of external signals to tell us when to stop working, Pang says that we find it easier to keep going. A fourth reason for overwork, he says, is that we see people “performing busyness all the time,” and so we want to compete and participate in that environment. Finally, he says that for many people, “it can actually be fun” to prove to yourself that you can keep up and to others that you’re dedicated and excellent at what you do. However, it’s also easy to ignore the repercussions of overwork, including the reality that “it is actually genuinely counterproductive.”

Pang says that several technology companies are investigating how to use computers “to help people be more productive during the times they’re actually in the office,” and then to rest in ways that “don’t disrupt clients or customers.” He adds that more companies are developing policies that employees shouldn’t check email in the evenings or over weekends. Another important strategy is to block out periods during the work week when employees “have permission to not answer email and to let the phone go straight to voicemail,” so as to focus for several hours on their most important projects.

How can we build rest into a work week? Pang recommends a five to ten minute walk, outside the office, even if it is just downstairs to the cafeteria and back, because “physical activity has immediate cognitive benefits. It’s obviously good for your heart, and walking in particular charges up your creativity.”

Pang also encourages “mind wandering,” where we “do nothing at all” (or only automatic activities like folding laundry that don’t require thought). Then our minds can “keep working on problems that have been occupying our attention and come up with answers.”

Regardless of your age or profession, Pang wants us to recognize that “we get untold benefit from taking rest and taking rest seriously.” You can encounter more of his thinking on the topic in his book, *Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less* (2016), and online at The Rest Project,” www.deliberate.rest .

Do you get enough rest in your life and in what forms? Do you find Pang's analysis helpful? Please share your thoughts with me on the contact page of my website at www.elizabethshih.com . I'd be delighted to hear from you.

WORD NERD'S CORNER: The case of "sensational" vs. "sensationalistic"



Are you troubled by the varying adaptations of the term “sensational” in the media? Sometimes the uses demonstrate the problem with the term!

In a recent blog posting (January 27, 2017) American etymologist Bryan Garner explained the differences between “**sensational**” and “**sensationalistic**.”

He writes that “**sensational** is based on the noun sensation (excitement)” and can mean “either ‘awesome,’ ” as in, “It was a *sensational* performance by the orchestra,” or something that “commands attention” in a terrible way (e.g. The *sensational* OJ Simpson trial dominated the airwaves).

By contrast, Garner writes, “**sensationalistic**” means “‘overblown; distorted to shock the emotions’ ” and “always carries strongly negative connotations,” as in, “Print media are being just as *sensationalistic* as TV” (Shales in Garner).

Garner notes that “because *sensationalistic* cannot be ambiguous, it is the better choice for signaling disapproval, as in the following example: “ ‘CBS and NBC did far less sweeps stunting than Fox and ABC, which blew out almost its entire schedule for sensationalistic Michael Jackson exposés . . .’ ” (Jicha in Garner).

Do you find Garner’s distinction between "sensational" and "sensationalistic" helpful? Will his explanation allow you to identify future errors in common use of the words? Please feel welcome to share your word bugbears on the “contact” page of my website (www.elizabethshih.com). I’d be delighted to hear from you!

SHOP NEWS

Thank you this month to Monica Kreuger, Co-founder and Chief Visionary Officer of Praxis School of Entrepreneurship. Monica and I continue to discuss how to broaden the markets I reach; these conversations always re-energize and bring me hope. Proteges of the Raj Manek Mentorship Program (through which I met Monica) are celebrating her and fellow mentors, at the Feb 23rd annual Raj Manek Memorial Banquet. For more information, visit <http://manekmentorship.sk.ca/Events/Events-Admin/artmid/723/articleid/1036/The-Annual-Raj-Manek-Banquet-2>

An enthusiastic thanks to Lori Jestin-Knaus at Women Entrepreneurs of SK, who ably leads a women's "mentoring circle," there. Her insights on how to strategize new services have also been welcome and timely. Thank you, Lori.

Another nod of appreciation to watercolour painter Bob Pitzel, of Humboldt, SK. Bob continues to mentor me and others informally and we are all the better for it. To view some of his extraordinary painting that is gaining followers as far away as Atlanta, Georgia (and beyond), please visit www.bpitzel.com.

Thank you also (in no particular order) to fellow women of the Freelancers' Roundtable Group -- Ashleigh Mattern, Julie Barnes, Katherine Duncombe, Leanne Bellamy and Amy Rederburg. When not plotting the overthrow of the publishing world (haha), we share tips, best practices and troubleshooting for the writing world.



ABOUT US

Since 2011, Elizabeth Shih Communications has chronicled the stories of B2B marketing and communications on the Prairies and across Canada.

Do you need help telling your entrepreneurial stories?

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**--chronicling the **stories of small businesses and non-profits who succeed and also give back to the community**. I tell those stories most often through articles, case studies and enewsletters, but can also adapt them to press releases, blog postings, annual reports, website copy and more. I now also adapt stories to write your awards applications (e.g. SABEX, ABEX and more) and to edit business resumes.

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