

November 2017 Vol 3 Issue 11



Communications Digest

Because Good Writing Should Grow on Trees!

Welcome Mid-November!

After a mild and lengthy fall, winter roared in this month with a sudden and heavy snowfall. But with the aroma of soup simmering in the kitchen and the sun streaming in my office window, I'm grateful to share with you another issue of "Communications Digest."

In last month's issue, I presented the insights of Ryan Holiday, who applies stoicism to entrepreneurial (and life) challenges. And in "Word Nerd's Corner," I visited the troubling case of the term, "segue."

In this month's issue, writer Michael Hyatt recommends a "Not-To-Do List" for busy writers and entrepreneurs. And in "Word Nerd's Corner," Bryan Garner explains the confusion we may have between "disburse" and "disperse."

Although the snowfall obstructs our paths as pedestrians and drivers, its precipitation will nourish our province's parched soil, in time for the growing season of another year.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

Principal
Elizabeth Shih Communications
www.elizabethshih.com

Article One: The "Not-to-Do List": Michael Hyatt on doing what matters

Former CEO of Thomas Nelson Publishers and leadership specialist Michael Hyatt has written that everyone uses a "To Do" list at some point or other.

By listing the items of what we need to do on a screen or sheet of paper, crossing them off as we go, we feel satisfied by our accomplishments. A "To Do" list is simple and effective. But Hyatt adds that "there's a catch" to this age-old practice.

When you are efficient and succeed at what you do, colleagues or clients may dump their work onto you: you become a "task magnet," exploited to the point of overwork and under-appreciation. And you are a "finite resource," no matter how efficient and successful you may be.

Too often, a routine "To Do" list features more items than anyone can reasonably get done. We easily fall into the trap of thinking that we must work harder and faster to get all the work done.

Hyatt suggests that what we need instead these days is a "Not-to-Do List." He writes that the only way that we can "continue to grow professionally without going crazy is to periodically decide what [we] are not going to do."

Last September's issue of this newsletter argued that work/life balance is impossible. But if we want to save ourselves from the reality of overwork and exhaustion, we need to do less, not more.

So how do we create a "Not-to-Do" list? First, we must become aware that we are used to overworking, in order to set a new limit. Secondly, he says, we should employ the following strategies:

- (1) Find a quiet place where we can think
- (2) Look at last month's calendar and write down anything that is not our responsibility to do
- (3) Look at our upcoming appointments for the next month and note what should not be a part of our current job or contract description
- (4) Go through your "To Do" list and again, note what should not be a part of your job or contract
- (5) We should now have a "Not-to-Do" candidates
- (6) Go through the list and highlight any item that's significant enough to be made part of our official "Not-to-Do" list and "shove it off your plate."

If you work in business but are not self-employed, then share this list with your colleagues, anyone who assists you and finally with your boss. You'll need all of these people's respect and acknowledgement, if you are to break free from doing what you ought not to be doing!

Here's a modified example of Hyatt's "**Not-to-Do**" list that he wrote when CEO of Thomas Nelson Publishers to get you started:

- (1) Don't review book proposals or manuscripts for potential publication
- (2) Don't negotiate contracts with agents or authors
- (3) Don't meet prospective new authors unless they have significant potential for marketing
- (4) Don't attend publishing meetings unless they involve vision or strategy
- (5) Don't write marketing plans
- (6) Don't travel to other cities on business that are more than one hour away
- (7) Don't respond to unsolicited sales pitches or proposals of any kind

You get the idea.

Here's a "Not-to-Do" list for freelancers or self-employed people:

- (1) Don't meet with prospects unless they are ready for you to draw up a contract for your services
- (2) Don't attend committee members unless they immediately pertain to what you are researching, writing or editing, and then, only once
- (3) Don't travel by car to other cities which are more than one hour away
- (4) Don't answer your own phone
- (5) Don't read unfiltered email
- (6) Don't respond to email more than twice per day
- (7) Don't respond to unsolicited proposals or invitations of any kind
- (8) Don't agree to secure permissions or signatures for any of the work you submit
- (9) Don't attend conferences or trade shows for more than two days at a time
- (10) Don't sit on external boards, unless doing so significantly increases or enhances your pool of interested prospects

Hyatt is the first to admit that this isn't "rocket science." But it does require assertiveness on our parts, if we're going to enforce what we won't do and if we're going to insist that others respect our limits, too.

Hyatt writes: It's all about doing more of what matters and less of what isn't.

So what do you need to stop doing?

WORD NERD'S CORNER

WORD NERD'S CORNER:



American etymologist Bryan Garner blogged recently on the distinction between the words "disburse" and "disperse."

Garner writes that "disburse" comes from the Latin "bursa," meaning "purse." It is used chiefly to the distribution of money. (For e.g., "The directors disbursed dividends to the stockholders.")

By contrast, "disperse" is used to refer to the distribution of all other things, such as crowds or diseases.

In "cultivated speech," Garner writes, these words are not puns. Failing to distinguish them in common parlance has likely caused their confusion in print. "Disburse" is sometimes misused in place of "disperse," in this example:

"A crowd on the campus of Kent State University is disbursed (read dispersed) with tear gas on May 4, 1970" (Dallas Morning News, 13 Nov. 1994, A12).

Does Garner's distinction disperse any confusion you might have over the use of disburse and

disperse? Please share your word woes on my website at www.elizabethshih.com/contact.

SHOP NEWS

I'm delighted to announce that my latest ebook is now available for sale on my website! Entitled *Keep Going: Five Creatives Build Resilience*, it chronicles the lives and careers of five creative people on the prairies who show resilience in how they live and in what they do.

Interviewees include freelance journalist and web developer Ashley Mattern, entrepreneur and academic Steve Cavan, Indigenous entrepreneur Christine Fiddler, community mental health advocate Kevin Crickett and artist and "Warrior Mom" Kayla Kreuger.

The profiles will interest and inspire you, as you face your own challenges. The ebook would make an ideal holiday stocking stuffer or gift!

Ashleigh Mattern and I will chat about the book and about resilience in our community on Lenore Swystun's community radio program, "Civically Speaking" (December 5th at 6:30 pm). Tune in to 90.5 FM that night to learn more!

And visit www.elizabethshih.com, under the "Books" tab, to order your own digital copy!

I thoroughly enjoyed giving a paper on freelance writing and editing on the Prairies at the fall conference of the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild (Regina, October 21st). I spoke alongside colleague Toby Welch, from Airdrie, Alberta. Our papers represented two diverse approaches to non-fiction writing and some tips and tricks to build a writing career in challenging economic times. Special thanks to Trevor Herriot for moderating the panel and to conference organizers!

Thanks again this month to fellow women of the Freelancers' Roundtable Group, capably convened by veteran writer Ashleigh Mattern. Members Julie Barnes, Katee Pederson and newcomers Hillary Klassen and Ashlyn George shared time and expertise, as we discussed communications and marketing projects. Our other regulars Katherine Duncombe and Leanne Bellamy will join us next time.

ABOUT US

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

Do you need help writing your entrepreneurial or organizational storytelling?

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 telling the stories of small businesses who succeed, while at the same time giving back to their communities.

For more information, please visit my website: www.elizabethshih.com.