A WEEK IN Learning

THE WRITE STUFF
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At a young age, we are taught basic skills, such as reading and writing. As we get older, those subjects get more in depth around grammar, sentence fluency, and comprehension. We may feel like we lose some of those skills, such as writing, because our jobs don't require us to sit down and write a ten page paper every year. However, writing shows up in our lives every day. Whether it's on paper, a computer, or a touchpad phone, writing becomes almost a daily task for us all.

Of course, there are some people who write more than others, or are at least more comfortable doing so. They may be able to quickly get those juices flowing, and transport their thoughts and ideas to their recipient. Much of their effort is spent constructing the message into a concise and innovative approach.

"Writing doesn't come as natural for everyone."

- **Carla Scherf**

Writing doesn't come as natural for everyone, though. Even if it does, there are still several challenges we may all encounter at some point. In the process of getting started, we may come across: (1) sticking to a relevant topic, (2) being too wordy, (3) not giving enough information (4) not considering the audience, or (5) forgetting to proofread.

A few weeks ago, our Learning and Development team went through a writing-activity workshop, where some helpful tips were made. Here are some writing tips that may help address the struggles we face when writing:

1. **Strike the Right Tone** – Your tone of voice is a crucial element in establishing and enhancing your team and personal brand. Be aware of the tone so it does not come across as unprofessional or lacking in authority. To avoid this, stick with your company's designated tone of voice to help build trust.

2. **Get to the Point Quickly** – Focus on the important messages and get to what matters quickly. This means introducing your point at the beginning to better prepare the readers. You don't want them to switch off before you've even gotten started.

3. **Be Clear and Concise** – Imagine you're writing for someone who has no experience in your

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subject matter, and keep your language clear and simple. Use plain language. What's the point in writing something if your audience has to work really to understand it? There are no bonus points for using fancy words or long, complicated sentences. Often times, a sentence can be broken into two separate thoughts.

4. **Illustrate Your Points With Specifics** – Don't be vague in your communication. Illustrate with specific examples. Make sure you're giving people the information they're after.

5. **Remember the Goal** – What do you want your reader, who has just read a page of your communication, to do once they have finished? Does that come across in your writing? If you want them to buy a product, are you being persuasive enough? Have you demonstrated how the product will solve their problem? Make sure that your readers know exactly what the next step is, and gently encourage them to take it.

6. **Curb Your Enthusiasm** – Don't overuse exclamation marks, or other forms of symbols/punctuation that express too much emotion. As always, keep the audience and subject matter in mind.

7. **Forget Formal (Well, Most of the Time)** – You want to connect with your audience, so avoid using impersonal, stuffy language. Write as if you're talking to the person face-to-face. Using contractions such as "you're" instead of "you are" is another way to sound friendlier and more approachable. While there may be a few exceptions to this technique (such as legal contracts), business writing is becoming more casual. The trick is finding the right level of informality for your particular audience.

8. **Put It All In the Right Order** – We tend to write in the order that ideas and thoughts come to us, but that's not always the best way to present the final product. If that is the easiest way to get all your thoughts out, try separating them in bullets. Then, go back to turn them into complete thoughts and put them in an order that will make sense to the reader.

9. **Always Revisit Your Writing to Edit and Proofread** – The trick to good writing is not just what you put down on the page, but what you take out. Check for unnecessary words that you can remove, for grammatical errors, and for other ways to clean up your copy. When you're close to a piece of writing, it's very easy to miss spelling and grammar mistakes, or other opportunities to make improvements. Getting fresh eyes on the page will help catch any errors. There's no shame in asking for help.

10. **Practice Makes Perfect** – It may seem obvious, but practicing will help improve your writing. Take the initiative to write more often and learn from your peers.

Whether you're a seasoned writer or someone who dreads hitting the reply button on an email, these tips can be helpful and applied *write* away.

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