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From Good to Great

Tips to Make Your Writing Exceptional

Stories rule. Let us help you find, tell and share yours.

What Traditional Corporate Communications Delivers

FACTS

NUMBERS

“SAFE” MESSAGES

MARKETING/PROMOTIONS

LEADERS’ VOICES

What Today's Media Consumer Wants

AESOP

AUTHENTICITY, not authority

ENTERTAINMENT, not information

SHOW, not tell

OPINION, not neutrality

PEOPLE, not experts

I've learned that people
will forget what you
said, people will forget
what you did, but
people will never forget
how you made them
feel.

Maya Angelou





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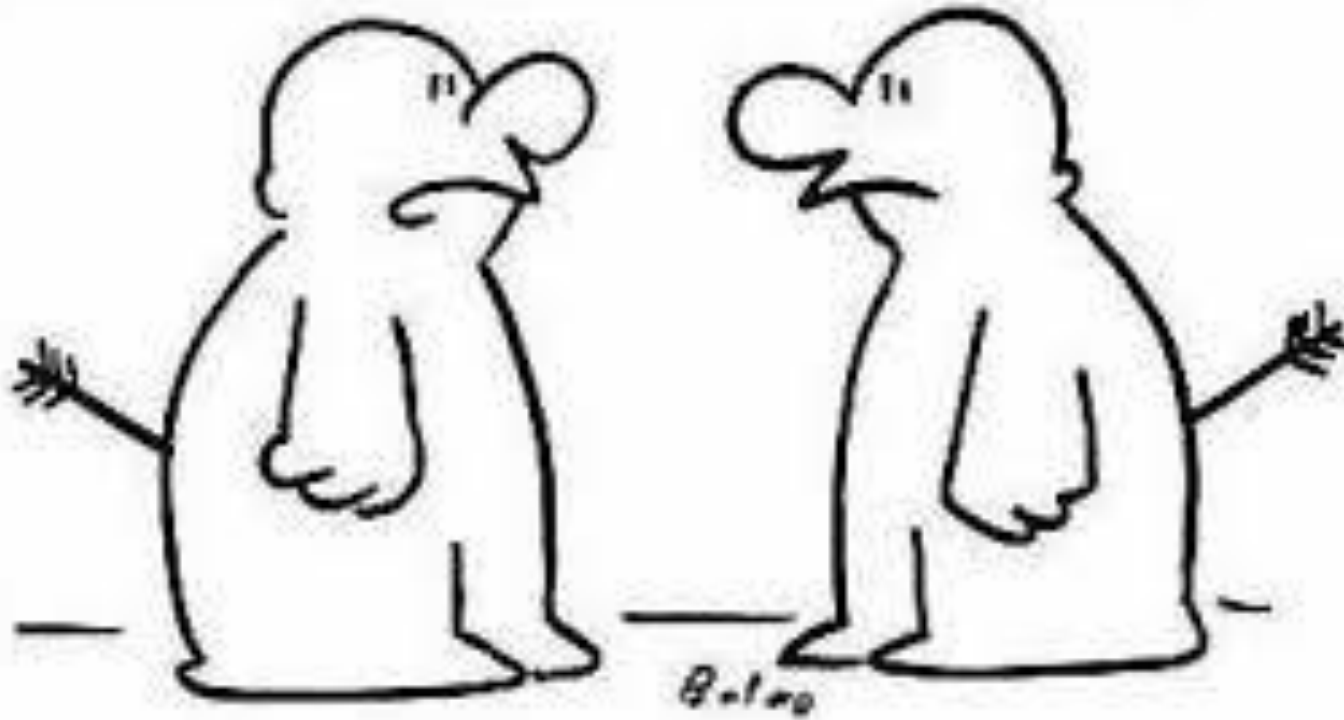
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"I know exactly how you feel."



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Great Writing Tells a Story

- We're wired to understand stories
- We respond viscerally to credible tales of humans facing challenges
- Stories create an emotional response – facts and figures don't



A good story has...

- A hero
- Conflict (villain, challenge)
- Drama (ups and downs)
- Beginning, middle and end (but you don't have to tell it in order)
- Color (details)
- People, People, People
- POV

Know Your Audience

- Who is your target audience?
- What motivates them? (Ask.)
- Put yourself in their shoes
- Why should they care?
- Will they be moved?

But aren't some stories just... boring?



Keep digging until you find it.



Be a Reporter: 7 Tips

- (1) Interview!
- (2) Ask the same question more than once
- (3) Get details on the details
- (4) Decide on your angle early
- (5) Think about the package
- (6) Use multiple sources
- (7) Interview again

How to Be Interesting

Details, Details, Details

Facts are good. Details are GREAT. Details allow you to show, not tell.

TELL: Wilson Industries today announced the opening of a new factory in Lumberton, N.C. The factory doubles Wilson's capacity to manufacture heavy-duty brake pads for use in off-road construction vehicles and will create 100 full-time jobs.

SHOW: Bob Jacobs got to work early today. Standing outside of Wilson Industries' new factory on Short Hill Road in Lumberton, N.C., Jacobs said he didn't want to miss the moment when the facility's front doors opened for the first time.

"We've been waiting a long time for this," said Jacobs, a lifelong Lumbertonian recently hired as a foreman overseeing assembly workers at the plant. The factory, which opened today, doubles Wilson's capacity to manufacture heavy-duty brake pads for use in off-road construction vehicles and will create 100 full-time jobs.

What to AVOID

passive voice

jargon

clichés

legalese

self-serving language



What to AVOID: an example

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative Continues to Engage the International Forest Community Through PEFC Endorsement

WASHINGTON, DC – The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) Inc. announced today that the SFI 2015-2019 Forest Management Standard has again met the rigorous third-party assessment of the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC). This is SFI's fourth PEFC assessment. The SFI Program was first endorsed in 2005. PEFC is an umbrella organization that endorses national forest certification systems developed collaboratively by diverse stakeholders, tailored to local priorities and conditions.

“SFI makes important contributions that address the unique needs of North America’s forests and communities, and is a valuable national member working with PEFC to elevate the role of responsible forestry,” said Ben Gunneberg, Secretary General of PEFC. Only forest certification standards that meet our rigorous meta-standard and that are developed in an open, transparent manner through a multi-stakeholder process are endorsed by PEFC.”

What to DO: an example

Coca-Cola Leaders Give Shareowners View of Company's Next Chapter

ATLANTA – Coca-Cola shareowners gathered today in a space where their company's rich heritage lives on, and left with a glimpse into its future.

For the second consecutive year, The Coca-Cola Company hosted its annual shareowners meeting at the World of Coca-Cola in downtown Atlanta's Pemberton Place – located just a few blocks from where the first Coca-Cola was poured nearly 131 years ago. And while the company's flagship brand remains its biggest, the business is evolving in line with shifting consumer tastes and shopping trends.

"The Coca-Cola Company – your company – will become bigger than the world's best and most-loved brand," James Quincey, who will become Coke's CEO on May 1, told a crowd of 300 shareowners. "In very simple terms, The Coca-Cola Company will be about beverages for life."

Writing Your Story: 7 Tips

- (1) Make a loose outline
- (2) Who, what, when, where, why
- (3) Inverted pyramid – sort of
- (4) Use quotes to introduce content, not repeat it
- (5) Don't bury the lede, but sprinkle the gems
- (6) Read your story out loud
- (7) Say something, but not everything

Trick #1: Start at the End



Eli Sanders

The Bravest Woman in Seattle

The prosecutor wanted to know about window coverings. He asked: Which windows in the house on South Rose Street, the house where you woke up to him standing over you with a knife that night—which windows had curtains that blocked out the rest of the world and which did not?

Trick #2: The Buddy Holly Story... telling Technique



If you knew Peggy Sue
Then you'd know why I feel blue
Without Peggy
My Peggy Sue



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Sneaky Ways to Use the Second Person

“Picture your office on a typical Thursday afternoon...”

“Imagine a woman doing her taxes in 2030...”

“Ask most people for their favorite memory,
and they’ll mention the birth of a child or a wedding day.”

Trick #3: Start Before You Start



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He tempted his targets with the high life:
whiskey, cigars, prostitutes and cash.

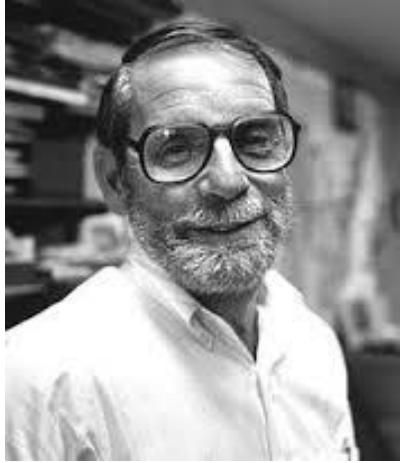
His moles fed him bundles of military secrets
and law enforcement files.

All so he could rip off the Navy on an industrial scale
for years and years.

**Now, the depth of the corruption is being exposed as the investigation reaches
into the highest ranks of the Navy.**

The man who seduced the 7th Fleet

Trick #4: Start in the Middle



John McPhee

Travels in Georgia

I asked for the gorp. Carol passed it to me. Breakfast had been heavy with cathead biscuits, sausage, boiled eggs, Familia, and chicory coffee, but that was an hour ago and I was again hungry. Sam said, “The Yankee bastard wants the gorp, Carol. Shall we give him some?” Sam’s voice was as soft as sphagnum, with inflections of piedmont Georgia.

Trick #5: Break it Up

The Age of Rudeness

In a world as unmannerly as this one, how is it best to speak?

There's no need to be rude, I say to the man in the packed hall at passport control. There are people everywhere, and his job is to send them into the right queues. I have been watching him shout at them. I have watched the obsessive way he notices them, to pick on them. There's no need to be rude, I say.

His head jerks around.

You're rude, he counters. You're the one who's rude.

This is an airport, a place of transit. There are all sorts of people here, people of different ages, races and nationalities, people in myriad sets of circumstances. In this customs hall, there are so many different versions of living that it seems possible that no one version could ever be agreed on. Does it follow, then, that nothing that happens here really matters?

No, I'm not, I say.

You are, he says. You're being rude.

Getting Good Quotes

- (1) If at first you don't get a good quote: try, try again
- (2) Ask for a story or anecdote
- (3) Ask for story *elements*: challenges, turning points, emotions
- (4) Avoid “press release quote” language
- (5) Take part of the release, turn it into a quote & get it approved

Five Final Tips

- (1) Great writers read great writing
- (2) Great writers revise
- (3) Great writers listen
- (4) Great writers think
- (5) Great writers feel

About Ragan Consulting Group

Ragan Consulting Group (RCG) was created by Mark Ragan and Jim Ylisela out of a love for great storytelling and a demand for improved corporate communications.

Mark and Jim began their careers in journalism. Mark later took over his family business, Ragan Communications, the No. 1 provider of corporate communications training and news. Jim worked in journalism for 30 years, including 13 years of teaching at Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism.

At RCG, they and consultants like Nick Lanyi help organizations create brand journalism news sites, organize and train writers and editors and restore reporting (and creative storytelling) to internal and external communications.

If you're interested in learning more about these services or would like to bring Nick to your organization to present a workshop to your team, please contact Rebecca Shaffer at rebecca.shaffer@raganconsulting.com.

