

COMMUNICATION MADE IN THE USA: LEGAL-BUSINESS STYLE

by ANNE MARIE COX

Whether you're an associate, partner, or own your law firm, you want to attract new clients. Most likely, your clients are senior executives or business owners at various companies and firms.

For a business executive, it is difficult to understand meaning or intent if a lawyer only communicates in legalese. To assume another professional understands legal communication is like someone from another country assuming you understand his or her language. Have you ever started to speak a little bit of Spanish, when all of a sudden the other person starts speaking fluently and fast—and you then realize that you don't know Spanish?

Although legalese might be impressive with peers, using legalese amongst business professionals may confuse non-lawyers, which may not be the best way to connect. If the intent or purpose is to impress a business or corporate executive, let your previous wins and positive outcomes validate your knowledge and experience.

Unless the communication is aimed at another lawyer or a judge, try to mirror the tone and style of the recipient. Communication should be concise, and the delivery should be considerate, humble, and clear. And we all need practice. Here's why.

Communication 101

Communication is incredibly important to business success. Communication is a two-way

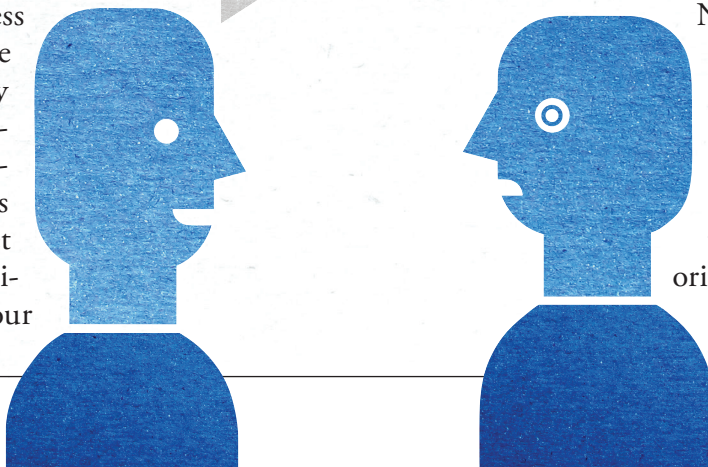
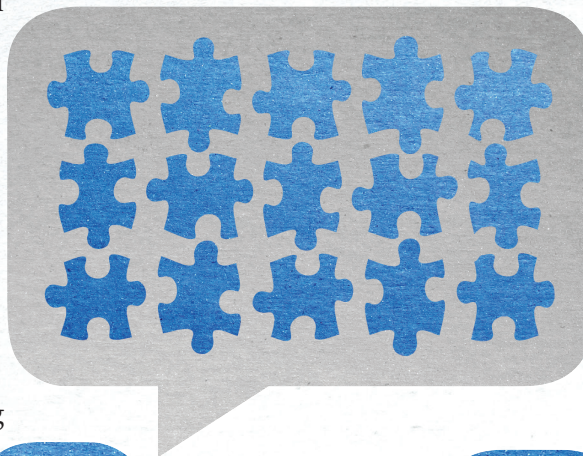
process, involving more than one individual, and effective use of communication tools. It's most important that after the communication is delivered, the recipient confirms it with a response that shows an understanding of the information. Otherwise, communication breaks down and misunderstandings abound.

Leaders in law should take on some of the traits of business leaders. According to *Forbes* magazine contributor Brent Gleeson, leaders in general need to constantly further develop their leadership skills and be more conscientious of their communication.

Gleeson's high-level tips for improving leadership communication are: Be present. Ask the right questions. Work on emotional intelligence. Stay calm and be positive. As a former Navy Seal, he provides sound advice for all leaders.

Work Together

Remember: there are writers and there are editors. Writers compose an original thought or idea, and an editor reviews and edits the information for clar-



ity, accuracy, and brevity. The two work together toward a final outcome. After the draft is edited, the piece goes through a process that includes proofreading to ensure the best outcome.

Have you ever read a book, magazine, or news article that had a misspelling or grammatical error? Have you ever listened to a radio show or TV show that you couldn't understand because they spoke too fast? Editing written work and practicing speaking roles are involved in every part of creating clear communication.

How often do we use email, texting, and social media to communicate? As you can imagine, a lot of understanding can be lost in translation. Misunderstandings are even more prevalent when you do not follow up the communication to check whether there has been a meeting of the minds.

Details, Details

The statement, "dot the i's and cross the t's" exists for many reasons. One reason it exists is to remind us how important it is to be conscientious of details and using the right words.

Details show the importance of a well-thought-out idea or plan. Very rarely does a first idea become an actual implemented plan. Most plans or communication pieces go through a series of brainstorming sessions and multiple drafts before they are implemented or published.

Make a Great Impression

Typically, we are judged within the first thirty minutes of any new introduction. Our body language, verbal communication, and how we engage are all key to winning or impressing a person or a professional organization.

What if everyone sat behind the

computer and never met anyone in person? Would anyone really know us? How do we know what's real and what's fake, or what's credible versus simply promotional?

Conversation and communication that happens in person, by phone, or through video conferencing tools are very effective. Effective communication is important if you want to be understood correctly. Communication is important if you want to win new business and keep it.

Implement Old-School Style

If the goals are to stand out and win new business, we need to go back to the basics. Pick up the

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phone and say hello to someone you previously met at a networking function. In this time of high tech tools, we have lost the art of communication. Picking up the phone sends a message to the recipient that he or she is valued. Personal touch goes a long way.

Attend networking functions and engage in conversations with other professionals. Be sure to circulate the room and not focus longer than ten minutes on one particular person or group. This is how a clique is formed, which may alienate people you value. It's in the follow-up that

you will secure the relationship.

Communication Wrap-Up

When using the old-school style of written communication, it pays to allow your first draft of communication to be reviewed and edited by a communications professional who is not a lawyer. In general, a piece that goes through a series of reviews and edits before publication offers the best outcome in understanding the main point of the communication.

It's even more helpful to choose a professional who communicates effectively and understands your legal business model, as well as industry background related to your specific niche of law. By choosing a specialist, your audience will clearly understand the communication, and everyone will win.



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