

Managing Editor's Desk

The speaker was relentless. In the course of her hour-long talk, she kept returning to her theme: "We are our presentation." Over and over again, she emphasized that people judge us on the basis of our entire presentation. Yes, whether or not we comb our hair is important. But, she added, as others form impressions and make judgments about us, we are also evaluated on the basis of posture, poise, facial expressions, intonations, attire, listening skills, vocabulary, the rate at which we talk, and so forth.

I'm not telling you anything that you don't already know, at least in a general sense. The gift of this speaker was that she made us (actually, through her relentlessness, she forced us to) understand at a much deeper level that indeed we really are our presentation--at least in the minds of others. Our identity, our essence--in sum, who we are--becomes apparent by virtue of the entire presentation we make when we are interacting with others.

When I thought about what this speaker was saying, I quickly realized that she was talking about some pretty heavy stuff. As we interact with other people, we tell them volumes about ourselves, our histories, our beliefs, our character, what we stand for, and who we really are.

Wow! That's really putting it all on the line.

Each time an interaction occurs, we communicate. In fact, our speaker emphasized that among all the components of an interaction, it was our communication skills that were of the most **importance**. She noted that our ability to communicate has the most to do with the impressions we make on others--and, accordingly, their judgments of us.

Why am I talking about presentations and communication?

Our identity, our essence--in sum, who we are--becomes apparent by virtue of the entire presentation we make when we are interacting with others.

Apart from whatever pride and self-esteem we all draw from how others see us, our self-presentation and our ability to communicate also determine the degree to which others will trust and respect us. In this profession--in which we often weigh in on policy decisions, provide a scared public with important information, explain a complex issue to the media, attempt to inspire our staffs to dig just a little deeper, or help regulated parties appreciate why they should be performing a certain function--how people perceive us has everything to do with how they are going to respond.

If they draw from our presentations that we are credible, thorough, sincere, and professional, the chances that we can gain the response we are looking for are good. If we come across as uncaring, authoritarian, superficial, or uninterested, the odds of eliciting the response we seek are poor.

As difficult as verbal communication is, written communication is even more so.

At least when we are together with someone, we can "read" the other person and fine-tune what we are saying if it is apparent that we have lost or are losing the other's interest and attention. We lose that opportunity when we write--in written communication, we trust our entire presentation to the words we select.

I once received a crumpled up and poorly written resume in the mail. You can imagine my judgment of the person who wrote it. I get carelessly written e-mails full of misspelled words from certain people who never bother with the 10 seconds it takes to use spell check. Thoughts unavoidably creep into my mind that such people are careless, not serious, not thorough. I get letters long on criticisms but short on rationales. Do I tend to wonder if such a person is biased, unobjective, and so forth? You bet.

The ability to write with an appreciation of how the reader might perceive us and all that we stand for is an important tool for the environmental health professional. Of course, the ability to write so that the receiver of the material understands what we are saying also constitutes a critical component of the process.

In recognition of how important **writing** is to our work, the Journal is pleased to bring back our popular **writing** column--now titled "The Effective Writer"--with this issue. This once very popular column had to be dropped several years ago because the author had other commitments. Circumstances have changed, however, and Dr. Robert Goldbort is once again able to write his column for the exclusive benefit of the Journal's readership.

Remember--to return once more to our opening theme--when you interact with someone, your presentation defines you for that person. Your communication skills take on added significance when the interaction is through written correspondence. To help you become better communicators and to help you make better presentations so that you can be more effective in your work, we are reintroducing "The Effective Writer" with a special report in this issue of the Journal.

Note: Many Journal readers will quickly notice the change in title--from "The Technical Writer" to "The Effective Writer." We made this change to underscore the point that within our ability to communicate lies our ability to be effective.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Nelson Fabian, B.S., M.S.

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By Nelson Fabian, B.S., M.S. gevik has agreed to provide NEHA members with a free resume review. If you desire assistance in creating or making revisions to your resume, a reasonable price for this service will be determined based on the extent of work requested. To request a free resume review and/or additional resume services, phone Dr. Hagevik at (303) 456-0650 or e-mail her at <shagevik@4adv.net>.

**Comment [MSA1]:** The importance of communication is taught in professional settings as well as in school. It contributes to everyday life and is important to my study in ISM.

**Comment [MSA2]:** Similar to what the first professional I interviewed said.

**Comment [MSA3]:** The effectiveness of one's communication helps a person draw a conclusion based on body language and the words used by the speaker.

**Comment [MSA4]:** In many professions, communication is used on a daily basis. Without teaching proper communication, people will not be successful in sending or interpreting a message.

**Comment [MSA5]:** Demonstrate a professional amount of enthusiasm about the topic to receive a positive response.

**Comment [MSA6]:** Communication is a large part of writing. Without proper writing skills, messages may become unclear, making the writing inefficient.

**Comment [MSA7]:** Perception is not only based on body language. Proper communication is also used to convey messages through writing allow the reader to draw conclusions about the writers. Want to communicate positive outlook about oneself.

**Comment [MSA8]:** Writing journals are including segments on effective and proper writing due to the lack of common knowledge on the topic.