Avery Peiffer

Professor Reardon

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Assignment #10

Written Communication Guide Article Reflection

This article provided some very interesting information about written communication in the workplace. While I read it, I was comparing its main points with how I have learned to communicate with peers and professors during my time at Pitt. I think that the emphasis on being clear and succinct is incredibly important, both in the workplace and in a college setting. However, in my emails to professors I feel more of an obligation to justify myself; that is, I feel the need to outline my reasons for writing to them. In the workplace, as the article mentions, I need to focus completely on the message, because the recipient does not necessarily have the time to spend reading any long background I might provide. This is likely the case because workplace communications are mostly concerned with the actions that people take, so there is no need to provide background. At Pitt, I am often emailing for clarification or help, so the professor needs all the information I can provide to help me adequately.

When reading the article, I also found myself thinking about how these tips apply to modern workplace messaging services, such as Slack and Microsoft Teams. By their nature, these messaging services are much more casual than email communications. At my co-op, I communicated with my coworkers entirely on Mattermost, another alternative to Slack. As a result, my messages were much less concise than if I was sending an email. It seems that maintaining a level of professionalism on these messaging services is very important. One of the most resonant topics the article touched on was the idea that I should always send communications as if they will be scrutinized at a later time. This seems to still apply to these collaborative messaging services; in that I shouldn’t send messages without first spending some time proofreading my content.

I do think that the section about using good English is somewhat unnecessary in today’s global market. It is reasonable to expect that some of my future coworkers will not speak English as their first language. In my own communications, I should still try to write with correct spelling and grammar, but I should not make judgments about others based on the quality of their English. Speaking of which, I will not dwell on the irony of the article using ‘loose’ instead of ‘lose’ four times throughout. This is not to say that spelling and grammar are useless, but I think that drawing conclusions on someone based on the quality of their writing can often be unfair to that person.

The most relevant section of the article for me was the section about talking directly to the reader. I have never thought of writing emails in this manner before, but it seems very useful. It makes a lot of sense to summarize the entire email in the first sentence, so you can capture the attention of your reader and beckon them to continue reading. I must still be ingrained into what I was taught in high school English classes, because I often find myself not getting to my point until 2-3 sentences into my email. This likely does not punish me when I am writing to professors, who have much more of an obligation to respond to me. But if I were to do this in the workplace, I could very easily be punished by people not reading my emails. The most general takeaway is that I have to put myself into my reader’s perspective, without expecting them to have any vested interest in reading my email by default.

**Works Cited**

Koehler, T. P. (2001). Practical guide to effective written communication. Paper presented at Project Management Institute Annual Seminars & Symposium, Nashville, TN. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.