

DIANNA BOOHER

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Dianna Booher is an expert in the field of business communication and productivity. Her extensive and ongoing research and published works serve as the foundation for her firm's communication skills training and consulting services.

She is the author of 46 books, including her classic, *Communicate with Confidence: How to Say it Right the First Time and Every Time*, and her 2011 title, *Creating Personal Presence: Look, Talk, Think, and Act Like a Leader*. The National Speakers Association inducted Booher into the CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame, and *Successful Meetings* magazine named her one of the 21 Top Speakers for the 21st Century.

Q | WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB, AND WHAT LESSONS DID YOU TAKE AWAY FROM IT?

My first job was in high school when I worked at Six Flags. There I learned the importance of proper image—how you look and dress, friendliness, and customer service. When I was hired as a 16-year-old, the vice president of HR looked at me and said, "You have a tiny pimple on your chin. You need to get that cleared up before you report for work." He preached that image was everything at the amusement park.

The second lesson I learned was the importance of confident communication. As teens, we had to give directions to adults and communicate with authority to keep them safe on the rides. If you had a great presence about you and good communication skills, patrons did what you said.



Q HOW DID YOU INITIALLY BECOME INTERESTED IN THE FIELD OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION AND PRODUCTIVITY?

I always liked to write papers in school. In early adulthood, I had several older friends who happened to be executives at major oil companies in Houston, where I lived. They were continually complaining about their employees—engineers, lawyers, and IT staff—who couldn't write. And I always thought, "How hard is that?"

I was writing a novel at that time while going to graduate school, and I asked my agent: "Do you think you could sell a book on business writing? I can write a book to help engineers learn how to write. They think logically, so I can create a logical, five-step plan and measure the results—how much faster they can write with this system. I can save the company money." My agent agreed, and that's how I sold it.

I wanted to become the expert, so I went to my executive friends and asked for writing examples. I picked out passages and put them in my first book, *Would You Put That in Writing?* Since then it's been renamed and updated, and today it's called *E-Writing: 21st Century Tools for Effective Communication*.

Q WHAT ARE THE LATEST TRENDS EMERGING IN CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS?

I see three. First, communication is going in all directions without an organizational hierarchy. It used to be that downward communication dominated. But now, both internally and externally, because of social media, people can communicate in any direction—up, down, and sideways. And even outside an organization, customers expect to hear from the CEO.

A second trend is that whoever can articulate best takes the prize—the budget, project, contract, or plum assignment. There is no loyalty. If you can shout loudest, be the most influential, or get the biggest platform, then you "win."

The third trend is that people value speed as much as, or sometimes more than, accuracy. For years the focus was on making sure that you are accurate in what you say and in your data, numbers, and facts. Now we see some people saying: "But that's slow; that takes a long time. I want to get things out there. Decide. Do. Create. Produce. Speed is the goal. I want a fast response."

Q WHY IS CREATING PERSONAL PRESENCE VITAL TO ONE'S PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS?

In my book *Creating Personal Presence*, I use a diagram to illustrate this puzzle of sorts where you move through a continuum of how people perceive you. They perceive you first by how you look. Then they start filtering their perceptions through how you talk, and how you think, to how you act. And that last part of perception, how you act, is the most important—your character and integrity—yet it's the most difficult and time-consuming to observe.

This is why your personal presence is important to your success. It's all part of the way you capture someone's attention. It's the first filter that one uses to judge you. How you look, talk, think on your feet, express yourself, and articulate vision, strategy, and character are all part of those judgments. And once someone has an impression about you, it's very hard to change that perception.

Dianna Booher was interviewed by Ann Pace, senior writer/editor for ASTD.

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