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MAKING THE COMPLEX SIMPLE: A CORE LEARNING DESIGN AND FACILITATION SKILL

Simplicity leads to focus. And focus produces clarity of purpose.

Posted: July 27, 2015

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"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication."---Leonardo da Vinci

If people don't understand the change you want them to make, they can't make the change. If they don't understand your explanation, you have less chance to change their minds about that issue. If instructions are complex, people will resist the effort to follow them-or fail to accomplish the task.

Simplicity, persuasion, and learning are intricately linked. Health-care agencies and insurance companies, for example, continue to try to quantify the communication problem between physicians and their patients. Laura Landro, managing editor for the Wall Street Journal and also author of the paper's Informed Patient column, has gathered intriguing statistics from several sources about "missed messages":

- 18-45 percent of patients can't recall the major risks of their treatment.
- 44 percent of patients don't know the exact nature of their operation.
- 60-68 percent of patients don't read or understand information in a consent form.
- 80 percent of what doctors tell patients can't be recalled as soon as the patient leaves the office.
- 50 percent of what the patient does "recall" is inaccurate.

(Laura Landro, "The Talking Cure for Health Care: Improving the Ways Doctors Communicate with Their Patients Can Lead to Better Care—and Lower Costs," Journal Reports: Health Care, April B, 2013.)

While the research may not identify complexity as the sole cause for these communication failures, common sense clearly suggests that simplifying these technical and emotional conversations would improve understanding and recall.

Why does communication fail to persuade---whether physicians are trying to influence patients to take their medications, do their therapy exercises, or control their cholesterol? Why can't salespeople get clients to increase next year's orders, or political parties persuade more citizens to turn out to vote?

The same roadblocks thwart all these efforts: Too many ideas detract focus. Mixed messages and learning goals bewilder people. Irrelevant details bury key ideas. Disorganized documents discourage reading. Convoluted sentences cause re-reading and waste time.

Have you ever searched a company's Website in frustration trying to find a phone number or an answer to a simple question? Ever spent half an hour searching a Help menu to find an answer to a simple question? Ever spent 15 minutes looking through a course reference manual to review a topic and then give up? Turning the complex into the simple makes sense.

# Simple Does Not Necessarily Mean Short

Known as the father of advertising, David Ogilvy wrote in his book, "Ogilvy on Advertising": "Directresponse adverlisers know short copy doesn't sell. In split-run tests, long copy invariably outsells short copy." Copywriters tell us that as a rule of thumb, the higher the price of a product or service, the more words it takes to sell it.

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trainin live online Of course, the goal of all persuasive communication is not to sell a product or service. You may be selling change or credibility or ideas. You may be selling people on the idea that they need to follow safety precautions, take care of their health, or comply with government regulations.

When persuading people that a project is easy, breaking it down into *more and smaller* steps makes sense. You assume they know little or nothing about the project and provide *more* rather than less detail to make it simple. Making recommendations to your executive team without providing information on the relevant benefits would make the pending decision *more* complex rather than less so,

So making persuasive messages *shorter* rather than *longer* doesn't necessarily make them simple. Clarity comes from language, structure, and relevancy.

#### Focus for Clarity

Simplicity leads to focus. And focus produces clarity of purpose, "The secret of success is constancy of purpose," according to philosopher Benjamin Disraeli, Maybe that explains the downright obsession organizations have about the phrasing of their mission statements to unify employees around their visions. Persuading someone to do something is only half the battle—they need to understand that it's their top priority.

#### **Limit Choices**

People value personal choice. That leads to the popular notion that the greater the choice, the more value,

But two major research studies debunk this assumption, People want to know they have choices. But in solving their complex problems, they often seek out sales professionals, financials consultants, attorneys, and other advisors to help them *limit* their choices—to make their decisions easier.

The food industry, particularly, has discovered this. A headline in *USA Today* read, "Marketers Such as Starbucks Discover That Simple Sells." After an era of ever-expanding menus, restaurants are slimming menu choices down to house specialties. Bestselling cookbooks are focusing on "gourmet" meals with fewer and fewer ingredients, to be prepared in less and less time.

Over-choice paralyzes people. While they initially feel motivated by the thought of extensive personal choice, having fewer choices makes it easier for people to decide, buy, do, or learn something.

#### Reduce the Rattle

Little leaguers learn to chatter the batter early: "Batter, batter, batter, Watch, watch, watch, Here it comes, here it comes, Hey, hey, hey, But that's nothing compared to the noise level with 60,000 fans in the stadium during the Olympics.

That's the kind of escalated noise you're competing with as you're trying to get people's attention for a learning concept. Yet rather than turn down the volume, people make the mistake of increasing the chatter and drowning out their own message!

For example, presenters display a slide or screen and then talk while their audience is trying to digest what's displayed. In effect, they're competing with the display for the group's attention. Salespeople do the same thing. They close a deal, get client agreement, and then keep talking—often raising concerns about the product or service that causes the buyer to back out of the sale.

Employment specialists and talent placement firms insist that a key reason organizations have difficulty filling advertised openings is that their ads are filled with clutter. They mention educational "requirements" that aren't really required at all and list too many criteria rather than the essential skills and experience they want, instead of persuading people to investigate the job, qualified people click away.

Senior leaders say people tend to create the most noise; when they're seeking funding for capital expenditures, investing, and acquisitions. But recommenders frequently provide the wrong kind of information—just noise,

Change does not come easy—nor without the influence of strong leaders, strong facilitators, and strong course designers who communicate well,

Simple works and simple sells. Making the complex simple -- now, that's hard.

An expert in leadership communication, Dianna Booher works with organizations to increase the effectiveness of their communication. She's the founder of Booher Consultants and Booher Research Institute (http://www.BooherResearch.com) and the author of 46 books, published in 26 languages, Her latest book, "What More Can I Say: Why Communication Fails and What to Do About It," is available at local and online bookstores (visit http://www.WhatMoreCan/SayTheBook.com),

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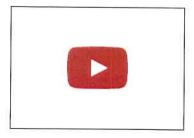
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