


The Record

MONDAY, MAY 31, 1999

 **working life**

Poor writing costs business time, money

Corporate employees learn how to communicate clearly

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Special to The Record

Unclear meaning. Misunderstood sentences. Bad spelling. Incomplete sentences. Disjointed syntax.

An English teacher's comments splashed in red across a student's paper?

No. These are complaints from today's corporate employee, eagerly trying to understand internal memos, e-mail, letters, and reports.

It's not just grammatical errors that are the problem, however. Poor communication in any form may result in lost productivity and missed goals.

Richard Pinsky of Richard Pinsky Associates, a Manhattan-based corporate consulting firm whose on-premise seminars help clients' employees improve writing skills, says today's technology and its speed-of-light advances are forcing us to refocus on all of our basic communication skills.

And because we now communicate faster than ever, he says, we have more time to do other things. This, in turn leaves, less time and tolerance for unclear, poorly constructed correspondence.

Almost nine years and 1,500 attendees later, Pinsky has gained an impressive Fortune 100-style following: American Express, BBDO Worldwide. Citibank. Credit Suisse. Merrill Lynch. NBC. Saks Fifth Avenue. Tiffany. Warner-Lambert.

Why are we so poorly positioned to communicate effectively?

"Effective writing instruction in schools is infrequent," Pinsky says. "Often, when a

student writes a paper, the instructor corrects the spelling and grammar but neglects the larger picture: how to formulate ideas and write them in a logical way.

"As careers advance and people become busier, the deficiency is further neglected."

Pinsky says poor communication skills are not related to degrees attained; poor communication cuts a swath across social strata.

This was in evidence at one of his recent seminars, sponsored by Warner-Lambert in Morris Plains.

The pharmaceutical giant catered the casual two-day seminar on "Writing in Business: Get to the Point!" Administrative assistants shared a round table with an executive associate, a utilities engineer, an in-house interior designer, a senior research associate, and a director as part of the approximately 25 attendees.

Why did such a diverse group attend?

ALEX PARKER: director of global customer development, Warner-Lambert, based in London: Parker, a native of Scotland, was the most senior person in attendance.

"It's not really the spelling or the grammar issue. For me, it's the loss of meaning. The message giver loses the ability to be clear," he says. As a director, fluent in both German and French, Parker is in a unique position to have dealings across borders, and therefore across cultures.

"To watch one group from Canada communicate with the group from Spain, if you don't use appropri-

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ate, straightforward English, especially if you're communicating a very complex issue, I guarantee you risk losing one-third to one-half of the readers," Parker stresses.

"If you therefore consider the manpower, the expense, of two teams trying to meet the common goals of the company, they may have wasted a vast amount of time and they still have not completed the task allotted."

JANET SEATH: executive associate, Warner-Lambert, Morris Plains: Her goals were to increase her effectiveness at work by learning how to communicate more effectively.

"I work with many high-level Warner-Lambert employees in different sectors worldwide. I wanted to make sure I was getting to the point (in writing). The people I deal with don't have the time for anything less."

One of the first to mention a memo's "tone" as being very important to her, she said: "I have to carefully construct my memos when I'm making requests from higher-ups. I feel that having the right tone is exceptionally important . . . and a sign of respect."

AMMUNJE NAYAK: senior research associate, Warner-Lambert, Morris Plains: Nayak, a native of India, has been in the United States since 1975, and earned his M.S. degree in industrial pharmacy from Long Island University's Brooklyn campus in 1981.

"My schooling taught me only how to write technical reports, not memos. [In science] when we write, we write with other scientists in mind. I used to just write endlessly to get out all of my points, but maybe they weren't in the proper order and maybe I was confusing the reader," he reflected.

Companies are always evaluating and measuring. If it's something that can be measured, it's called a hard measurement, cost, or estimated expense. The cost of office rent would be such an example.

Soft expenses, on the other hand, are ones that are not easily measured, are usually untrace-

able, and easily ignored. The Pinsky seminar is such an example.

Normally, companies seeking immediate, positive results from employees attending such a seminar might be a difficult task in a direct, bottom-line manner.

If a seminar, however, can be graded on attendees' enthusiasm and their unanimous proactive assertions that they would do it again, then this appears to have been a most successful seminar for Warner-Lambert . . . and for Richard Pinsky.