



## The Importance of Thinking Things Through

**MAKING A MESSAGE PRETTY DOES NOT MAKE IT COMMUNICATE BETTER. IN FACT, IT'S JUST THE OPPOSITE. A DESIGN THAT MAKES THE READER STOP AND THINK *MY! WHAT A BEAUTIFUL TYPEFACE!* IS NOT GOOD DESIGN.**

I've had the good fortune to attend design seminars led by Jan (pronounced like *yawn*) White who was, for many years, a designer for *Time*. Design people and word people sometimes have differing visions: Writers and editors want the words to be clear, readable, and uninterrupted by design elements while some designers view text as *that gray stuff I have to design around*.

White has an unusual approach because he's a designer with a strong affinity for words. No designer can ever do a project justice, says White, without reading and understanding the text. The design must have one goal – that of making the text more understandable.

If the design gets in the way, it's the wrong design. If the design calls attention to itself, it's the wrong design. Outstanding design just "disappears". That's also true of typography.

As a "designer" who's never gone to art school (except to view art shows or, some years ago, to pick up my younger daughter when she was in art school), I know that trying to get too fancy is a recipe for disaster and I try to keep White's guidelines in mind.

### Looking but not Seeing

I WAS ONCE WORKING ON A SERIES OF ADS THAT WAS BUILT ON A NEED FOR IMMEDIACY. I FOUND SOME USEFUL IMAGES THAT FIT THE MESSAGE – ALARM CLOCKS RINGING AND A HAND HOLDING A STOPWATCH, FOR EXAMPLE, AND SELECTED 3 THAT WORKED FOR THE SERIES.

We would start with monochrome magazine ads (two sizes), migrate to a series of three direct-

Don't tell your designer to



because PRETTY doesn't communicate  
and if it doesn't communicate, it can't SELL.

mail postcards, and continue to a direct-mail "stunt" package.

I set up a box inside the ad space and had the timepiece breaking out of the left corner. That worked perfectly for two of the images, but failed entirely for the third. Part of the problem was that the third image showed a stop-watch being held in a man's right hand, as seen from the model's perspective.

Placing the image in the top left corner made it appear that the hand had been amputated. No good. I tried cropping, placing the hand in an oval, and then tilting the oval. Nothing worked; even though the image fit the message, I thought I'd have to replace it because it didn't fit the design.

I showed the ad mock-up to a brand manager for a corporate communications department. The problem wasn't the oval or the square, she said. The problem was placement. Why not put the image on the right side?

Of course! Just because two of the ads had the graphic on the left side didn't mean that had to be the case for the third image.

The hand *belonged* on the right side of the ad. The crop could butt up against the frame and the hand could overlap the top of the frame. In attempting to match the other layouts, I had created a situation in which my preferred image could never work.

### What's the point?

THE POINT IS THAT IT'S EASY TO SEE WHAT WE WANT TO SEE AND THAT CAN LEAD TO TROUBLE.

It's easy to visualize the wrong outcome because it's what we think should be right. Our obligation is to look at situations realistically, without prejudice, and with an open mind.

If we are to succeed at any task, that is the only way. Ω

# Dealing with Annual Performance Evaluations

By A. J. STINNETT (MSP@STINNETTGROUP.COM)

ALTHOUGH DREADED BY MANY MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES ALIKE, PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS ARE ESSENTIAL IN REVIEWING AN EMPLOYEE'S RECORD FOR THE YEAR AND PLANNING FOR THE COMING YEAR.



“Your evaluation is based on the next 10 minutes of work. Go!”

Some companies give employees this information, but many do it poorly. We humans want to know how we did and what's ahead for us. Businesses prepare and publish operational and financial results consistently. Athletes pay close attention to the score board.

Performance evaluations have been in use for hundreds of years. Five centuries ago, the Arsenal of Venice, a large ship building operation, used a merit rating plan to review the work of each employee. Wages depended on reviews.

## The Purpose

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS INFORM EMPLOYEES ABOUT THEIR PERFORMANCE RECORDS.

The review should recognize and document superior work, determine the need for training, help the employee improve, identify and develop future leaders, provide a rational basis for determining pay increases, inform employees about standards or required results, and determine the overall competence of the workforce. This helps businesses plan, prosper, and grow.

## The Process

EVERY EMPLOYEE, STARTING WITH THE CEO, NEEDS A POSITION DESCRIPTION THAT DESCRIBES WHAT THAT PERSON IS PAID TO DO.

It should not state how, when, why or describe the performance standards, goals, or results. The *what* duties rarely change but the others may change frequently; additionally, many employees want to decide *how* to do their work.

Employees should be informed, as often as needed, about performance standards and expected results. In today's turbulent business world, these may change often.

The difficult part of the process involves tracking and recording each employee's performance. You should make note only of *superior* and *inferior* results each week.

An employee with many *superior* notes can be trusted with important tasks; one with many *inferior* notes will need training or development.

Performance should be recorded at the end of each week. Then, every three months, summarize the performance information and share it with the employees. Do this informally by telling them what was superior (this is a good time to congratulate or praise); what, if anything, was inferior; and what's ahead for them and the work group. Ask if they have questions or need any help.

These brief quarterly reviews should take no more than 10 to 15 minutes.

## The Annual Evaluation

MANY COMPANIES SET PERFORMANCE REVIEWS TO COINCIDE WITH THE FISCAL YEAR, BUT IT'S BETTER TO DO THEM ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE DATE THE EMPLOYEE WAS HIRED.

The four quarterly performance summaries that you have already discussed with the employee should be used as source documents to prepare the annual evaluation in the following narrative format: Name, position title, organization, and date; a summary of the employee's duties; a summary of the performance standards or results the employee was assigned to meet; a summary of the employee's actual performance; and a summary of the performance standards or results the employee is to meet in the coming year along with plans for training or development.

## The Discussion

SCHEDULE IT NO LATER THAN TWO WEEKS AFTER THE END OF THE PERFORMANCE YEAR AND GIVE THE EMPLOYEE AT LEAST 2 DAYS TO PREPARE.

Structure the discussion by reviewing the employee's position description, the results that were expected, and the four quarterly performance summaries. Use the performance evaluation document as the agenda for the meeting.

Summarize superior work first, then candidly but briefly mention any poor work. Encourage the employee to participate and listen attentively when the employee talks.


Discuss any needed improvements and ask if any help is needed. Re-establish performance standards or results the employee is to meet and document this discussion.

Answer employees' questions and thank them for their contributions. The evaluation should be signed by the employee, the manager who prepared it, and the next level of management. Copies should be distributed to the employee, the manager, and the employee's personnel file.

The key to an excellent performance discussion is the *mutual exchange* of information, ideas and understanding. Remember, this is a business discussion, not a lecture.

Conflicts between an employee and manager should be referred to the next level of management for resolution.

The annual review process may never be something that managers or employees look forward to with anticipation, but neither should it be something they dread. Ω



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