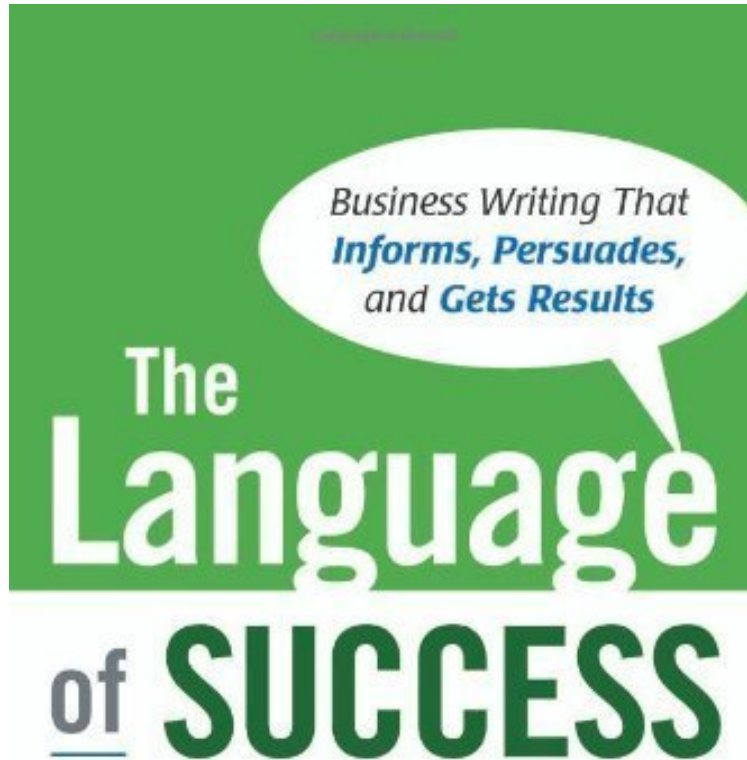


The Language of Success

Tom SANT

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Language is the medium of business. To be successful, we need to communicate effectively in writing. That's true whether we are providing instructions to our colleagues, communicating with our customers, or advising our direct reports. We must be able to deliver clear, accurate messages that inform, persuade and motivate. Unfortunately, people lapse into habits that interfere with their ability to communicate. The Language of Success shows readers how to avoid these mistakes, and to write lucid, concise, and accurate e-mails, letters, performance appraisals, and presentations. Now anyone can master the lost art of clear writing and:

- * eliminate ambiguities, jargon and grandiose claims
- * master proper paragraph structure so the message doesn't get muddled
- * avoid wishy-washy or misleading terms like "world class" or "state of the art"
- * write clear concise sentences that follow the "first time right rule"
- * use e-mail professionally and efficiently
- * create career-enhancing reports

Honest and authoritative, The Language of Success will give readers practical techniques to help readers cut through the fluff, guff, geek, and hyperbole, write exceptional business documents, and get their message heard.

"The Language of Success provides clear, concise information and examples that are understandable and useful." -- Technical Communication About the Author

Tom Sant (San Luis Obispo, CA) is the Co-Founder of Hyde Park Partners, a consulting company that specializes in improving sales processes and messages. He has worked with major corporations around the world, including ATT, HSBC, Booz Allen and Microsoft. He is the author of Persuasive Business Proposals (978-0-8144-7153-1) and The Giants of Sales (978-0-8144-7291-0). Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

CHAPTER 1 Introduction Where We're Going and Why the Trip Is Worth Taking

This book is about words, about the damage that can be done when they are used ineffectively, and about the power to be gained when they are used well. The purpose of this book is to show you how to write more effectively. It's designed to help you produce the kinds of documents that are likely to be part of your professional life—documents that ask and answer questions, that provide information other people need to do their jobs, that communicate your opinions, or that persuade, instruct, or update. We'll emphasize e-mail as the primary medium for delivering most of these messages for several reasons. First, e-mail has obviously become the dominant mode of communication all over the world. Second, it's different enough from traditional ink-on-paper writing that it poses its own unique set of challenges. Along the way, we'll provide examples of both good and bad writing for you to consider, explaining what works and what doesn't so that you can adapt the ideas quickly to your own use. So that's where we're going. Admittedly, writing is a skill that most people embrace reluctantly at best. But it's a skill that can make a huge difference in your career. From a practical standpoint, few professional accomplishments will pay off more in terms of your personal success or the success of your company or organization than learning to communicate effectively. In my experience, most people don't like to write. There are exceptions, of course. I'm one of them. I usually enjoy writing, especially if there's room for creativity or if there's a challenge to the task. Lots of people make their living as writers, in fields like technical writing, marketing communications, journalism, public relations, sales support, proposal writing, speech writing, and so on. You have to figure most of them don't mind writing. Other professions are virtually inseparable from the need to write—higher education, for example, where you must "publish or perish," or the practice of law, where letters, contracts, and other documents are often the deliverable for which the client is paying. All the same, the people who love to write are clearly in the minority. For the vast majority of people in the workforce, writing is a necessary evil. It's something they have to do, but they don't see it as a core part of their professional responsibility. Writing isn't part of their "real" job, they'll tell you. But, of course, they are wrong. Over the past fifteen or twenty years, the nature of work has changed dramatically. More valuable than any other raw material or resource, knowledge has become the engine of economic growth and the primary driver of increased productivity. The fact is we have now completed the shift to a knowledge-based workforce, a shift just as significant in its own right as was the shift to an industrial workforce in the late nineteenth century. During the past ten years, for the first time in world history, over half of the gross domestic product of the major Western economies has been directly linked to knowledge-based activities. As a result, businesses, institutions of higher learning, government agencies, and others in this knowledge-based economy now place greater importance than ever before on finding, sharing, and using information as efficiently as possible. Useful, valuable knowledge has become the fundamental source of differentiation for both organizations and individuals. The concept of useful and valuable knowledge is worth examining. It means doing more than simply sharing information. Facts, details, instructions, and other forms of data may be necessary, but they tend to have less value than informed insight. Think about the money and effort that organizations put into identifying and implementing "best practices." Owners and senior managers don't want some checklist of steps to follow when performing a certain task or a template for organizing certain processes. What they want is deeper insight into business process, insight that will enable them to improve bottom line results. In a knowledge-based economy, progress is measured by such factors as increased innovation, improved productivity, or better financial performance. As a result, implementing best practices is not merely a matter of collecting facts and data, but rather of identifying and disseminating knowledge. And that requires clear, effective, flexible communication. In a knowledge-based economy, our success and our organization's progress depend on

our ability to communicate with our bosses, our subordinates, our colleagues and our customers. Sometimes people need us to provide factual details and other forms of explicit information that are relatively uncomplicated. Here is the company's current mileage allowance on expense accounts. How to change your password. The new starting time for the budget review meeting. Some unexpected results from our recent lab tests of titanium alloys. Third quarter sales results showed a 2 percent decline in our core markets. In these situations, we are providing others with the information they need to do their jobs. This is an important task and early in our career it's likely to be the kind of writing we do most often. As we advance, as we acquire more experience and responsibility, people are likely to turn to us to provide deeper insights into the why behind those facts. Why should I change my password? What do you think caused those unexpected results you got from the new titanium alloys? Why did our sales go down in the third quarter? What they want from us now is our opinion, presumably based on our training and experience. By providing facts in combination with our expert opinion about what those facts mean, we have taken on a more complex communication challenge. As we move up in our organization, particularly if we achieve recognition as a technical expert or if we have a management role, we will do a lot more of this kind of writing. Sometimes we need to write messages that the audience isn't looking for at all. In these instances, we write because we need to motivate employees; we need to persuade customers, convince management, or possibly assure investors. Let's prevent any further data losses by adhering to our information security standards! Three reasons we should change the design specs of our engine housing. The long-term outlook for the housing downturn and our plan to stabilize earnings. In these situations, we may provide facts and offer some opinions, but what matters ultimately is our ability to affect what our readers think, what they feel, or how they act. As you rise higher in an organization, you will find yourself doing a lot more motivating and inspiring than simple information sharing. This is a much more difficult task than simply providing information or even offering an opinion, but it's usually a much more important one, too. In the next section are two examples of e-mails written and sent out by the heads of major corporations. Both messages are grammatically "correct." Both are pretty clear. Both were apparently intended to motivate the recipients. But by any reasonable standard, both messages failed to communicate. In fact, they failed so badly that they created major problems for the men who wrote them and the companies they led.