

July/August/September 2002

**TO: Executive Addressed**

**FR: James E. Lukaszewski, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA Chairman**

**RE: Detoxify Your Language, Communicate Effectively, Control Your Circumstances**

Most confusion and trouble between people or between companies, and in public discussions and media reports, results from negative language, both spoken and written, but mostly spoken. Effective verbal and written communication is positive, often instructive, clear, and brief. Urgent, important communication becomes powerful and useful if constructed in positive ways. The most helpful persuasive writing and speaking requires the removal of words, phrases, and ideas that cloud, confuse, complicate, or obfuscate.

To detoxify language, apply a four-step process that generates powerful copy and reduces the adverse affects of bad writing and language habits. This process also exposes vacuous, useless, spin-like content that should be avoided, even if it is positive.

1. *Replace all existing negative words with positive words or concepts.* Remember that negative language - spoken or written - is non-communication, can be damaging, and is usually wrong, untrue, or a lie. This is why the media key in on negatives so often. Negatives are the basis for further probing.
2. *Look for questions the remaining language generates.* Even after eliminating negative language, negative questions can be triggered. Examine structure, construction, and language use that generates negative or aggressive questions that will require answers. Negative or aggressive follow-up questions can be eliminated by further refinement of the text.
3. *Extract words. Powerful language is simple language.* Motivational language is precise language. Energizing language is concise language. Subtract useless words, edit relentlessly, sometimes harshly. Distill, boil down, refine, and concentrate the power and meaning of your words by writing and saying less but building the impact of the words.
4. *Say it out loud.* Language that communicates is language that speaks well. Most readers have an inner voice in their brains that tells them what they are reading with their eyes. That's because we have all been taught to write for reading. Who reads? Unfortunately, we don't speak the way we read. The more our language can be the way we like to speak or want to be heard, the less likely we are to send out stilted written language full of extra words and, therefore, confusing, unhelpful, even misleading.

One important benefit of this process is that as you write, edit, and read to yourself out loud, you are rehearsing the material in ways that make it more useful and memorable for you as the presenter. Use the speaking version for both spoken and written communication. This technique is a way of scripting yourself that improves your communication effectiveness.

If you would like to see additional examples of both good and bad communication, please visit our Web site at [www.e911.com](http://www.e911.com). Click on the yellow tab, "Executive Action," and select from dozens of other useful communication ideas and insights. You can also visit Amazon.com and search on "James E. Lukaszewski" for a complete list of available publications.

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