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# A “Sleazy” Way to Improve Your Communication Skills

By Sandra D. Byrd, Ph.D., CPA and Jacquelyn A. Jones

At most meetings between accounting faculty and accounting practitioners one of the main items of discussion is how to improve communication skills. A method which was developed in a senior level accounting class for a class project is a definite plus in this area. Students seem to enjoy improving communication skills when they are introduced to SLEAZY. SLEAZY can also help accountants who are already out of school improve their communication skills. SLEAZY is an acronym that represents six of the major keys to better communication skills.

First, “S” stands for “Specific.” Whenever material is being gathered for an oral or written report, letter, or memo, the writer should be specific as to the topic being covered or the purpose of the presentation. The topic or purpose of the presentation should be established and clearly stated at the beginning of the presentation. The presentation should then include all of the whos, whats, wheres, hows, whys, and whens to support the specific topic or purpose of the presentation.

The whos, whats, wheres, hows, whys and whens should be presented in a logical order. The “L” in SLEAZY stands for “Logical.” Step-by-step logic should be used when organizing ideas for a presentation. This means the writer should prepare an outline before the actual presentation, written or oral. Without the use of an outline the main point of a presentation is often lost among supporting information of lesser importance. The outline will lead to a more systematic form of communication. All of the ideas needed will be in a more effective order with proper emphasis on each idea to support the specific topic or purpose of the presentation. If an oral presentation is logical the “you knows” and “huhs”, which many times detract from an oral presentation, will be avoided. The presenter will not need to stop and pause to figure out what comes next because the most logical items will naturally follow one another. If an outline is used for a written presentation, the presentation will be easier to develop and will more readily support the end conclusion in a logical manner.

While building a purpose into an outline, the writer should always remember to keep the presentation on a

nonpretentious level, or “E” which stands for “Easy”. The presenter should always try to express ideas in a simple and straightforward manner. An audience is rarely impressed with the use of complicated or uncommon words. The audience simply becomes confused or loses interest in the meaningless presentation. The presenter must also worry about talking down to the audience; this scenario is just as devastating to the presentation. A simple rule of thumb to follow in preparing a presentation is to imagine that you are a member of your own audience. Today, this means you, like most business women and men, are overworked, distracted, or in a hurry. Write what you, if you were in this audience, would like to read or hear, in these circumstances.

“A” stands for “Audience.” Any and all presentations are a total failure without favorable audience reception. This statement alone should make the writer realize how truly important the audience is to the presentation. Different audiences expect and should receive different items. A complex report raising technical accounting terms, will not work for an audience in which very few are accountants. Also a very simplistic discussion of what an asset is in simple terms will not be successful if the audience is all CPA's. The “E” and the “A” in SLEAZY effect each other. For a presentation to be effective the presentation must be aimed at the audience and be easy for them to comprehend.

The “Z” in the SLEAZY acronym stands for “Zealous.” No matter what the topic or who the audience, the presenter should always be zealous in the presentation of material. If the presenter is active and acts interested in what is being said, then it is more likely that the audience will be interested and excited about the presentation as well. If the presenter does not care for the subject or the audience, this comes through in presentation. Also a smile will help in oral and written presentations. After all, even if a smile cannot be seen it can be felt.

Finally, the “Y” in SLEAZY stands for “Yawns.” As an accountant and communicator, the presenter does not want the presentation to be faced with yawns. So, the presentation should be short and to the point. The

problem should be stated and then solved. If necessary a few jokes should be thrown in along the way or a visual aid can be used to keep the audience from the "Y's." Today most audiences expect some type of a visual experience. If you are going to use visual aids, be sure they make a presentation more attractive and do not detract from the presentation. Before an oral presentation, be sure the equipment to be used is in good working order and that you know how to use it.

SLEAZY can be successfully applied to improve communication skills of accounting students and accounting professionals. A quick review of SLEAZY before each of your presentations can improve your presentation skills. These hints for a successful presentation are the most basic of ideas, but they are often the ones which are most often ignored or overlooked by presenters.

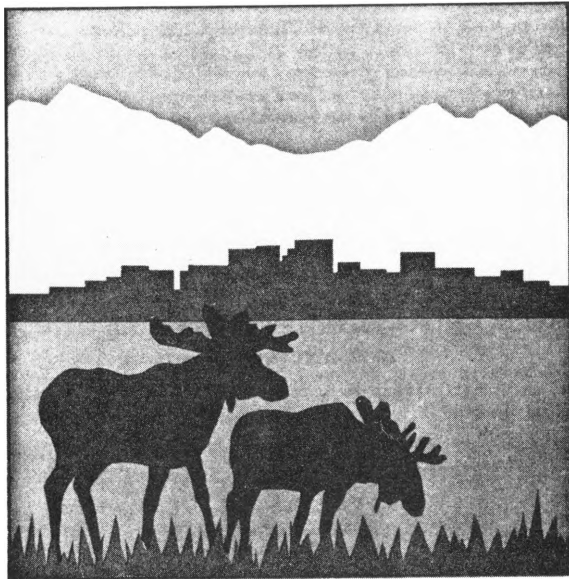
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