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—*Minneapolis/St. Paul City Business*

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# THE EXECUTIVE MEMO

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**A Guide to Persuasive  
Business Communications**

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**SHERRY SWEETNAM**

# The Executive Memo

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A Guide to  
Persuasive Business Communications

**Sherry Sweetnam**



**JOHN WILEY & SONS**

New York

Chichester

Brisbane

Toronto

Singapore

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***Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data:***

Sweetnam, Sherry.  
The executive memo.

Bibliography: p.

1. communication in management. 2. Memorandums.

I. Title.

HF5718.S88 1986 658.4'53 86-7741

ISBN 0-471-81826-7 0-471-57171-7 (pbk)

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5

# The Executive Memo

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*To Dad, who never quit*

# Preface

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This is not just a book about business writing. It's a book that shows you how to apply the principles of persuasion, salesmanship, and communication to your writing. It is written as a reference book so that you can choose the sections that pertain to your writing needs. Aimed primarily at managers and professionals in large corporations and small businesses, the book shows you how to write so that writing becomes a major tool for marketing yourself. The book contains:

1. Strategies on how to apply communication and persuasion principles to everyday writing problems.
2. Techniques that will help you organize your ideas quickly.
3. Ways to write two to three times faster than you now do.
4. Models of business communications: an information memo, a sales letter, a proposal, a letter of apology, and a "tough-message" memo.
5. Forty-two exercises that reinforce key points, with an answer key, and a full index for reference.

By reading the book carefully, you will be able to rewrite an ineffective memo so it becomes persuasive, interesting, and effective.

tive. You will learn how to write with more ease, how to write faster, and how to make your point better so that you can increase your impact at work. You will see tangible results, because this book gives you tangible advice!

This book is not meant as a review of the basics of writing and English. It assumes that you know the basics, that you simply need to review and practice the principles of communications and persuasion.

A few notes on how the book was written:

First, all of the examples are taken from the writing samples of the participants in my communication workshops. The names, dates, and company names have been changed to protect the innocent, the hard working, . . . and the struggling.

Second, I use the word “memo” throughout the book to refer to business letters, memos, reports, proposals, and sales letters. I do this for efficiency and because the principles covered in the book apply to all areas of written business communication.

Third, I make generalizations about writing which, given some situations, may not necessarily work. You must adapt these generalizations to your particular written communication. Without these generalizations the world of writing would seem like an unmanageable subject. Let them be a starting place.

Last, I wrote this book with a word processor. I highly recommend using one if you are serious about developing your writing potential. A word processor helps you write faster and with more confidence. Your writing production will increase enormously. How? The system helps you get over writer’s block by letting you sketch out a rough draft and then eliminate what you don’t like in one key stroke. Your writing no longer seems so permanent. Surprisingly, too, your fingers can word-process much faster than they can type. And editing is much quicker because of the system’s ability to “cut and paste” your ideas. The only drawback is that it takes time to learn how to use a word-processing program. But once you’ve mastered the technology, you’ll wonder how you ever lived without it! Anyone who writes heavily in business

should consider acquiring a word processor—it is an essential tool for communicating efficiently and productively.

SHERRY SWEETNAM

*New York, New York*



# Acknowledgments

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I want to thank everyone who has been so supportive of my work over the past few years. I want to thank my mentor Joe Ross for his encouragement and constant guidance. He always made sure I was moving ahead; without him I wouldn't have had the inspiration to get my ideas published.

Next, I want to thank the people on my staff who have helped Sweetnam Communications develop. In particular, I thank Kay Cuskley for her hard work, Pam Reid for her detailed and accurate work on the exercise sections of the book. Also, thanks go to my good workers—Mei Ching Fung, Ben Kai Bouey, and Jonathan Stone—for helping me run my office smoothly so I could concentrate on the book.

A special thanks to my dear friends and family, who have helped me throughout the years and with this book: in particular, Peter and Blanka Lawson, Jill LeVin, Sue Canfield and Ron Feigal, Alice Hughes, Janet Spratlin, Kathy Kidder, Jim Blew, Mary Russ, and the Dick Doty's in Colorado.

Also, thanks to both my personal and business friends who have helped me learn about the business world and coached me along the way: Janet Gray, Don Mertz, Jean Bublely, and Caela Farren. A spe-

cial thanks to Linda Pittari for giving me my big break into the business world. And to Woody Rudin.

Above all, thanks to all the people in my workshops. Without them there would be no book. Their eagerness to learn and grow inspired me to continue analyzing business writing and to develop new materials. The material in this book is derived from their concerns, their writing, and their contributions to our group. They are the ones who questioned, and the answers we came up with are the essence of this book.

Thanks to the illustrators Mary Power and John Caldwell for their original artwork, to Nettie Bleich for her active and positive role as my editor, to Kirk Bomont, my patient production supervisor, and to Julie Glass for her outstanding work as my copy editor.

Finally, thanks to my cat, Trinko, who sat on my manuscript and munched off many a page—she's been here by my side the whole way.

S.S.

# The Executive Memo

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# An Overview of Writing

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This chapter looks at how our past experiences with writing influence our present attitudes toward writing. It presents a diagnostic checklist to help you identify exactly what your writing needs are and it indicates where in the book to find answers to your questions. The chapter then looks at the differences between effective and ineffective writing, as illustrated in two versions of the same memo—one effective, the other ineffective. Last, it examines the advantages and disadvantages of writing and speaking, to help you make decisions about when to speak and when to write.

## ☐ OUR ATTITUDES TOWARD WRITING

Many of us in business today write with the same attitudes we held about writing when we were in school. We simply substitute our managers and offices for our teachers and schoolroom. When we confront a blank page, we panic and begin worrying about making our writing perfect. Instead of trusting ourselves and viewing writing as a management or communication tool, we think of our writing as a series of minitests on spelling, punctuation, grammar, and vocabulary. This cartoon illustrates the point:

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Writing is learned, it is not a natural ability. Speaking is. We all arrived in this world with the ability to speak. We babbled our way through the first year or two of our lives, inventing our own personal language. By the time we were 2 or 3 years old and had learned the basic grammatical structures and vocabulary of English, speaking had become like breathing to us. We saw no distinction between who we were and what we said. Speaking and being were one and the same.

By the time we reached the age of 4 or 5, we had learned to speak well, because we had learned speech was a powerful tool that gave us control over our lives. Speaking got us what we wanted. When we entered school, however, our lives changed drastically. Teachers gave us new rules about how to behave. We were told:

"Raise your hand if you have something to say."

"Be at school by 8:15."

"Raise your hand if you have to go to the bathroom."

"Line up before you go out to recess."