

I'm John Sturtevant, and this is Say What?! A weekly podcast with quick tips to help you communicate clearly at work, at home, and everywhere else you go.

Welcome to Say What?! Episode 8

This week, the fourth episode in our new series: Ten Quick Tips for Terrific Email

And today's Quick Tip is: What's in it for me?

We spend a good part of our days, trying to convince or even inspire people to listen to us, to trust us, to agree with us, and often, to take actions we want them to take.

In that sense, we're all sales people.

Now, it may not appear that way when you look at your job description, or what you wrote about yourself on your LinkedIn profile.

But we are.

The dictionary shows a definition of sales as:

a transaction between two or more parties, in which goods or services are exchanged for money or other assets.

So sales is: I give you something, you give me something. We're both happy.

And what is the one thing we ask people to give us all day long?
Their most precious, and most valuable asset?

Their time.

When you ask your reader to give you five minutes of their time to read your email, that reader's expectation is you will provide something of equal or greater value in return.

You will make it worth your reader's time.

You will answer the question they have on their mind: What's in it for me?

You had that same expectation, or maybe a slight variation of that idea when you clicked play on this podcast.

You were thinking something like “Do I have time to listen to this?”

In other words, “Do I want to give up part of my time to listen to John Sturtevant’s podcast?”

And, since you’re listening, you decided Yes. Thank you!

Now, my goal is to meet or exceed your expectations!

And that’s exactly what happens with you throughout the day.

People who read your emails are expecting you to make it worth it for them.

So how do you do that?

By thinking about the person who will read your email, and thinking about why that person would be willing to give you their time.

What do you have of value to offer your reader in that sales transaction we call email?

One way to help you define that value for your reader is to think about not only what you want to say, but why.

The optimist and author Simon Sinek reveals the importance of why in his talks and in his book Find Your Why.

He describes how understanding why helps us live in alignment with our purpose, and it helps us inspire the people we live and work with every day.

The same thing happens when you plan your emails. Adding the why helps you focus on your purpose for writing that email.

People won't truly accept an idea until they understand why that idea is relevant and meaningful and important to them.

If your reader doesn't understand why, your what loses its importance.

Adding the why to your emails doesn't take more time, and it doesn't mean you have to make your emails much longer.

It means thinking about your purpose for writing, and being clear about what you want your read to believe, or understand, or do.

And why.

Then leave out everything that does not support that purpose, and add value to for your reader.

There's often a huge difference between what you think you need to tell someone and what they want to know.

When you add the why, you not only give your reader information, you also help them understand what the information means, how relevant it is to them, and how to use that information to gain a new understanding, or make a decision.

And put the why at the beginning of your email – in the subject line and or first sentence. That will help your reader determine if he should read your email now, or save it for later.

You can learn more about adding the why to all your writing and see examples in an article I wrote for Financial Management Magazine. I'll post a link to that article on the podcast page on my website.

I'll also post a link to Simon Sinek's website, if you'd like to learn more about his ideas for finding purpose in your life and work. He's a wonderful writer and speaker.

So this week, look for ways to define your purpose for writing, and to offer something of value to your readers, in exchange for the time they spend reading your emails.

Give your readers the why, not just the what.

Who knows? You just might find there's something in it for you!

That's Say What?! for this week. Thanks for listening!

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