

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 11.

This week, we continue our series: Ten Quick Tips for Terrific Email

And today's Quick Tip is: Yawn. Ah, that's good enough.

Ok, raise your hand if you ever clicked send on an email without even reading that email first.

I can hear the flutter of a hundred hands reaching into the air.

But I understand. We get busy. We're in a hurry. We've got deadlines. So who has time to read every email we send?

You do.

Sending an email without reading it first is like making a meal for your best friend, but refusing to eat it yourself.

And I don't mean read your email in a hurry just skimming over it.

I mean read your email as if someone sent it to you. And as if it's important to you.

In fact, as I talked about in a previous podcast, read your email out loud.

Would you want to receive that email you just wrote?

Reading your writing out loud will help you achieve that conversation with your reader we've talked about before.

If you stumble over words as you read out loud, or you run out breath before get to the end of a sentence, or you're confused by how you organize your ideas, you know your reader will have the same experiences.

And as you read out loud, listen to more than just the information you sent. Listen to your writing style, your tone, your word choice.

How do you sound? Impatient? Abrupt? Rambling on and on?

Or, are you enthusiastic?

If your email is about a topic that needs your reader's immediate attention, do your style and tone and word choice convey a sense of urgency?

So I encourage you to start to thrill yourself with everything you write!

Yes, I said thrill! Be ecstatic, overjoyed, proud of yourself even.

I hear you thinking, Johnny, you don't understand, the stuff I write all day is boring.

No it's not.

There's not a boring topic in the world.

There are just millions of people out there who make things boring every day.

You don't have to be one of them!

And it's not that hard. The gap between this is boring and this is awesome is very narrow.

And that difference is often a matter of simply deleting everything your reader doesn't need to know, and focusing on what your read does want to know - to make a decision, or take action, or understand an idea.

As the great Elmore Leonard said "I leave out the parts my readers skip."

That's good advice for you too.

People don't want lists of facts, or sentence after sentence of data.

We want stories. That means we want to know there's a human on the other end of the email we received. We want to know how people feel and how decisions affect may us, and others.

We want to know the why behind the what.

People want to learn something new, even if it's about what you might think is an old, worn out, boring topic.

People want to know your point of view. Your readers want to know why your email is meaningful and useful to them.

One way for you to go from boring to brilliant is to look at your topic from a different perspective.

Get out of the rut of doing the same thing the same way every time and expecting a different outcome.

Ask new questions and look for new answers.

And sometimes those answers are not where the questions are.

I'm not suggesting you have to come up with paradigm-shifting, industry-disrupting, wildly innovative ideas every day.

Rather, I'm saying sometimes even simple changes in how you think, can have wonderful new results that will help you transform your email from mundane to meaningful for your reader.

As Einstein said, you can't solve a problem using the same thinking that created the problem.

So here are four resources, to help you think in new ways about those old topics.

And I'll post links to each of these on the podcast page on my website.

The first is a delightful book called *The Power of Mathematical Thinking* by Jordan Ellenberg. He uses examples, stories, and humor to make mathematics more common sense and to show how mathematical thinking is useful in other areas of life. The book is full of surprises.

Listen to Malcolm Gladwell's Ted Talk on spaghetti sauce. He tells a wonderful story about how changing our expectations can change the results we get.

Then Sam Harrison's book called IdeaSpotting. Sam offers real-world examples and practical action steps to you help find fresh inspiration when you need it. Sam's also written some great articles on creative thinking for Fast Company magazine. I'll post a link to those articles too.

And finally, Brian Eno's Oblique Strategies. Eno created this card deck around 1974 as a way to use lateral thinking to stimulate his creativity. They've evolved over the years and are still a wonderful way to stretch your mind.

So this week, as you create email after email, look at each topic from a new perspective, write emails you would want to receive, and leave out the parts your readers will skip.

Who knows? You just might find it a thrilling experience!

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

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