

Are Your Sentences Sapping Your Sales?

By Dianna Booher

Here's a new gripe that may be driving clients up the walls—and out the doors: Like the dripping of a leaking faucet, grammar errors can grate on their ears. Do these comments sound familiar to what you hear in your workplace every day?

“Bob and myself will be out to your office later today.”

“This equipment works real good.”

“Please email Kim, Juan, or I, and we'll send you a pass to the tradeshow.”

“Me and her are the only ones handling calls today.”

“She don't understand the complexity of the problem.”

Let me explain in the words of a CEO of a Fortune 500 company, talking about one of his vice presidents about to be dismissed.

“Roger has to go. He's just not the type we need around here. At the next rung of the ladder, these vice presidents will need to spend 90 percent of their time networking to bring in the big clients. They attend social functions, serve on community boards, entertain our biggest clients and their spouses for a week on a yacht in the Caribbean. Roger just doesn't have what it takes at this level. His hair looks disheveled half the time, and his grammar grates on me. In fact, his wife is an embarrassment socially when she accompanies him to client functions because her grammar is even worse than his. They're both college educated,...but just not polished.”

Image can stall a relationship or a career—and certainly block a sale.

When customer emails and proposals contain grammar errors, customers begin to wonder, “If the writing is wrong, how do I know they'll amortize my loan correctly?” “If they don't punctuate correctly, how do I know they'll deliver the merchandise on time?”

And where there's no conversational context and feedback, there's an even bigger issue than image: clarity! Add or remove a comma in a sentence, and you may unknowingly reverse the meaning of a sentence. Misuse a word and you can lose a contract. For example, there's a world of difference between the two statements: “*The new law before Congress will effect a widespread change in our pricing structure.*” (effect: to cause) “*The new law before Congress will affect a widespread change in our pricing structure.*” (affect: to influence or involve)

Grammar as a topic is slightly less exciting than trekking through the Everglades or attending a gala with your favorite celebs. But you'll find it difficult to get past gatekeepers without their playing gotcha with your emails and voicemails.

Frankly, bad grammar is like bad breath—even your best friends won't tell you. So you may want to go to this free online assessment at www.howsyourgrammar.com and see how you do.

In tough economic times, super stars remain successful because they pay attention to the little things that can make a big difference.

Errors Marked from Above; Correct usage in parenthesis:

*“Bob and **myself** will be out to your office later today.” (I)*

*“This equipment works **real good**.” (well)*

*“Please email Tom, Jean, or **I**, and we'll send you a pass to the tradeshow.” (me)*

*“**Me** and **her** are the only ones handling calls today.” (Her and I)*

*“She **don't** understand the complexity of the problem.” (doesn't)*

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535 words

Dianna Booher works with organizations to increase their productivity and effectiveness through better oral, written, interpersonal, and cross-functional communication. She is a keynote speaker and the author of more than 40 books (22 on communication) including The Voice of Authority, Booher's Rules of Business Grammar, Speak with Confidence, and Communicate with Confidence. Dianna is CEO of Booher Consultants, a communication training firm offering programs in presentations skills, business writing, and interpersonal communication. Successful Meetings Magazine named her to its list of “21 Top Speakers for the 21st Century.” Executive Excellence Publishing also named Dianna to its “Top 100 Thought Leaders” and “Top 100 Minds on Personal Development.” Visit www.booher.com or call 800.342.6621.

For more on business writing, see Booher's Rules of Business Grammar: 101 Fast and Easy Ways to Correct the Most Common Errors (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.