

You Can't Tell the Players Without a Program

By Dianna Booher

Put in the people. Have you ever read an email or somebody's database notes and had difficulty figuring out who was supposed do what?

“Disappearing doers” is a common problem in informal, cryptic writing. Writers think the actors in their sentences are obvious. Often, they are not. Take a look at this example from someone's contact manager:

Carol Frazier of Global United is trying to help us get into her company to do business. Called about the possibility of arranging a meeting with the sales development managers about their needs for fully automating their field offices.

Told them such automation was essential to compete in today's environment and that laptops for everybody were essential to do business. Negotiations began last week. Will call at end of next month with firm date when everyone can get together.

Questions: Who called about the possibility—the writer of this note or Carol Frazier? Does the “told them” in the next sentence refer to Carol Frazier telling her own company management or this writer telling Carol Frazier's company? “Negotiations begun” by whom? “Will call”—who will call whom?

Leaving out the “actor” in your sentences is like leaving out the star in your movie! Put in the people.

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215 words

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For more on business writing, see E-Writing: 21st-Century Tools for Effective Communication (Simon & Schuster/Pocket Books) by Dianna Booher.

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