

The **McGraw-Hill** Companies

*The Craft of*  
**Business Letter Writing**





*The McGraw-Hill Companies*

# *The Craft of* **Business Letter Writing**

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Hyderabad



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*This book is for you,  
Manu.  
How I wish  
you were around to see it!*

*Dad*

*Dedicated to my son Manu  
who was killed in a road accident  
in August 1995*

## Dear Reader

Thank you for picking up *The Craft of Business Letter Writing*. It will entertain you, stimulate you, and show you how to turn out smart letters, memos, e-mails, and faxes. That's a promise.

You will have noticed that this book is different from the scores of business correspondence books on the market. It is not a collection of readymade letters for all occasions. It takes executives deep into the *craft* of business letter writing through a series of dialogues.

A large number of authentic letters and memos picked up from corporate files are analysed in the book. They are reproduced without any editorial changes. The names of people, places, products, and companies have, however, been either altered or dropped in most cases to protect the identity of the sources.

Both these 'beasts' and 'beauties' have been field-tested in dozens of business writing workshops I've run for executives during the last four years. Parts of this book were published in the Tuesday Supplement of *The Hindu* in a series of twenty articles during January–May 1995. The readers responded enthusiastically. I am confident that you also will find this book interesting and useful.

There are men executives and women executives. It would be unfair to use *he* when the executive referred to could be either male or female. To keep saying *he* or *she* would be tedious. So I have used *he* and *she* interchangeably when referring to executives. Following a growing nonsexist convention, I have also used *they* where traditionally one employs *he* or *she* or just plain *he* to refer to an individual representing a class.

I invite you to send me, preferably with your comments on the margin, copies of very good or very bad business letters you have received. Total confidentiality is guaranteed. Also welcome from you are comments on this book. You can expect a prompt and grateful reply. Here's my address: A2 Roopali, Road 9, Tarnaka, Hyderabad-500 017.

Sincerely

MATTHEW M MONIPPALLY

## Acknowledgements

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I am indebted

To several companies, big and small. Some of them gave me access to their correspondence files; the others let me have samples of letters and memos generated by them or received by them.

To several hundred middle and senior managers who attended my business writing sessions during the last four years, and to professional colleagues who gave me critical comments on the earlier drafts of the book. The feedback from them has been of tremendous value.

To Dr Nanan P. Kurian, Professor at Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. He gave me detailed and accurate information on the international series of stationery sizes.

To Mr G. Radhakrishna Pillai and Ms Sachi Madhavan who read through the entire text and saved it from many errors and discrepancies.

To the authors/publishers who generously gave me permission to reproduce extracts from their books:

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3. A. De Mello (1983) *Prayer of the Frog Book I*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakasan.
4. Barry Eigen (1990) *How to Think like a Boss and Get ahead at Work*, New York: Avon Books.

To *The Hindu*, Madras, for permission to incorporate in this book my articles on business letter writing which they had published.

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To my wife Philo and daughter Preeti. Both have been a constant sounding board and a source of inspiration.

MMM

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# *The Pretty Letter*



1. First Impression is the . . .
2. The Tone Setters I
3. The Tone Setters II





## First Impression is the...

---

Guru: Hold on for a moment, Samir. Are you going to send that letter you've just signed?

Samir: Yes, of course. Why, what's the problem?

G: You've cooked a good dish. But you're serving it in dirty china.

S: I don't understand.

G: Well, take a quick look at your letter. The text is pretty good. It's clear and concise. But the stationery is bad and the typing worse.

S: The letterhead isn't the swankiest in the world, I agree. But then we don't believe in splashing money on stationery. We want it to be functional. After all it is put away in a file once it's read. By going in for ordinary stationery we save a lot of money on both paper and printing. In a letter we focus on the text, not on the frills.

G: I'm not suggesting that you squander money on stationery or office equipment. But every letter that goes out of your firm should look attractive. It should command the reader's respect. It should carry the image that you want to project.

Often executives in other firms see your letters long before they meet you. At times they never get to meet you. They may judge you and your firm exclusively from your letters.

The first impressions are visual ones. And they can be crucial. A bad impression could make the reader toss the letter into the wastepaper basket—literally. She may conclude—unfairly perhaps—that she has no time for the likes of you. Unless of course you're an Income Tax Commissioner.

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S: Income Tax Commissioner?

G: Yes. People in the IT Department don't need to persuade you to read on. That's the privilege of government officials and kidnappers. As you don't belong to either category, you'd better take care of the looks of your letters.

Won't you agree that well dressed people tend to be treated with more respect than shabbily dressed ones?

---

Patricia Ryan, the managing editor of **People** magazine, once told me that if she is having a business lunch in which she anticipates being intimidated or not being taken seriously enough she will order a Scotch and water. She rarely drinks, but just ordering a Scotch instead of a Perrier creates a subtle, almost imperceptibly different, I-mean-business impression.

\_\_\_\_\_, Mark H. McCormack,  
*What They Don't Teach you at Harvard  
Business School, 1984: 27*

---

Letters are no different. Their looks are too important to be left to the cheapest printers in town. Get an attractive letterhead designed by an artist. Get it screen printed on good quality paper. The difference in prices between good and bad stationery is not as big as you imagine. But the difference in the image projected is substantial.

S: What kind of stationery do you recommend for a firm like mine?

G: The best you can afford. I'd suggest that you spend a little more than you think you can afford on stationery and office equipment. It is money well spent. A classy letter reaches and influences decision-makers far more effortlessly than a shabby one.

S: But we've managed pretty well all these years with our inexpensive stationery and manual typewriters. No one has stopped doing business with us because of them.

G: May be. But times are changing. The market place is crowded now; the competition is intense. Creating a favourable image is vital for survival. Excellent stationery has a positive impact whether you are writing to big firms or to small firms, to government departments or to individual customers.

S: But won't it scare away ordinary customers rather like the posh looks of an expensive restaurant?

G: Well, a classy image can't hurt you in the long run even if a few think that you are beyond their means, and don't venture to do business with you.

- S: OK. What's wrong with the typing in this letter? You said it was very bad.
- G: The typing isn't even. Obviously it was done on a manual typewriter by a raw typist. Besides, I can see two cases of overtyping and one typing error which hasn't been corrected. The word 'receipt' is typed 'receitp'.
- S: You're too finicky, Guru. I don't think anyone will have any difficulty reading and understanding the letter because of either the overtyping or the minor typing error.
- G: Why do you call 'receitp' a minor typing error?
- S: If the word 'friend' is typed 'fiend', it would be embarrassing. But the sky wouldn't fall if I dropped a 'p' from 'appeal' or put in an 'n' instead of 'm' in 'example'. 'Receitp' belongs to this harmless category. That's why I've called it a minor typing error.

I have more important things to do than combing my letters looking for such nits.

---

Here's what the author of *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School* has to say about the looks of letters:

Correspondence—both internal and external—is one of the most frequent opportunities you have for presenting yourself to the business community.

I'm a real stickler about any written communication that goes out over my name. I insist that it be neatly typed (pleasing to the eye) and contain no spelling errors or typos. There are few things in business that you can easily make stick, but this is one of them. It frustrates me to hear a secretary say, "It's *almost* right." Correspondence forms a strong subliminal impression about how you run your business, and I don't want someone to think I run it "almost right" when I have such a simple, obvious opportunity to impress otherwise.

\_\_\_\_\_ Mark H. McCormack,  
*What They Don't Teach You at*  
*Harvard Business School*, 1984: 29–30

- 
- G: You are quite right, Samir, if letters are meant merely to pass on information. They are adequate if the reader can retrieve the information you've put into them. But there is much more to letters than mere transfer of information.

We have already talked about the need for good quality stationery. Neat and flawless typing is an expression of courtesy to the reader.

When you sign a letter without getting rid of the typing errors, you're telling the reader that you don't care. If your letter isn't free from all errors, get it retyped.



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- S: Getting letters retyped is useless. Every time my secretary retypes a letter she makes new mistakes.
- G: Replace her then. Or perhaps it is time to invest in an electronic typewriter or a computer. The printing will be even, alignment of lines will be easy, and your secretary can make the corrections you suggest without introducing new errors.
- S: I'll buy a computer then.

- ***There is much more to letters than transfer of information. They project a firm's image. So their looks are very important.***
- ***Use the best stationery and office equipment that you can afford.***
- ***Ensure that the typing is flawless. Never send out a letter that has typing errors in it.***
- ***Never underestimate the value of the looks of your letters. Bad typing and poor stationery could land your letters in the waste paper basket. Smart letters command the reader's respect.***

- G: Make sure the printer is a good one. If you can't afford a laser or an inkjet printer, get at least a letter quality dot matrix printer. Dot matrix printing in the draft mode is not a pleasure to read; it does not photocopy very well either.

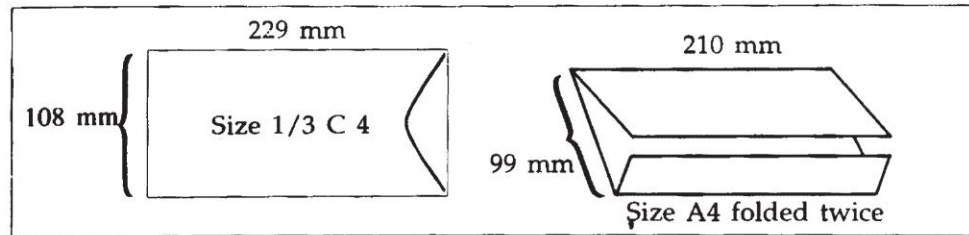
By the way, do you know how many times your letters are folded when they are put into envelopes?

- S: I am not a despatch clerk, Guru. I am an executive. Our Despatch takes care of folding letters, putting them in envelopes, sticking stamps on them and posting them. You don't expect me to do all that, do you?

- G: Oh, no. But you should know how your letters are treated by your secretary and Despatch. Don't forget, it is *your* letters that they are handling. Casual handling can bring to nothing all the efforts you put into drafting a good letter.

First of all, provide them with envelopes that match your stationery in size and quality.

I recommend size A4 (297 × 210 mm) letterheads for practically all your external correspondence. The matching envelope is size 1/3 C4 (108 × 229 mm). An A4 sheet folded twice goes comfortably into it. If you use size A5 (210 × 148 mm) stationery for extremely brief letters, it can be folded once in the middle and put into a C6 envelope (162 × 114 mm).



If the envelope is too big, the letter moves about in it. If the envelope is too small, you will have to fold the letter three or four times to push it in. A letter folded four or five times is little better than a crumpled one.

**S:** What is special about these sizes? Why is A4  $297 \times 210$  mm rather than, say,  $300 \times 200$  mm?

**G:** The A-series is the basic series of internationally accepted paper sizes. It starts with A0 ( $841 \times 1189$  mm) and ends with A10 ( $26 \times 37$  mm). If you look at this chart, you will see the logic behind the 'strange' sizes.

| Size      | Breadth/length<br>(in mm)          | Area<br>(in sq. metre)   |
|-----------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| A0        | $841 \times 1189$                  | 1                        |
| A1        | $594 \times 841$                   | $1/2$                    |
| A2        | $420 \times 594$                   | $1/4$                    |
| A3        | $297 \times 420$                   | $1/8$                    |
| <b>A4</b> | <b><math>210 \times 297</math></b> | <b><math>1/16</math></b> |
| A5        | $148 \times 210$                   | $1/32$                   |
| A6        | $105 \times 148$                   | $1/64$                   |
| A7        | $74 \times 105$                    | $1/128$                  |
| A8        | $52 \times 74$                     | $1/256$                  |
| A9        | $37 \times 52$                     | $1/512$                  |
| A10       | $26 \times 37$                     | $1/1024$                 |

**S:** I see the pattern. The area comes down by half but the ratio of the sides remains the same ( $\sqrt{2}$ ).

**G:** B- and C-series are supplementary sizes. The C-series covers envelopes, files, cartons, etc. The B-series covers book racks, shelves, brief cases, etc. These standards were evolved in Germany in the 1930's and have since been adopted the world over except in USA.

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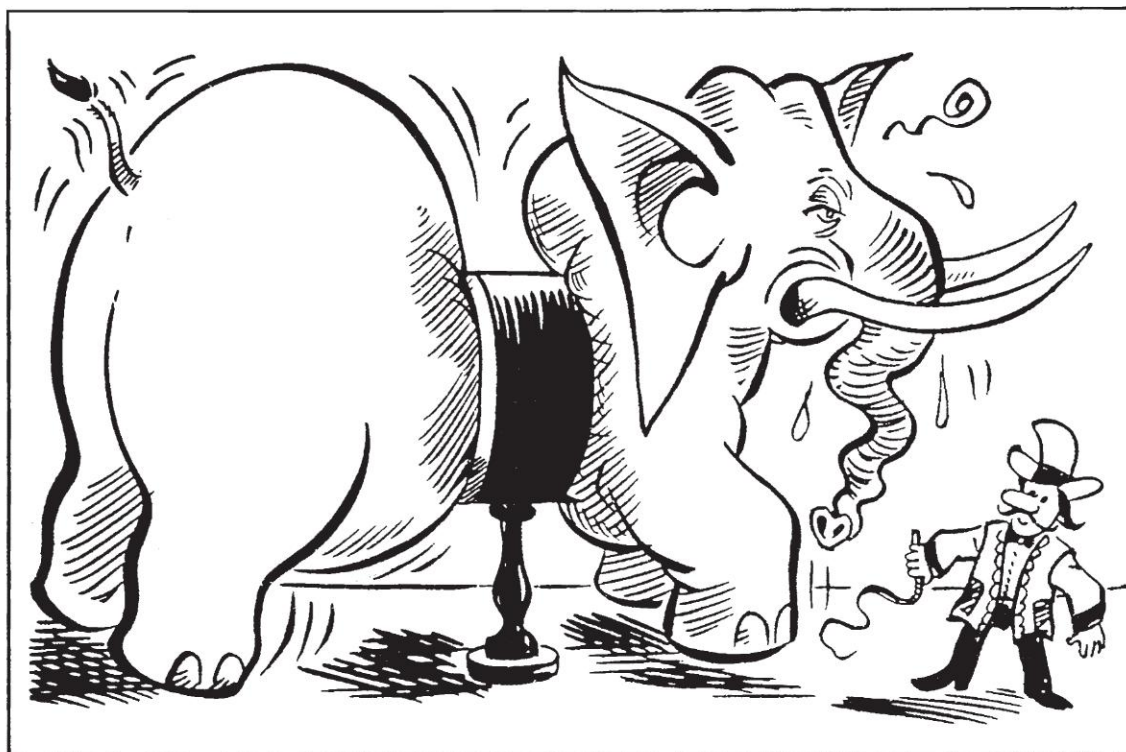
- S: How about letters with enclosures? A one-third C4 envelope may be too small for five or six A4 sheets folded twice.
- G: If there are several sheets to be enclosed, it is not a good idea to fold the whole lot twice. You might like to send it unfolded in a C4 (324 × 229 mm) envelope. Or you can fold it once in the middle and put it into a C5 (229 × 162 mm) envelope.

| <b><i>The Right Fit</i></b>  |                                 |                        |                                 |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b><i>Letterhead</i></b>     |                                 | <b><i>Envelope</i></b> |                                 |
| <i>Size</i>                  | <i>Length/breadth<br/>in mm</i> | <i>Size</i>            | <i>Length/breadth<br/>in mm</i> |
| A4 (unfolded)                | 297 × 210                       | C4                     | 324 × 229                       |
| A4 (folded twice)            | each third is<br>99 × 210       | 1/3 C4                 | 229 × 108                       |
| A5 (unfolded)                | 210 × 148                       | C5                     | 229 × 162                       |
| A5 (folded once,<br>i.e. A6) | each half is<br>148 × 105       | C6                     | 162 × 114                       |

A letter looks best when it is not folded. If you can send out letters unfolded, do so. But it is prohibitively expensive. Folding single-sheet letters once or twice is an acceptable compromise.

- S: Occasionally I get letters in window-envelopes. The size is all right, but the letters are folded four or five times to get the address on the letters to fit the window. Letters are then stapled to the envelope to keep them in place. Taking such letters out is quite a job. The postman is happy though, because he doesn't have to scratch open the window to see the full address.
- G: How I wish companies stopped using window-envelopes!
- I have received letters which were so casually folded that my name couldn't be seen through the window, but the first line of the letter was. It was embarrassing on a couple of occasions. I was angry with the firms they came from.
- S: Nevertheless you will agree that window-envelopes save the typist a lot of time. That is why we use them at Swan Engineering.





*If the envelope is too small, it is bound to spoil the looks of the letter.*

G: If we calculate the time spent by the sender and the reader, I don't think we will find window-envelopes great time-savers. Even if a little time is saved, it isn't worth the trouble everyone involved has to take. It is best to avoid window-envelopes.

I have no objection, however, if the window on the envelope and the space for typing the address match so well that the full address and only the address can be seen through the window. I still don't recommend it if it can't be done without folding the letter more than twice.

S: Typing addresses neatly on envelopes is not easy. That is why window-envelopes are popular.

G: You don't need to type addresses on envelopes! We can get self-adhesive address blanks. Once an address is typed on one of those, it can be neatly stuck on the envelope.

How nice it is to receive a decent-looking letter in an equally decent-looking envelope!

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S: Often executives don't open letters. Their secretaries do it for them. In some companies an Inward Mail Section does it. So does it really matter what kind of envelope a letter arrives in?

G: You can't be sure who will open your letter. It may very well be the person you have addressed it to. Even if it is her secretary who opens it, you shouldn't ignore the shape your letter arrives in. A letter that commands his respect has a better chance of being presented properly to his boss. In fact, your letter should get everybody's respect throughout its journey from your desk to the reader's desk.

Investing on the envelope that your reader doesn't get to see reminds me of a very insightful observation the incomparable Jeeves made in one of Wodehouse's stories. The test of a true gentleman, says Jeeves, is in his socks that no one normally gets to see. A new-rich pretender may invest in the most elegant suits, ties, and shoes, but not in socks and other underwear which others don't see. A true gentleman wears what he feels he must wear. It doesn't matter to him whether anyone sees him in it or not. We can say that envelopes are like a gentleman's socks.

S: I'm sure you have something to say about the way we seal envelopes and stick stamps!

G: You bet!

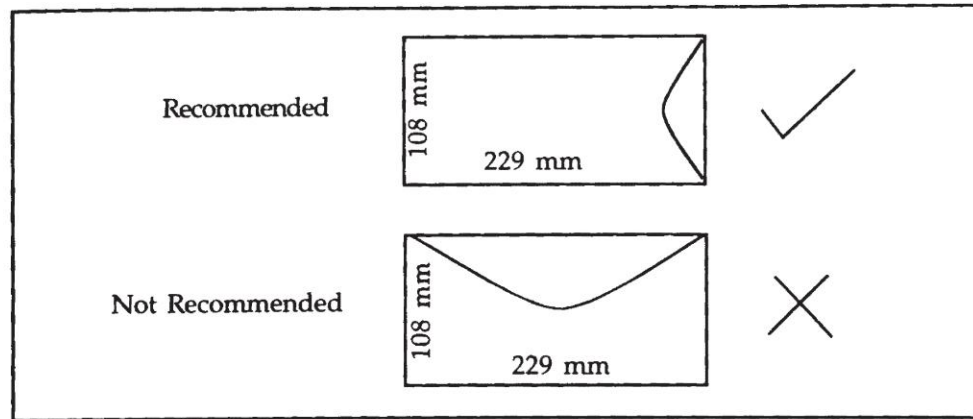
When you seal the envelope, don't forget that the letter has to be retrieved intact. If glue is splashed carelessly on the flap of the envelope, it buries the letter. You will then need to be a neurosurgeon to pry it out of the envelope without inflicting any damage on it. Do you think a letter with parts missing or with bits of the envelope sticking to it will create the right impression on the reader?

S: Frankly, I don't know how neatly our Despatch seals our letters. Never bothered to find out. Never thought it was important. But, I agree, a tattered letter that I get is unlikely to hit the right notes in my heart.

G: Give your Despatch strict instructions on how to handle your letters. You may even ask a few friends and check whether your letters to them arrive in good shape.

Make it easy for your Despatch to seal your letters well. One way is to get envelopes with adhesive flaps. Another is to go in for envelopes with flaps at the short side. Like this





Impress on everyone connected with your letters—your secretary or typist and your Despatch—that the looks of letters are very important. Give them the best stationery you can afford. Show them what layout you want to follow, how you want the letter to be folded, and how you want the envelope to be sealed, where and how you want the stamps to be stuck. Don't leave these to chance. Don't forget, it is your letter that is maimed by casual handling.

Invest in good quality stationery and office equipment. Proofread the letter thoroughly before you sign it. Make sure that everything about your letter commands respect. First impression, they say, is the best impression. A good impression is definitely the best introduction to the content of your letter.

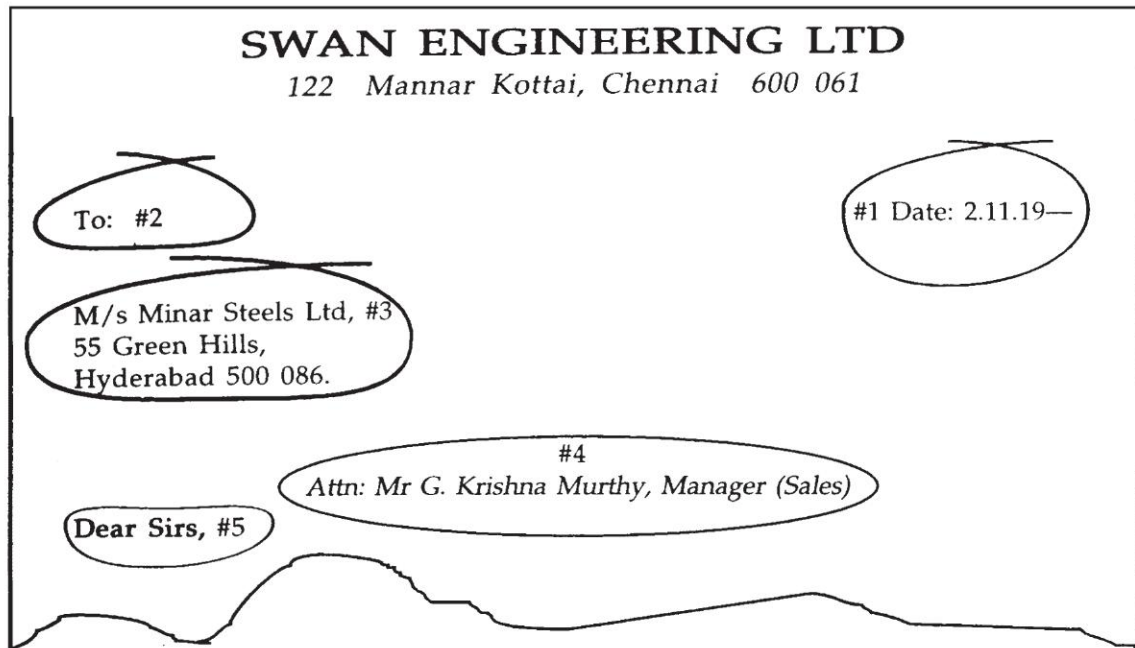
- **Use good quality envelopes that match the quality and size of your letterhead.**
- **Never fold your letters more than twice.**
- **Avoid window-envelopes. They can be a nuisance for postmen and embarrassing for the recipient. If you use them, make sure that**
  - a) **the full address can be seen easily and**
  - b) **nothing else can be seen through the window.**
- **Seal envelopes very carefully so that the letter is not stuck to the envelope.**

# 2

## The Tone Setters I

---

- GURU: Your letters don't look smart. There's unwelcome fat all over.
- SAMIR: Unwelcome fat? I don't quite get you.
- G: The format you've chosen looks heavy and unwieldy. You have put in several things which are absolutely unnecessary. On the other hand, certain things which ought to be in are left out. This format can't project a no-nonsense, business-like tone, no matter how well the body of the letter is drafted.
- S: Frankly I've never thought about the effect of the format on the letter's tone. The secretary is expected to know all that. My job is to dictate the content.
- G: Dictating the content is of course your job. But don't dismiss the format as the secretary's job. Never forget that it is *your* letter that she's dressing up. You should decide how it should be laid out. The choice of format signals certain values and attitudes. You may not be conscious of them, but they act on your subconscious when you read the letters you receive. So you'd better make a deliberate choice about the format of the letters that leave your office.
- S: Here's a typical letter that leaves my office. Show me how to make the layout smarter.
- G: Sure. Let me number the offenders.



- G: What is 2.11.19— (#1)?
- S: Why, it's the date.
- G: Everyone knows that 2.11.19— is a date. Then why label it 'Date'?
- S: Are you suggesting that I give just the date in the slot for it?
- G: Precisely. Writing 'Date' in front of what is clearly a date is as superfluous as holding a torch in broad daylight.
- S: How about printing 'Date' and 'Our Ref' on the letterhead?
- G: Printing 'Date' or 'Our Ref' is acceptable, although unnecessary. Here the purpose is not to label them as such but to indicate to the typist exactly where that information should be given. It is more an aid to putting your own house in order than helping the reader.
- S: Why do you say that it is unnecessary?
- G: It is unnecessary because it is very simple to establish a convention about such things in the organisation without peppering the letterhead with labelled blanks to be filled. In fact, it wastes a lot of a secretary's time to make sure that the date or reference is typed on the dotted line. Alignment is

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even more difficult when a word-processed letter is printed out on to such a letterhead.

The way the date is written also needs a little change. It is all right if you are writing to fellow Indians. We normally use the order: date-month-year. But not everyone follows that order. The Americans, for example, have a different order: month-date-year. An American might take your letter to have been sent on February 11, 19— rather than November 2, 19—.

The problem is particularly bad when you have a date like 5.6.19—. Is it the sixth day of the fifth month or the fifth day of the sixth month?

- S: If I write the name of the month, there shouldn't be any confusion.
- G: Right. And once you give the name of the month, the order becomes unimportant. You can write 2 November 19— or November 2, 19—. Either way, there is no confusion whoever you are mailing the letter to. But of course it would be nice if you could use the American pattern when you write to Americans and others who follow it. A little thoughtfulness on your part can help the reader a great deal. You should always aim to make it easy for the reader to deal with your letter.
- S: Shouldn't we write 2nd November or November 2nd?
- G: You may if you want to. But 2 November and November 2 are equally acceptable.
- S: How about using short forms like Nov., Dec., Oct., etc?
- G: No harm. It is more elegant though to have the full name. Besides, you won't save any space by abbreviating — you don't type anything else on the same line.

- **Don't write : Date: 2-11-19—**
- **Write: 2 November 19— or November 2, 19—**
- **Always spell out the name of the month.**

- S: Shall we move on to #2? You have put a circle round 'To:'
- G: Before you ask me why I have ringed 'To:' let me ask you what 'To:' is doing at the head of the inside address.
- S: Now, don't try to be funny. It simply indicates that the letter is being sent to that address. Nothing more, nothing less.





***"The choice of format signals certain values and attitudes..."***

G: That is obvious, isn't it? When you use your letterhead, there is absolutely no room for confusion about who is sending the letter to whom. Even if a letter is on plain paper, 'from' and 'to' can be skipped because the convention is that the address on top is that of the sender and the one below that of the recipient.

Then why start the inside address with 'to' when you use your letterhead? It's ugly; it's unnecessary. It's an insult to the reader's intelligence. It's another torch in broad daylight. Cut it out.

Let's move on to #3. Why is 'M/s' prefixed to Minar Steels Ltd?

S: Shouldn't we use 'M/s' when we refer to companies?

G: Why should we? As you know, M/s is the short form of Messrs, the plural of Mister. You use it when you refer to two or more men ( e.g. Messrs Sharma and Gokhale) or to firms whose names consist of male names: Messrs Maganlal and Brothers, Messrs P.N. Purushotham and Sons.



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'Messrs' sounds silly when it is attached to nonpersonal names such as "Jumbo Earthmovers Ltd", "Supreme Transformers" and "Zenith Marketing and Exports Private Ltd". Just drop 'Messrs' from the head of the firm's name if it is inappropriate.

- S: I think Minar Steels Ltd looks somewhat incomplete without 'Messrs.' Don't you?
- G: Not at all. You feel so because you see 'M/s' used lavishly and indiscriminately. You might as well say our city roads will look incomplete without cows and buffalos blocking traffic!

- **Don't use 'To' at the head of the Inside Address.**
- **Don't use 'Messrs' at the head of a company's name unless it consists of male names.**

Examples: **Right: Messrs Naik and Sons** ✓

**Right: Zenith Orchards Ltd** ✓

**Wrong: Messrs Zenith Orchards Ltd** ✗

- G: Let's look at #4, the attention line. You want Mr G. Krishna Murthy's attention, right? You want him to read the letter and respond to it. Then why don't you write to *him*? Why don't you recast the address to read:

Mr G. Krishna Murthy  
Manager (Sales)  
Minar Steels Ltd  
55 Green Hills  
Hyderabad 500 086

- S: If I address my letter to Minar Steels Ltd, I know the letter will be opened and replied to, even if Mr Murthy is not around. Suppose I address a letter specifically to him. If he is on leave or out of town, isn't there a danger that the letter will lie there for days waiting for his return? How does his office know if a letter is personal or official? Also, suppose he leaves the firm and joins another one?
- G: That is not really a problem. It is obvious that the letter is addressed to the Manager (Sales), rather than to the person, Krishna Murthy. If he is not around or even if he has left the company, the letter can be opened by his deputy or successor because it is a formal letter to the company.
- S: If a letter is addressed to an individual rather than to the firm, I don't think it is easy to tell the personal ones from the official ones.

G: It's really simple. Don't give the addressee's designation if the letter is a personal one. Or, especially if there are other Krishna Murthys in the same firm, put the designation in brackets. You can also write 'Personal' on the envelope, to be doubly sure that a personal letter is not opened by the office.

S: Often I see the firm's address followed by an 'attention line'. When do we use the 'attention line'?

G: The only time you need to address your letter to an organization and resort to this roundabout way of directing it to the person who should read it is when *they* insist on that procedure.

Some government departments, for instance, indicate that all correspondence should be addressed to the chief executive. If they want it that way, oblige them. It's foolish to antagonise them on it. After all, your constant aim should be to win them over and get a favourable response from them.

S: When we write 'Attn: so and so,' the letter will reach them won't it? Then what's the problem?

G: It will, indeed. But ask yourself how you would react to a letter that is addressed to you by name. Won't your reaction to it be warmer than to a letter which is addressed generally to the firm and is opened by some clerk in the Inward Section? Somehow you feel more personally responsible for the letters that are addressed to you by name.

Although business correspondence is between firms, it is done by individuals. And your aim should be to influence individuals favourably towards you, and towards your firm. A firm is an abstraction, a notion. It has no ego, no emotions. But individuals have them, and they can be tickled to your advantage.

S: How about writing to, say, General Manager (Marketing), when you don't know his name, but you know that the letter should go to him?

G: How do you know that it's a him and not a her? I suggest that you telephone their operator and get the GM's full name, and write to him or her. A woman may not like to receive a letter which starts with 'Dear Sir.'

S: My impression is that most women executives don't mind receiving letters which start with 'Dear Sir'. Men, however, might mind dealing with letters which start with 'Dear Madam'.

G: It's not enough to avoid what the reader minds. Your aim should rather be to find out what pleases them, and to do that. I'm sure a woman executive will be pleased if the salutation acknowledges her sex.

**18 The Craft of Business Letter Writing**

S: Is it really worth the trouble to find out the name of an executive when you send a routine letter to him or her?

G: It depends. If you think that the executive you are addressing a routine letter to will not—need not—read it, there is perhaps no point in finding out his or her name. The acknowledgement of a cheque, for instance, is unlikely to go to the General Manager (Finance). No one at that level will want to be bothered with such stuff. Don't send such letters to executives by name. Do that only when you want a particular individual to deal with your letter.

A letter addressed to an executive by name is also likely to be treated with much greater respect by the clerical staff than letters addressed generally to the firm or to a designation such as 'General Manager (Marketing)'. They may think that perhaps the executive knows you well, and would be angry if your letter was not dealt with promptly.

S: I think I can agree with you there. I've often found that when I telephone a firm and ask for a top executive by name, few searching questions are asked. But if I say I'd like to speak to the Purchase Manager, I may have to speak to and end up discussing with an assistant. Finding out and using an executive's name does help.

G: In brief, the best policy is to decide in each case whether your letter should reach a particular executive for an appropriate response. If 'yes', address it to him by name. If not, address it to a department or to the firm in general.

- **Avoid the 'attention line' if you can.**
- **Whenever possible find out who is going to deal with your letter and address it to him or her by name and designation. The results will justify the effort you may have to make in order to find out the details.**

S: Don't you think you have overlooked a practical problem? How can the Inward Section open letters addressed to executives by name and stamp the date of arrival? When a letter is addressed to the firm, there is no problem in opening it.

G: Even now you get a few letters addressed to executives by name. Some of them may be confidential. What do you do with those letters?

S: They are sent unopened to the executives concerned.

G: Stamping the date of arrival is not really necessary except when there has been an unusually long postal delay. If you think that the date of arrival stamp is very important in your firm, each department can have its own



stamp instead of depending on the central Inward Section to do it on all letters.

Shall we move on to #5, the salutation?

S: Sure.

G: You've used the plural 'Sirs' because you're addressing the firm, I guess. Why not address the firm by its name: Dear Minar Steels?

S: No, that's just not done. That's going too far.

G: You're right; that does go against the convention. However, you might try it when you write a no-risk letter to a firm, and you want to include the whole firm in the salutation.

S: For example?

G: Imagine that you are a chess enthusiast writing a note of thanks to a firm which has done something very good for the game such as sponsoring a tournament. Or suppose you are an ordinary citizen writing a congratulatory note to a firm that has achieved something remarkable. 'Dear Sirs' would be pale in letters such as the following:

**Dear Minar Steels**

Thank you very much for sponsoring the international chess championship this year. Your ...

**Dear Minar Steels**

Congratulations on beating American and European companies in the bid for supplying steel to ...

S: I understand what you mean. But in an average business letter addressed generally to a firm, don't you think that 'Dear Sirs' is the apt salutation?

- G: Definitely. Do use 'Dear Sirs'. It's safe. 'Ladies and gentlemen', however, is gaining ground because firms consist of men and women. Women now insist on being counted. So use 'Ladies and Gentlemen' except when you know that the firm's management is exclusively male.

Whenever possible avoid 'Dear Sirs.' Find out and use the names of people you are writing to. We all love seeing our names—whether we admit it openly or not.



***"To sir or not to sir. That's the question."***

Addressing a person by name signals a hint of equality. It can work to your advantage. Sirring indicates distance between him and you, if not differences in levels.

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At Mons barracks, Aldershot, cadets were welcomed by an enormous Irish Guards RSM. "Good morning, gentlemen," he said. "While you are here you will call me 'Sir' and I shall call you 'Sir'. The only difference will be that you will mean it."

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\_\_\_\_\_ Alan Road, Observer May 1, 1983 in  
Frank S Pepper, **20th Century Anecdotes**, Sphere, 1990: 42

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This applies equally to 'Madam.' Use the surname with an appropriate title (Ms/ Mrs/ Miss) if you know the name of the woman executive you are writing to. If she does not herself indicate her preference for the title Miss or Mrs, it is safe to use Ms. It is widely accepted now as a title for both married and unmarried women.

S: By the way, how is 'Ms' pronounced?

G: Give the 's' in 'Ms' the sound of 'z': /mz/ or /miz/. That's all.

S: Thanks. I have a worry, though. Won't seniors be offended if a young executive calls them Mr so-an-so or Ms so-an-so?

G: Of course, our society is pretty hierarchical. Older people generally expect to be 'sirred' or 'madamed'. Especially those who occupy high positions in government or industry.

Women executives might—just might—read more than a hint of equality in Dear Ms... You wouldn't want to invite trouble by holding a red rag to the reader at the opening of your letter. The aim should be to please the reader, not to annoy him. If the hint of equality, or of informality is not appropriate, use 'Sir' or 'Madam' even when you know the name. This is particularly applicable when you write to government officials as opposed to corporate executives.

S: That isn't very helpful.

G: There's no foolproof rule. You should consider the implications and consequences before you decide whether or not to use the addressee's name in the salutation. It actually depends on who you are and what position you hold *vis-a-vis* the reader. In case of doubt, and if you are not inclined to taking risks, 'Dear Sir' (or 'Dear Madam') is the safest salutation. But remember: the safest salutation needn't be the most effective salutation.

My point is that it should be a conscious decision you take, not a routine choice left to your secretary. An ill-chosen salutation could mar a letter.

When you use names of people in addresses and in salutations, make sure that you get the spelling right. Some people are resigned to their names getting misspelt. But most people are annoyed by spelling mistakes in their names. Similarly some with unusual names are delighted when the writer gets their name right.

- ***When you know the name of the person you are writing to, the salutation should generally be 'Dear Mr...', 'Dear Ms...', 'Dear Dr...', and so on.***
- ***Use 'Dear Sir' or 'Dear Madam' only if they are well above you in age and status, and any hint of equality and informality is inappropriate.***
- ***Think of your letters as conversations on paper. Don't be a slave to conventions which take warmth out of letters.***

S: How about first names? Are they okay in business letters?

G: They're perfectly fine in business letters to people whom you normally address by their first names when you talk to them. Think of your letters as conversations on paper. You don't need to—you shouldn't—stiffen up just because you are putting something down on paper rather than speaking face-to-face or over the phone.

The whole purpose of using the name—surname or first name—of addressees is to please them. If 'Sir' or 'Madam' is what you think is likely to please them, do not use their names.

S: How about using titles with first names? Won't that show the right mix of respect and informality?

G: We don't use titles such as 'Mr', 'Ms', and 'Dr', with first names. These go with surnames. You don't, for example, say 'Ms Sita' or 'Mr Ramesh', if these are first names. You say, 'Ms Gokhale', 'Mrs Gandhi', 'Mr Tiwari', etc. This is particularly important when you write to foreigners.

S: How about people in South India? They shrink their surnames or family names into their initials. Some don't use their family name at all. They have their own names and a letter or two to represent their father's or mother's name. How about them?

G: Well, if they don't have a surname, use the name they treat as the last name. 'P.R. Krishnan' will, for instance, be 'Mr Krishnan' and 'T. Sudha' will be 'Ms Sudha'. Even if you know that 'T' stands for Sudha's family name, 'Thazhathuveetil', you are unlikely to please her by calling her 'Ms Thazhathuveetil'.

A mistake which I see many people make unwittingly is to use the plain 'Mr' for all men and 'Ms' ( or 'Mrs' or 'Miss' ) for all women. There are other titles, and your addressee may have earned one of them.

A doctor (of medicine or of philosophy) has earned the title 'Doctor'. Officers in the armed forces like to be called by their titles. So use the right

titles when you address them. A plain 'Mr' or 'Ms' is unlikely to please them. They would like you to acknowledge the title they have worked hard for and earned.

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The journalist Frank Giles married Lady Katherine Sackville, who as the daughter of an earl retained her title after her marriage. On a journey abroad they received an invitation from the British embassy addressed to Mr and Mrs Giles. Concerned at the breach of protocol, Giles rang the embassy and started to explain, "She isn't exactly Mrs Giles." "That's all right," said the voice at the other end cheerily. "Bring her along anyway. We're not at all stuffy here."

\_\_\_\_\_ Los Angeles Times Dec 15, 1981, in  
F.S. Pepper **20th Century Anecdotes**, Sphere, 1990: 290

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Other titles which you may need to use occasionally include 'Professor', 'Father' (shortened to 'Fr', used for Christian priests) and 'Sister' (shortened to 'Sr', used for nuns). It would be odd to address a priest as 'Mr' and a nun as 'Ms'.

S: How about 'Shri', 'Shrimati' and 'Kumari'?

G: There is no harm in using them if you like to. But I feel they appear a bit odd in a letter written in English. They appear very odd indeed when combined with foreign names: Shri Stallone, Shrimati Taylor, Kumari Clinton. I suggest you avoid those titles in letters in English.

In brief, call people by the name or title that is likely to please them most. Spending a few minutes to find this out is time well spent. It is a very important part of the letter, not a simple formality. It sets the tone for the entire letter.

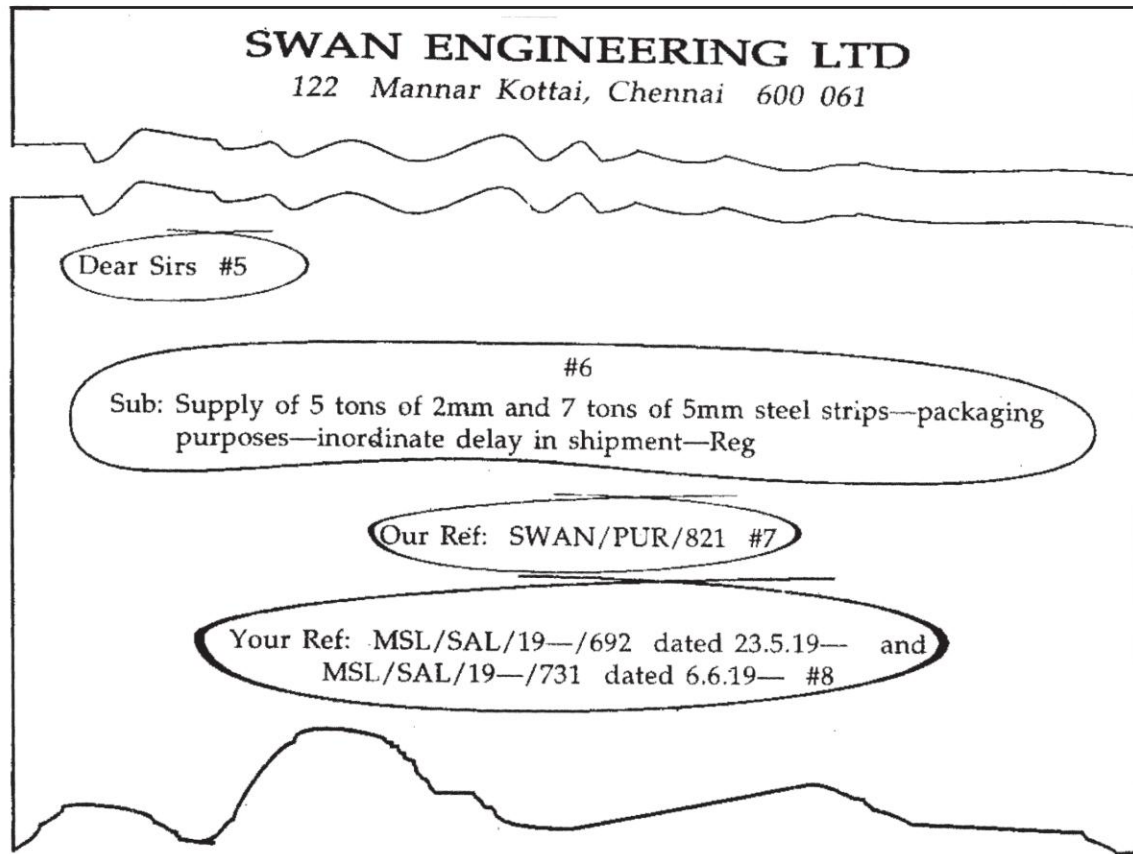
- ***If your addressee has earned a title such as 'Doctor' or 'Professor', use that instead of plain 'Mr' or 'Ms'.***
  - ***Call a person by the name or title that is likely to please them most. Salutation is not a simple formality. It sets the tone of the entire letter.***

S: I see what you mean. I had been leaving all these to the secretary. And she has been following a format that she is familiar with.

G: Let us move further down to #6. You seem to be giving the reader two letters for the price of one.

S: What do you mean?





- G: Well, you have a mini letter between the salutation and the body of the main letter:
- S: That's unfair! Shouldn't there be a subject line to tell the reader what the letter is about?
- G: Sure. A subject *line*, not a quarter of a page. A subject line is of course very useful to the busy executive who reads your letter. But it should be very brief. Ideally four or five words; rarely more than a single line. The subject line should be like the destination board of a city bus. It needn't mention all the stops on the way.
- S: Let me redo mine then. How about "Supply of 5 tons of 2 mm and 7 tons of 5 mm steel strips—Reg"
- G: That's better. But why go into details like the width of steel strips? Besides, isn't the focus of the letter on delay in supply? Shouldn't that word be retained?



S: Suppose I change it to "Delay in supply of steel strips—Regarding" or "Steel strips—delay in shipment—Reg"

G: They are both good, and they will both fit into a single line. There is no one fixed way of doing it. Just make it brief.

Also avoid ...

S: Don't tell me. You want me to cut out the label 'sub:', don't you?

G: Yes, and 'Reg'. The place between the salutation and the body is reserved for the subject line. So there is no need to label it as subject unless you are writing to a moron. And 'regarding' means much the same as subject. So don't you think it's a bit daft to dangle it at the end of the subject line?

S: If you don't write 'sub' at the beginning and 'reg' or 'regarding' at the end of the subject line, won't it get mixed up with the body?

G: Not at all. There are many ways of highlighting the subject line. It can be in block letters. It can be underlined or italicised. Another option is to use bold face. You can also combine these to make the subject line stand out from the body.

It is also useful to physically separate the subject line from the salutation and the body with double spacing.

S: Here, look at my new, slim subject line. What do you think of it?

**STEEL STRIPS: DELAY IN SUPPLY**

G: Yes, that's it. The reader knows that the letter is about steel strips and that you are going to talk about the delay in supplying them.

Here's the 'sub' which I found in a letter a firm received. I am reproducing it exactly as it is.

Sub: Faster flow of application notes Technical Literature and New Products to Engineers of your Establishment from our Principals—reg

Can you shrink it to a decent subject line?

S: Let me try. How about **FASTER TECHNICAL INFORMATION?**

- G: Those three words beautifully capture three fourths of the wordy original. I suggest you add: FOR YOUR ENGINEERS. That will make the content of the letter appear clearly relevant to the reader's interests and induce him to read on.

Here is another flabby subject line from an agent who clears cargo through the customs. The letter deals with raw materials which have come from France.

Sub: 9 packages containing raw materials arrived under AWB No  
D123 - 12345678/8764321 Dated 12-05-19—

- S: We can skip the number of packages and the Air Way Bill Number. But if we just say RAW MATERIALS, it may take the reader in a wrong direction.
- G: You're right. The subject line should help the reader and the secretary who files and keeps track of the letters.
- S: Suppose I wrote: RAW MATERIALS FROM FRANCE
- G: That would be more than enough. In fact, I can't think of a better way of making the subject line brief and informative.
- S: Isn't RAW MATERIALS FROM FRANCE too general? Shouldn't we indicate that we are talking about the consignments being cleared through customs?
- G: I don't think so. Don't forget that the reader doesn't get this letter from out of the blue. He has placed an order for certain raw materials and is waiting for them to arrive from France. He knows what the raw materials are. All he needs is an indication that the stuff has arrived from France.
- Let's get back to your letter. The new and lean subject line—STEEL STRIPS: DELAY IN SUPPLY—prompts me to read the letter quickly. But you have put up roadblocks.
- S: No, I haven't.
- G: What are those detailed references doing there standing between the subject line and the body (#7 and #8)?
- S: But this is a *business* letter. And it *must* have references for proper filing and quick retrieval. You can't cut them out.

G: Cool down. Let's look at it dispassionately. Do you always look up the references before you start reading the body of a letter?

S: Not always. Often the issue is fresh in my mind. But there are occasions when I ask my secretary to get me the previous correspondence on a topic.

G: Fine. That justifies the mention of a reference number but not its display on centre court.

Put your reference number away somewhere inconspicuous. Like between the heading and the address. The reader (or his secretary) will look for it *if and when* it is needed.

S: How about the reader's reference number? I will need to refer to it when replying to his letter, won't I?

G: What you want to do is to give a full reference below the subject line and start your letter: "With reference to your above cited communication..." Well, don't! There are many ways of weaving the reader's reference into the first paragraph of your letter. Here are two examples:

"Your letter of August 12 arrived here a day after the order was despatched."

"We are delighted to receive your assurance of August 12 that..."

S: But they don't contain exact reference numbers. Like MSL/SAL/19—/731.

G: It's unnecessary—nearly always. Yours is a reply to a letter you have received. So the reader knows what you are referring to. However, if you think that it is needed, you can incorporate it in the first or second sentence:

"We are delighted to receive your assurance of August 12 (SAL/19—/731) that..."

When you write to government departments, however, it is useful to give the full reference in a separate line. Otherwise it may not get to the right desk. Clerks in government offices are rarely tempted to touch any letters which do not unmistakably guide themselves into their in-trays.

- ***Make your subject line very brief. It should not be a summary of the letter but an indication of what is in it.***
- ***Use references sparingly. Don't allow them to occupy the prime spot in a letter.***
- ***Don't label the subject or the reference. Labels such as 'Sub' and 'Ref' insult the reader's intelligence.***

# 3

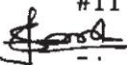
## The Tone Setters II

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SAMIR: Why have you ringed 'Thanking you' (#9)?

GURU: Let me ask you a counter question. Why have you ended your letter with 'Thanking you'?

S: That's how we end all our letters.

|                                                                   |                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>SWAN ENGINEERING LTD</b><br>122 Mannar Kottai, Chennai 600 061 |                                                                                                                  |
| #9 Thanking you,                                                  | #10 With warm regards<br>Yours sincerely<br>For Swan Engineering Ltd                                             |
| #12<br>cc : To Mr Sengupta                                        | #11<br><br>Manager (Purchase) |
| #13                                                               |                                                                                                                  |



G: Can you give me one good reason why 'thank you' should be there at the end of the letter? I bet you've done it unthinkingly. Or your secretary has put it in as part of the 'standard accessories'.

S: No, not at all. I want to make him feel good. Who will dislike an expression of gratitude?

G: Gratitude? Nonsense. It is a meaningless phrase found mostly in letters Indians write.

If the letter is to thank the addressee, that job should be done properly in the body of the letter, not in a lifeless, dangling phrase. If thanking the addressee is not the purpose of the letter, why tag that phrase on? When you get to the end of the letter, stop.

S: Aren't there cases where you ask for a favour and end the letter thanking him? You expect him to do you the favour or anticipate a favourable response. You must thank him before you sign off.

G: You mean 'thank you in anticipation'? Well, that loads insult on to an idiotic phrase. When you ask for a favour, how can you so plainly say that you expect it to be given? Write a separate letter of thanks *after* you have received the favour you asked for.

When you write a letter of appreciation or of gratitude, you might start thanking the addressee. You might then end it reiterating your gratitude. But when you do so, use a proper sentence such as 'Thank you very much' rather than a dangler like 'thank you'.

S: If the favour being asked for is very small or routine, sending a separate *thank you* note is out of proportion. It may even embarrass the reader.

G: I agree. In such cases you might want to end your letter with a simple expression of gratitude. But then personalise it a little. You might say something like 'Thank you very much indeed'. 'Thank you for your support', or 'Thank you for sparing your time'. Then the reader will know you mean it.

Avoid phrases and sentences which mean nothing. 'Thanking you' is an empty phrase now. It's a fixture which people have stopped noticing.

S: In that case 'yours sincerely' and 'yours faithfully' also appear to be empty phrases. Can I sign off without them?

G: You can. If you do, you won't be alone. There is, for instance, a move in the USA to get rid of such nonessentials and to make letters more businesslike.

30 The Craft of Business Letter Writing

The Administrative Management Society (AMS) of the USA recommends a simpler format it has developed.

In the AMS format there is no *salutation* nor *complimentary close*. The first sentence of the letter carries the salutation. So instead of:

**Dear Ms Kamle**

*Your request for a copy of our manual has come nearly four years after we discontinued our K-series of mixies. However...*

we have

*Your request for a copy of our manual, Ms Kamle, has come nearly four years after we discontinued our K-series of mixies. However...*

The letter ends with the writer's signature without a complimentary close.

S: I haven't seen it yet. Is the AMS format widely accepted?

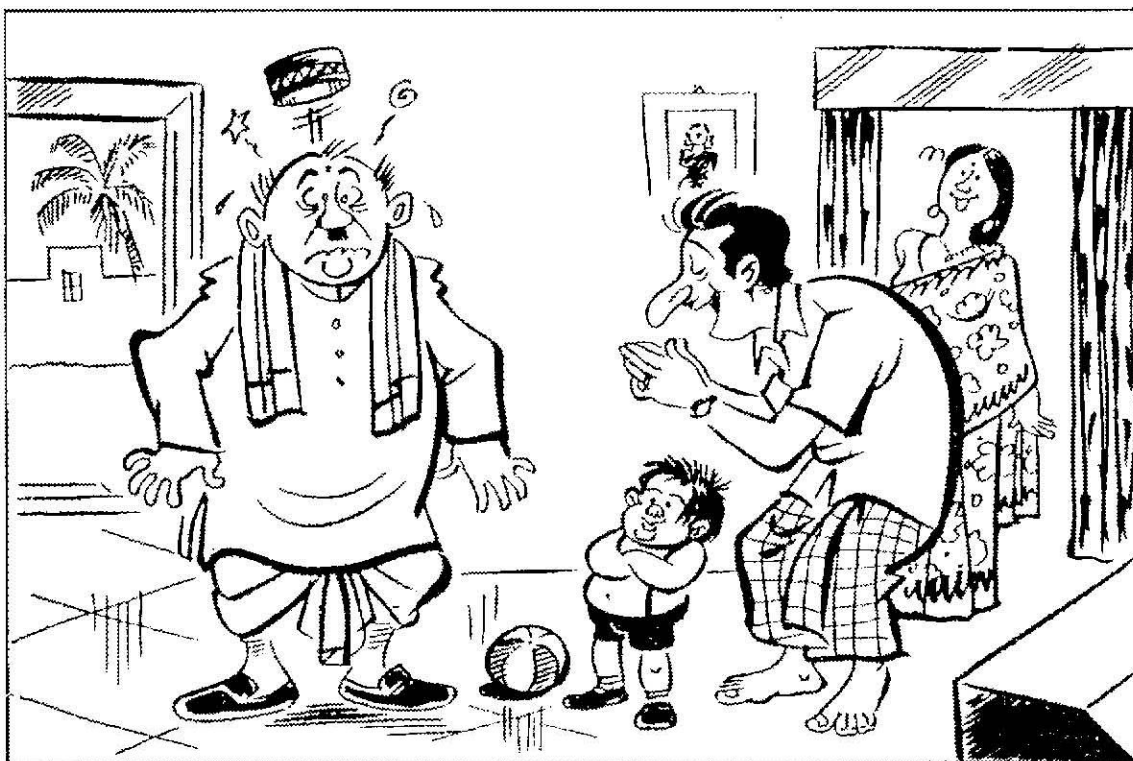
G: No. The simple reason may be that the salutation is like 'hello' and the complimentary close like 'good bye'. They may have become empty phrases, but they serve a purpose.

No matter how busy we are, we don't start talking to people without greeting them. Neither do we finish a conversation and go away without some form of leave-taking. So dropping the salutation and complimentary close perhaps appears to be too businesslike, too abrupt, and has failed to catch on.

I think it's good to have a complimentary close except perhaps in routine interoffice memos. But I won't be surprised if it eventually disappears, like the longish and servile expressions which were common a few years ago. I'm sure you remember seeing 'your most obedient servant, I remain'.

S: Sure. I see it occasionally even now.

G: Well, now tenants who refuse to vacate their rented houses can fruitfully use a variation of this phrase: 'your most devoted tenant, I remain.'



*"Yours faithfully I remain your tenant forever."*

Until better replacements arrive on the letter-writing scene, we had better use the mundane 'yours faithfully' and 'yours sincerely'.

S: What's the difference between the two? Can I use them freely?

G: 'Yours faithfully' is very formal. So it is all right in a letter which starts with the salutation, 'Dear Sir' or 'Dear Madam'.

'Yours sincerely' is less formal. It matches salutations such as 'Dear Mr Sen', 'Dear Mrs Gore', and 'Dear Professor Naik'.

When your business letter is very informal and you are on first name terms with your reader, you can end your letter with '(Yours) cordially'. You can also use '(Yours) sincerely'.

The salutation and the complimentary close indicate the tone and the relationship assumed between the reader and the writer. That is why it is important to use a matching complimentary close.



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S: I'm a bit confused. Can you go over the combinations again?

G: Sure. Here we are.

| Salutation            |   | Matching Complimentary Close |
|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Sir                   | ) |                              |
| Madam                 | ) |                              |
| Dear Sir              | ) | Yours faithfully             |
| Dear Sirs             | ) |                              |
| Dear Madam            | ) |                              |
| Ladies and Gentlemen  | ) |                              |
| Dear Mr Sen           | ) |                              |
| Dear Ms Apte          | ) | Yours sincerely              |
| Dear Dr Reddy         | ) |                              |
| Dear Professor Tiwari | ) |                              |
| Dear Preeti           | ) | (Yours) cordially            |
| Dear Vivek            | ) | (Yours) sincerely            |
| Dear PRS              | ) |                              |

S: You've put 'yours' in front of 'sincerely' and 'faithfully'. I've seen some letters where 'yours' comes after 'sincerely'. Which is better?

G: You can write 'Yours sincerely' or 'Sincerely yours'. Both are equally acceptable. The Americans tend to use 'Sincerely yours' while the British prefer 'Yours sincerely'.

With informal letters you can drop 'yours' if you wish. You can close the letter with 'Sincerely' or 'Cordially'.

S: How about dropping 'sincerely' and retaining 'yours'?

G: Not in a business letter! When standing alone 'yours' sounds too personal to be let into even informal business letters.

Once you leave the realm of business letters and go into personal letters, no one can tell you what is okay and what is not. Whether you start the letter with 'Usha dear' or 'Darling Usha' or sign off with 'yours for ever' or 'your very own' is entirely up to you.



- S: And to her also, I guess.
- G: Quite. But in a business letter certain norms have to be followed.
- S: Why haven't you said anything about 'regards'? I see many letters with this or a variant of this as the complimentary close. I always use 'with warm regards'. You've ringed it (# 10).
- G: I'm glad you've raised the issue. 'Regards' refers to friendly feelings. So if the tone of the letter is friendly and informal, there is no harm ending it with a phrase such as 'with best regards' and 'with warm regards'. 'With kind regards' is slightly more formal. It is best to avoid such phrases when your salutation is a formal 'Dear Sir' or 'Dear Madam'. They don't go together any more than a suit and bathroom slippers.
- By the way, do you switch off the mains and wear rubber gloves when you change a light bulb?
- S: Why do you ask that?
- G: You appear to be an overcautious man. In the signature block you write 'for Swan Engineering Ltd'.
- S: What's so odd about it?
- G: Nothing odd. Nothing wrong either. But do you really need it? When your letter is on your company's official stationery and you sign giving your designation, isn't it obvious that you are signing for the company? In most letters it is absolutely redundant. If you were a low level functionary or if a major financial commitment was made, you might like to have the additional protection of such a shield. Otherwise, avoid it. Get as close to the reader as you can.

- ***Do not end your letters routinely with 'thanking you'. It is a hollow phrase.***
- ***'Yours faithfully' matches formal salutations such as 'Dear Sir' and 'Dear Madam'.***
- ***'Yours sincerely' matches less formal salutations such as 'Dear Mr Ahmed' and 'Dear Ms Wadkar'.***
- ***'Sincerely' or 'Cordially' matches informal, first-name salutations such as 'Dear Kavita' and 'Dear Robert'.***
- ***Do not end a formal letter with 'regards', 'with warm regards' or a related variant.***

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G: Your signature (#11) is a very pretty one.

S: Thanks. I'm quite proud of it. You will never guess how long I practised to perfect it.

G: The signature tells the reader a great deal about the writer.

So it's a good idea to make it look like the way you want it.

There are pretty signatures and ugly ones; giant ones and pygmy ones, plain ones and ornate ones, bold ones and light ones, horizontal ones and slanting ones, legible ones and illegible ones...

S: Mine is illegible. And I want it that way.

G: Why?

S: I don't want anyone to forge my signature. That's why.

G: How you sign your name is your business. Make it as undecipherable as you like. But why do you play hide and seek with the reader?

S: I don't quite get what you mean.

G: Well, you're hiding behind that pretty but inscrutable signature. How will the reader know who you are? Who will he reply to? Nowhere in the letter do you mention your name.

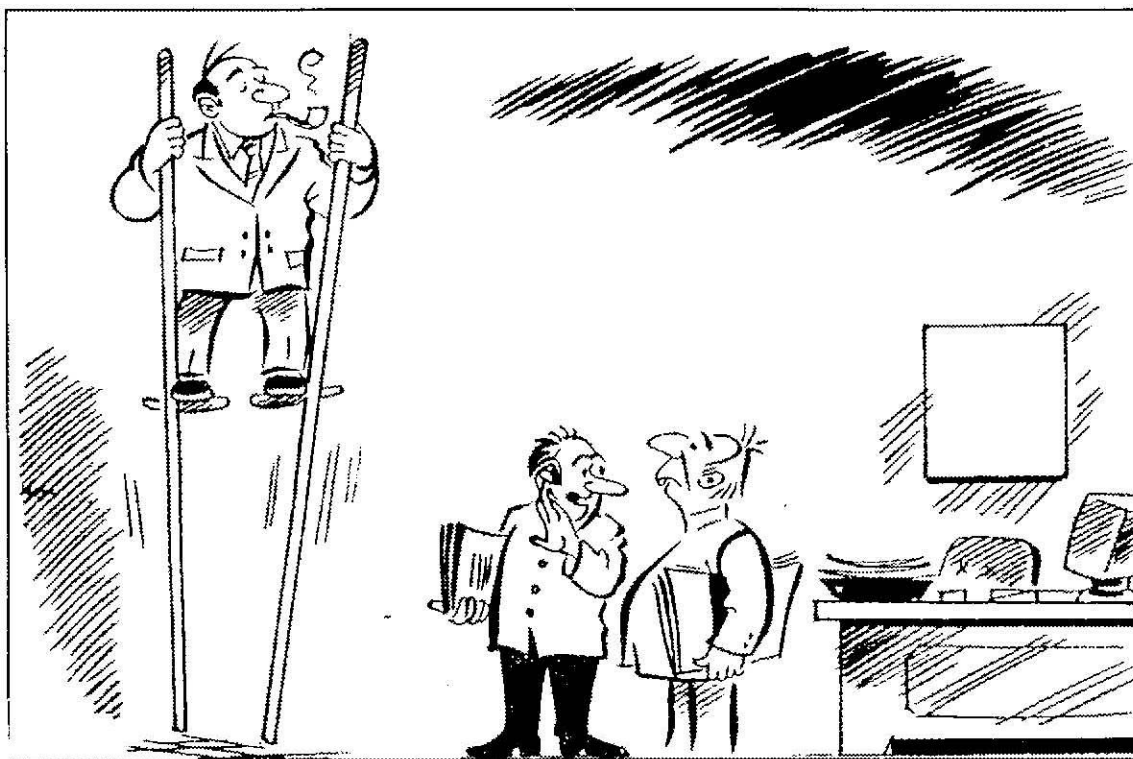
S: My designation is given there, below my signature. So he knows who to reply to.

G: Yes, of course. But how will he know whether you are a man or a woman? You have put on a mask, Samir. Take it off. Reveal yourself. Allow the reader to relate to you. He can't do it to a designation. He should know who you are for him to write a decent reply.

S: But even if I had 'S.N.Sinha' typed below my signature, he wouldn't know whether I am a man or woman. 'S' could stand for Seema, Sonya, or Susan. Perhaps I should write Mr S.N.Sinha?

G: No. Don't. Men don't use 'Mr' when they refer to themselves. It's best to give your full name, 'Samir N. Sinha'. That makes it easy for the reader.

But even if you don't reveal your first name, the reader can figure out whether you are a man or not. The convention is that when a name appears in such contexts without any courtesy title, it's a man's.



*"No one knows his name. We call him 'His Highness'."*

So 'P.R.Kaushik' will be treated as a man's name unless the letter 'P' is expanded unmistakably to a woman's name such as Priya, Prameela, or Priyadarshini.

- S: There are some first names which are given to both men and women: Kamal, Kiran, Mandeep, Navjot, and Suman, for example. Besides, a woman may not want to give out her first name in a business letter.
- G: There's a way out. She can write 'Ms' (or Miss or Mrs) in brackets either to the left or to the right of her name:

**(Ms) S.L. Nanda**  
**Suman L. Nanda (Ms)**  
**K.B.Munshi (Mrs)**  
**(Mrs) Kiran B. Munshi**

- S: Why brackets?



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G: Well, that is to show that she doesn't really want to refer to herself as 'Ms' or 'Mrs' but she is using it to indicate how she should be addressed. 'Ms' in brackets merely tells you that she is a woman.

S: I have received letters from people—men and women—who attach Dr to their names given below their signatures. Is it all right?

G: It's best to avoid even such earned titles when you write your own name. But if you feel that you should indicate your professional status to your reader in order to establish your credibility, do use those titles. Even there, it is good to put them in brackets. For example:

S.T. Venugopal (Dr)

(Dr, Ms) A.N. Ray

An alternative in such cases is to indicate the professional qualification. That need not be in brackets.

A.V.N. Pillai, Ph D

(Ms) P.L. Mukhopadhyay, MBBS

(Mrs) A.R. Rafat, MBBS

S: I think it's much better to give one's first name than to put 'Ms' in brackets.

G: I agree.

On the whole it's best to give the first name along with the surname unless there is a very good reason to hold it back. There is an element of vulnerability in such a revelation. But you can't have a meaningful relationship without being vulnerable.

S: I received a letter recently. The writer's name was typed but there was no signature.

G: That's an insult. It's your signature that makes it *your* letter even if it is drafted by someone else. Without your signature your letter is not authentic. You must ask your office never to send out your letters without your signature.

S: When I am away on tour or busy, can't I let my Assistant sign for me?

G: Don't! Except in an emergency.

Imagine that you are a guest at a party. You find that your host has gone away leaving it to an assistant or servant to 'look after the guests and to serve them'. How will you feel?



Annoyed? Insulted? Unless of course an emergency has taken him away at the last moment. Once you know that, you readily forgive him.

S: But I travel quite often. I don't like to delay replying to letters.

G: There's an easy way out. If the letters are purely routine and inconsequential, let your Assistant answer them on his own. If they are important and if the reply must go from you, let your Assistant or secretary send an acknowledgement in his own name. He can say you will write as soon as you are back.

If he feels that an important letter you have dictated or authorised should not wait until your return, he may sign it on your behalf and mail it. But he should add a hand-written note explaining the circumstance briefly.

S: There are times when I have to send scores of greetings cards. Do you suggest that I personally sign every single one of them?

G: Absolutely. Not just sign your name, but write (or have typed in) the recipient's name as well.

S: I don't have the time.

G: Then don't send the cards out! Cards with your rubber stamp don't fool anyone. A greetings card should make the recipients feel that you have thought of them. A rubber stamp convinces them that you have NOT thought of them.

If I get a greetings card with a rubber stamp even of the President of India, I won't feel flattered.

The old biblical advice is still valid: Do unto others what you would like them to do unto you.

- ***Never send out a letter without your signature.***
- ***Don't let your assistants sign your letters on your behalf except in cases of extreme urgency.***
- ***If your signature is not easily legible, have your name typed below it.***
- ***Spell out your first name unless you have a very good reason to hold it back from the receiver of your letter.***

S: Why have you put a circle round the line below the signature block (#12)? I've marked a copy to Mr Sengupta. That's all.

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G: Who is this Sengupta?

S: He is our Plant Manager.

G: How would your reader know that this Sengupta is your Plant Manager? What are his initials?

S: P.K.

G: Then you should write 'Mr P K Sengupta, Plant Manager - Swan Engineering'. Even 'cc: The Plant Manager, Swan Engineering' is okay. But not plain 'Mr Sengupta'.

So there are two things missing here. First, you have dropped the initials. That is all right when you call someone or when you refer to someone in a conversation, but not here.

Secondly, you haven't given the reader essential information about the person you have marked a copy to. The reader might wonder who he is and why a copy should go to him.

S: I see what you mean.

Tell me, what does 'cc' stand for? Does it mean 'complimentary copy'?

G: Not really. It stands for 'carbon copy'. In other words, it tells the reader that his copy contains exactly what is found in the original.

S: If 'cc' stands for carbon copy, we can't use it to refer to a photocopy, can we?

G: You can of course write 'pc' instead of 'cc' if it's a photocopy that you are sending to someone. However, there's no need to be so finicky. After all 'carbon copy' means an exact copy; that is what a photocopy is, too.

S: I think photocopies are neater than carbon copies.

G: And more legible. Don't send a third or fourth carbon copy to even your worst enemies. There are more civilized ways of torturing people.

These days computers have made it easy to produce excellent copies.

S: You mean additional print-outs of the same letter?

G: Yes.

S: But they cost more than photocopies.

- G: Yes, they do. I am not suggesting that we banish carbon copies and photocopies. They are more than enough for internal consumption. When a copy of your letter goes to another firm, why not have a neat print-out of the letter on your letterhead?
- S: Then 'cc' and 'pc' are both out of place!
- G: There's a way out. Just write: 'Copy: Mr B N Melkote...' That goes well with all copies—photocopies and carbon copies—except blind copies.
- S: Oh! What are blind copies? Never heard of them.
- G: You write 'bc' or 'blind copy' on a copy sent to a person without the other readers of the letter being told about it.
- S: I'm not sure I've got it.
- G: Imagine that you are writing to Mr Krishna Murthy with a copy to Mr Sengupta. You will indicate on the original, on Mr Sengupta's copy, and on the office copy:

*Copy: Mr P K Sengupta ...*

Suppose you want to send Mrs Chikodi a copy but don't want either Mr Krishna Murthy or Mr Sengupta to know that. You get an extra copy and send it to her with the notation, "*Blind copy: Mrs S.V. Chikodi.*"

- S: Why such formality? Isn't it enough to just post her a copy?
- G: I'm afraid not. Mrs Chikodi should know that Mr Murthy and Mr Sengupta are not aware of a copy being sent to her. Your office copy also should carry accurate information on who has received what type of copy.
- S: That, I guess, is a hedge against possible embarrassment from unintentional references and revelations.
- G: Yes, precisely.
- If Mrs Chikodi doesn't realize that hers is a blind copy, she might casually talk about the content to Mr Murthy or Mr Sengupta, and puzzle them. It may embarrass them or you, the writer.
- S: I understand. But I am puzzled by your last circle (#13). There's nothing in it. Should there be something there which I have missed out?
- G: Yes. The word 'enclosure' or 'encl.' In the body of the letter, you say that you have enclosed a tentative estimate of monthly requirements of steel strips.





**A blind copy!**

S: Aha! Here aren't you going against your own recommendation? Isn't that yet another case of redundancy? You ridicule labels such as 'date', 'subject', 'ref' and 'reg', don't you? That an estimate is enclosed is clearly mentioned in the body of the letter. Why mention that again at the bottom of the letter?

G: It's a precaution. It alerts your secretary and your Despatch Section. It also alerts the reader.

You should ask your secretary and your Despatch Section to check for the word 'Enclosure' at the bottom of the letter before the envelope is sealed. It is not enough to mention it somewhere in the body of the letter. The letter may go without the enclosure you promise.

S: Should I write what exactly is enclosed?

G: That is not essential. If, however, you can say so in a word or two, there is no harm.



*Enclosure: Cheque for Rs 2850*  
*Encl: Brochure*

S: How about 'Enclosure: a/a'? That makes it clear that the enclosure is 'as advised' in the body of the letter.

G: If the enclosure is 'as advised' in the letter, why state the obvious? Just write 'Enclosure'.

If you enclose, say, three things, you will do well to write: 'Enclosures: 3'. The aim is to make sure that the reader does not miss anything you've promised to enclose.

- ***When you mark a copy of your letter to someone, make sure it is neat and legible. Photocopies or additional print-outs of letters are better than carbon copies.***
- ***If a blind copy of a letter is sent to someone, that information should be clearly shown on that copy and on the office copy.***
- ***If there are enclosures, say so at the bottom of the page.***

S: Now that you've talked about all the parts of a business letter, can we move on to the body of the letter?

G: Not yet. We haven't talked about the layout. Your typist can save at least three minutes a letter if she follows a different layout.

S: Frankly I've never linked layout of letters and typing time. I've left it to typists. What's the layout you are talking about?

G: It's called the block format. It's quite simple. All the lines including the reference number, date, salutation, subject line, body, complimentary close, and signature are aligned to the left margin. No lines are indented. So the letter looks like a block.

If we convert your letter to the block format with the changes I have suggested, it will look like this:

**SWAN ENGINEERING LTD**

122 Mannar Kottai, Chennai 600 061

SWAN/PUR/821

November 2, 19 \_\_\_\_

**Mr G Krishna Murthy**

Manager (Sales)

Minar Steels Ltd

55 Green Hills

HYDERABAD 500 086

**Dear Mr Murthy**

**STEEL STRIPS : DELAY IN SUPPLY**

Body of the letter

Yours sincerely

**SAMIR N SINHA**

Manager (Purchase)

Copy: Mr P.K.Sengupta, Plant Manager, Swan Engineering

Enclosure

- S: It looks smart. I agree it will save the typist's time. He doesn't have to keep track of indentation. But doesn't it take up more space than the standard one? The address is typed below the date and reference. In the standard layout the date and reference are typed to the right of the address without taking up extra lines.
- G: You're right. There is, however, nothing sacred about the block layout. If the body runs into three or four paragraphs and space is at a premium, push the date and reference to the right hand side. If the body is very small, the block layout will make it look bigger by filling up the page.
- S: Are the first lines of paragraphs also aligned to the left margin?
- G: Yes. Every single line in the letter.
- S: Aren't we supposed to signal the start of a paragraph by indenting the first line by five spaces?
- G: Well, fashions and expectations change. Normally paragraphs have their first lines indented. But in the block format the start of a new paragraph is shown by an extra blank space between paragraphs.
- S: I also notice that there are no punctuation marks after the salutation and the complimentary close. Aren't we supposed to have a comma after these? Shouldn't there be a full stop at the end of the inside address?
- G: Whatever the traditional expectations, all nonessential punctuation marks are dropped in the block format.
- S: You have dropped the full stop from the word 'Mr'. Is dropping punctuation marks part of the block format?
- G: Not really. 'Mr' doesn't need a full stop at the end wherever you use it. Neither do Mrs, Dr, Ms, or Miss.
- S: But they are short forms of longer words, aren't they?
- G: Yes and no. 'Miss' is a full word, not cut out of a bigger word. The others are shorter versions. But look at the way they are made shorter. The first and last letters are retained; the letters dropped are from the middle. You don't use a full stop at the end of such short forms.

When the last few letters are chopped off to make a word shorter, the full stop is generally used: Professor >Prof.; February > Feb.; reference > ref.

On the whole the block format aims to make typing easier. That is why many traditional punctuation marks are dropped.

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S: Is the block format widely accepted?

G: Yes. It is used widely the world over. It is increasingly being adopted by Indian firms. I don't think anyone would find the block format objectionable. It's smart and functional.

- ***Adopt the block format. It looks smart and businesslike. It also saves typing time.***
- ***In the block format every single line is aligned to the left margin. Nonessential punctuation marks are dropped.***



## *The Secrets of Smart Letters*



4. KISS
5. Write as you Speak
6. Tickle the Reader's Ego



# 4

## KISS!

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- G: I see you have invested in a computer and a new, attractive letterhead.
- S: And a new secretary as well. She's efficient and sensible. I've taken your advice about the looks of letters.
- G: That's very good. But that is only the first step. Now take a closer look at this letter which you have just passed on to your secretary. It looks like a draft for your Marketing Manager.
- S: Ah, yes, it's a draft for our new Marketing Manager. He's a friend, and so he asked me to draft an impressive letter for potential customers. As he's just settling down, I agreed to do it. I've been with Swan Engineering for several years. So I know a lot about our products. But where did you get it from?
- G: I snatched it from your secretary as she was folding it and putting it into an envelope. What a letter! It is twice as long as it should be. And in spite of the torrent of words, I can't get your meaning or purpose. You did not KISS.
- S: Kiss? Kiss whom? You mean kiss ... her?
- G: Oh no. KISS is the most basic rule of effective business letter writing: Keep It Short & Simple.
- S: Oh, I thought... Well, but this letter is just two pages.
- G: Two pages is too long. Few executives will care to wade through two pages of verbiage. They get bored or put off. They are likely to flip fat letters into the waste bin or mark them to their subordinates. If you want to catch the senior executive's attention, keep your letters brief and crisp.

S: I don't think there's anything flabby in this letter.

G: Let's go over it. You have written:

We are pleased to introduce ourselves as a leading manufacturer, exporter, and importer of electrical appliances and industrial electronic components. Set up in 1985 and currently with an annual turnover of Rs 81 crore, we manufacture a variety of electrical appliances. Currently we employ about 200 workers in our modern plant situated at Pune, Maharashtra. We also have a strong sales network in Southern, Western, and Central India. Besides marketing water heaters, toasters, irons, washing machines, and ovens under our own well-known brand name, *Swan*, we also manufacture a variety of elements for several leading companies. We can use our spare capacity to manufacture for others elements and other electrical parts to their specifications.

Among the national companies which buy from or import electrical/electronic components through us are Vikram Lites, Superheet, and Hot Pot. If you need elements for your electrical irons, ovens, and heaters, it will be a pleasure for us to send our Technical Director to you for a comprehensive discussion of terms, conditions, quality, and prices. Our Import Department also can meet your requirements of supply of electrical and electronic components. Our manufacturing unit in Pune started production about ten years ago.

At that time we had only one product: electric iron elements. Within two years we added water heater elements and oven elements. By 1988 we established *Swan*, our own brand of electrical appliances. We also started import of industrial electronic components especially from South-east Asia.

We can import virtually any electronic component of any leading company in the world within three weeks. Our prices are competitive because we import the components direct from the manufacturers abroad. The electrical appliances we manufacture also are competitively priced. This is because our modern machinery and trained workers guarantee high productivity. And now we are thinking of exports of electrical appliances to various African countries where there is a very good demand for them. In addition to exporting our own make under a new brand name, *Omega*, we are also considering exporting brands of other manufacturers of electrical appliances.

Our studies indicate that there is a very good market in many African countries for electric ovens and toasters. If you wish to have your products exported...

Tell me, what exactly is your purpose?

S: It's obvious, isn't it? I want to impress them with our range of products and services and to get them to buy our elements—we have plenty of spare



capacity, you see—or to import electronic components or to export their electrical appliances through us. We are a leading manufacturer and we...

- G: Hold it. You have too many objectives and too many details. You haven't thought through them either to restrict them intelligently or to order your thoughts properly. You just ramble on assuming that the reader will hang on your every word. When we write, how easily we forget the way we read!

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One Sunday President Coolidge attended church without his wife. When he returned to the White House she asked him the subject of the sermon. "Adultery," said the President. "What did he say about it?" she persisted. Coolidge thought for a moment. "He was against it," he reported finally.

\_\_\_\_\_ Bennett Cerf, *Try and Stop Me*, 1947  
From Frank S Pepper, **20th Century Anecdotes**, Sphere, 1990: 402

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Forget for a moment that you drafted that letter. Now ask yourself how you would read that letter if you received it from some other firm. Are you likely to plod through it carefully? Are you likely to read it again and again like a first love letter? You know how pressed for time you always are. So are the managers you write to. Your letter must therefore be **SHORT** and **SIMPLE** if you want them to read it with attention, and to respond to it immediately.

- S: How can I make it short when I have many things to say?
- G: The trick is to plan it well.
- S: Writing letters is not my only job, Guru! I can't afford to spend all my time planning and revising letters. I have several letters to draft every day apart from other things. How much time can I spend on any one letter?
- G: All right. But suppose your letter doesn't get you a response because it is badly written? Or suppose it gets you a response which is quite different from what you want? Whatever time you've spent on that letter will be wasted. Goodwill may be squandered. Suppose you have to write a second letter because the first one has merely managed a request for clarification?

Don't forget every letter that leaves your firm costs you a lot of money too. The postage and stationery make up just a fraction of the real cost. A letter that fails to interest the reader or worse still, a letter that annoys them is a big drain on your resources.

Imagine that a letter which you have received does not make sense. How will you react? Won't you get annoyed? If you do, you may throw it into the

waste bin. Surely you don't want such a fate for your letters. So, you have to take time to plan your letters. You don't really save time by skipping the planning stage. As I said earlier, lack of planning makes letters not only difficult to read but also irritatingly lengthy.

S: But you will agree, won't you, that planning takes up quite a lot of time.

G: It need not. Except in very difficult cases. Let me give you a few simple questions which you can ask yourself as you draft your letter.

WHY am I writing this letter? (Is it to persuade? To impress? To apologise?)

WHO is going to read this letter? (What is his/her status in his/her organisation? How much background information does (s)he have? What might be his/her attitude to what I'm going to say?)

WHAT should I put into the letter? (What does the reader need to know? What can I omit?)

HOW should I organize the ideas? (In what order should I put the main ideas?)

WHAT TONE should I use? (What words should I use/omit in order to create the right tone?)

- ***Executives won't plod through long letters. So make your letters trim and attractive if you want their immediate attention.***
- ***Planning is the key to drafting smart letters.***
- ***Planning is simple if you ask yourself five questions:***
  - Why am I writing?***
  - Who am I writing to?***
  - What should I put in?***
  - How should I sequence the ideas?***
  - What tone should I use?***

If you pause for a little while before you draft or dictate a letter and ask yourself these five questions, you can plan it pretty well. If you don't ask these questions, you may put in things you don't really need to and drop ideas that you must put in. Your tone might turn out to be unwelcome, too.

S: Shall we get back to my letter? I did not really ask myself these questions. I see that the letter is somewhat lengthy. With a little bit of planning, I should be able to trim it. But I don't think planning would help me make the letter

simpler or clearer. In fact there is nothing in the letter which is difficult to understand.

- G: You are quite right. In your letter, there is no idea which is difficult to grasp. The words you have used are simple and common, and so are easy to understand. The problem is with the organisation of your ideas. They don't link up logically. Your paragraphs have no unity. Instead of focusing on one idea in each paragraph, you talk about many things. You flit here and there, at times repeating yourself. Naturally the reader's mind wanders.

It is lack of focus that has made your letter too long. Let us go over your letter and plan it together. Let us see how you can achieve both clarity and brevity. What did you say were your objectives? In other words, WHY are you writing this letter?

- S: I want Luminatronics Ltd to buy our elements. I would like them to import electronic components through us, and export their products through us. I would also like to impress on them that we are a strong, reliable company supplying to various big names in the country.

- G: If we want clarity, we have to separate the major objective from the minor ones. We should also separate the main idea from the supporting ones and the irrelevant ones. WHAT is your main objective?

- S: To get them to buy our elements.

- G: WHO, do you think, will read your letter?

- S: The people in the Purchase Department of Luminatronics Ltd, I guess.

- G: Do they know about your firm? What is likely to be their attitude?

- S: I am not sure that they know about us. But I'm sure they will be interested in our offer. Which firm wouldn't want a steady supply of quality components at competitive prices?

- G: WHAT do you think will interest them or persuade them to buy your elements? That you started production ten years ago?

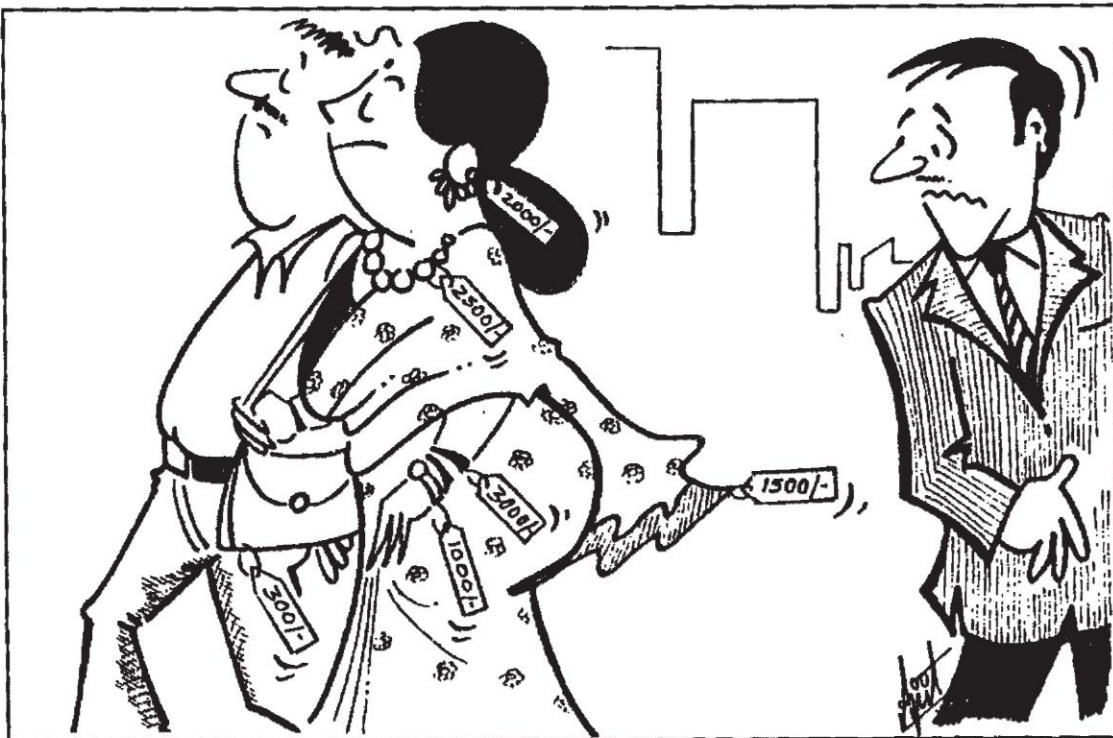
- S: Oh no. That's of little use. They might be impressed favourably by our state-of-the-art Japanese machinery and our small, well-trained workforce. They might develop confidence in us if they come to know that we supply elements to leading companies such as Hot Pot, Superheet, and Vikram Lites.



- ***Separate your major objectives from minor ones if you want to make your letters clear.***
- ***Link up ideas logically.***
- ***Have just one main idea in a paragraph. Every sentence in it should support that idea.***

G: Good. Your other objective is to get them to use your export and import services. And what aspects of your services are likely to be attractive to them?

S: We import directly from foreign manufacturers; so our rates are competitive. Our contacts and network are so good that we can guarantee supply within three weeks. As to the export services, our main claim to attention is that we have established a strong presence in the fast growing African market. It is lucrative because there are very few local manufacturers and the quality specifications in those countries are easier to meet than those in Europe and in the US.



***"Your class has to be suggested indirectly."***



G: Good. Now it's fairly clear how we should order our ideas. Let's have just one main idea in a paragraph. Let's not put in anything that doesn't support that idea. Let's also order the ideas in such a way that the sequence is logical.

Let's get into the main idea without any unbusinesslike preliminaries and beating about the bush. Let's mercilessly cut out any idea that does not support your objective. How about your description of the genesis of your company? Does it support your objective?

S: Not really.

G: Then cut it out. How about your self-introduction as "a leading manufacturer of electrical appliances"?

S: We need it to project our image as a major player.

G: No. It's pompous and pointless. The tone isn't right. If you are a leading manufacturer, they will know it. If you are not, bestowing that fancy title on yourselves will not convince them. On the contrary, it may put them off. Your class has to be suggested indirectly, not proclaimed from the housetop.

S: We have been putting that claim into almost all the first letters we write to companies.

G: Well, let's cut it out and plunge into your main idea. It's also vital that we start with a sentence that captures the reader's interest. Something that is relevant to the reader's needs and concerns is usually a good bet. I've often found questions to be good openers. Let's try a question. Something like this:

Would you like a steady supply of superior quality elements for your popular electric heaters, ovens, and toasters?

Having aroused their interest with an indirect promise in the form of a question, and a gentle touch of flattery, you can go on to say how you can manage it.

Latest Japanese machinery operated by a lean and well-trained workforce has enabled us to supply elements that meet the exacting standards of leading firms such as Hot Pot, Superheet, and Vikram Lites. We will be happy to supply elements to you also.

The first paragraph is about your ability and willingness to supply quality elements. There is nothing in it that distracts the reader and clouds the main idea. You have suggested your class gently by dropping the names of some of your *Upper Class* customers.

S: Shouldn't we give a detailed picture of the company? It's our first letter.

G: All detailed information about the company should be put into an attractive brochure. That can be sent to different kinds of potential customers. It can also present a lot more information in a far more attractive way than a few lines in a letter can.

S: I feel a visit to them by our Technical Director would be more useful than a brochure.

G: Why not combine both? How about:

The enclosed brochure gives you a fairly clear idea of our manufacturing capacity, standards of quality, and awards received in recent years. We would, however, like to send you, on a date that is convenient for you, our Technical Director, Mr Hameed Ahsan. He will give you a comprehensive picture and answer any queries you may have.

Here we draw the reader's attention to the brochure. We also try to get the reader to say 'Yes' to our suggestion that we send him our Technical Director.

S: Now I can perhaps introduce our export and import services. Even if they don't want our elements, they may be interested in imports or exports.

G: Quite. Let's add a couple of short paragraphs.

When Mr Ahsan meets you, he will also brief you on our export and import services. We can import virtually any electronic component from anywhere in the world within three weeks. Our rates are competitive because we import directly from foreign manufacturers.

We have also established a strong presence in the fast growing African market. We can arrange for export of your appliances to that part of the world where there are few local manufacturers and where quality requirements are not as stringent as in Europe and in the US.

Now let *them* ask for more information; then you can give it to them. Your letter is successful if your message is clear and if it has aroused the reader's interest.

You can conclude the letter with a hint that you mean business.

May I call you about 10 am next Thursday (17 November) to fix an appointment for our Technical Director to visit you?

S: Isn't that going too far? Suppose he is out of town on Thursday?

G: Then he will ask a colleague or a deputy to take the call. If his interest is sufficiently aroused, he may even call you up before that, if he is not going to be available when you call.

It is a good idea to end your letter with a call for action if that is your main objective. Make it easy for the reader to say 'Yes'. Here the action you propose—telephoning the reader—is your own. At times the action expected may be the reader's. Either way it should be something definite, something that doesn't leave the reader in doubt.

S: Can we go over the text of our letter once again?

G: Sure.



Would you like a steady supply of superior quality elements for your popular electric heaters, ovens, and toasters?

Latest Japanese machinery operated by a lean and well-trained workforce has enabled us to supply elements that meet the exacting standards of leading firms such as Hot Pot, Superheet, and Vikram Lites. We will be happy to supply elements to you also.

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When Mr Ahsan meets you, he will also brief you on our export and import services. We can import virtually any electronic component from anywhere in the world within three weeks. Our rates are competitive because we import directly from foreign manufacturers.

We have also established a strong presence in the lucrative and fast growing African market. We can arrange for export of your appliances to that part of the world where there are few local manufacturers and where quality requirements are not as stringent as in Europe and in the US.

May I call you about 10 am next Thursday (17 November) to fix an appointment for our Technical Director to visit you?

Now how many words is it?

S: About 270.

G: That's just one half of your version. And twice as clear. This is the way to make your letters brief. Cut out any idea that is irrelevant or nonessential.

S: How do we judge what is essential and what is not?

G: It's determined by your objective. Don't spell out everything. Don't underestimate the reader's intelligence.

S: Won't a very brief letter appear to be abrupt and rude?





***Make it easy for the reader to say 'yes'.***

- G: Well, don't be too brief! You may baffle your reader or put him off by appearing to be abrupt. But inane verbiage is the usual problem, not extreme brevity.

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Once George Bernard Shaw was introduced to an audience and invited to speak on sex. He stood up and began: "It gives me great pleasure." And then he sat down.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Source not known)

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In his *The Art of Readable Writing* published nearly half a century ago, Rudolf Flesch gives an apt illustration of the contrast between profligacy and brevity in letter writing. He had written to several writers and publishers for permission to quote in that book brief passages from their writings. A textbook publishing company's reply began like this.

Dear Mr Flesch:

We have your letter of July 21 and note that it is your intention to include in your book on modern English prose style, to be published by Harper & Brothers under the title *The Art of Plain Talk*—a few brief passages from our *Wirth's Development of America*.

This single sentence paragraph of fifty words is totally unnecessary, according to Dr Flesch. Why give the writer of a letter its summary when you write the reply? He knows what he wants and what he has asked for in his letter. A direct or even indirect reference to the letter received would generally be more than enough. Commenting on that reply, Dr Flesch says: "After reading those fifty words, I knew exactly as much as before". He then gives the reply from an author who returned Dr Flesch's own letter with these handwritten words on it:

*By all means  
J.D. Ratcliff*

"Naturally you can't always follow Mr Ratcliff's method in your correspondence, but the basic principle is sound," adds Dr Flesch. "Say what you have to say and then stop."

S: Won't we offend people if we send back their letters with our reply scribbled on them?

G: Perhaps yes. But that is because that doesn't follow the convention in correspondence between firms. It is, however, quite common for internal memos. Now that most offices have their own photocopiers, this method can be adopted without sacrificing the need to keep a record of all correspondence. You write in (or type in) your reply on the letter you have received, get a photocopy of it, and send back the original. Instead of filing their letter and your reply, you file just one sheet which contains both the letters. That takes exactly half the shelf space! In fact many firms are doing it already with fax. They get a quotation, for instance, by fax. The acceptance is written in on it and faxed back.

*Think of the amount of secretarial time saved. You save on stationery too. Once this method catches on, no one will take offence. So perhaps you could start trying it out when you send no-risk or low-risk replies.*

S: What length would you recommend for a business letter?

- G: You might as well ask, "What is the right length of a skirt?" Seriously, the 'right length' varies from letter to letter.

But here is a rule of thumb. Except in extraordinary circumstances, a letter should not exceed a page (A4 size). This self-imposed restriction will force you to think hard and plan your letter so well that clarity is ensured. Moreover, comprehension is easier when the whole of a letter can be seen at a glance. The danger of a part of the letter getting detached and lost can be eliminated, too, if there is only one page.

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An American wrote to Rudyard Kipling, "I hear you are retailing literature for a dollar a word. I enclose a dollar for which please send me a sample." Keeping the dollar, Kipling wrote, 'Thanks'.

The story goes that shortly afterwards Kipling received another letter: "Sold the 'Thanks' anecdote for two dollars. Enclosed please find 45 cents in stamps, being half the profit on the transaction, less postage."

\_\_\_\_\_ Edmund Fuller, *Anecdotes*, 1942  
in F.S. Pepper *20th Century Anecdotes*, Sphere 1990: 155

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- S: Most routine letters can be fitted into a single page. But it is often difficult, almost impossible, to put into a single page everything you want to say in a special letter.

- G: Yes, I agree. If one page is not enough to say what you must, see if you can move some paragraphs to an appendix or an enclosure. Let the reader go to it or get an assistant to study it if he is interested in detailed information. Putting it into the body of the letter will weaken the impact.

It is said that Lee Iacocca, the legendary Chief Executive of Chrysler, never read any reports or letters which were longer than a page. His deputies invariably converted reports into one-page beauties to make them presentable to him.

In 1891, Winston Churchill sent the First Lord of the Admiralty a memo asking for a major report in one page: "Pray state this day, on one side of a sheet of paper how the Royal Navy is being adapted to meet the conditions of modern warfare." That must have been quite a feat.

There are far more unplanned and unpruned letters than people imagine. Here's a letter from a transformer company (Sweta Transformers Ltd) to a senior director of the Confederation of Engineering Industry. It's about a foreigner's visit. Read it and see if we couldn't make it much shorter without sacrificing any important ideas.



**Dear Sir**

*VISIT OF MR ENRICO VITTORIO OF ELETTRIMAX, SPAIN*

Please refer to your Letter No. A 9(b)/4738, dated 28 September 19—, giving the feedback received from Mr Sathe.

1. As explained to Mr Vittorio at Delhi our factory was under lockout and hence, we could not arrange a factory visit. For your information, we may mention that the factory is still under lockout.

2. Regarding our capabilities & performance, we are sending detailed write-up and supporting documentation to Mr Vittorio.

In this context we wish to inform you that we have handed over following details regarding our company during the discussions at Delhi.

- \* Company profile
- \* Catalogues
- \* Balance Sheet
- \* List of Major Machinery
- \* List of Test Equipment
- \* List of Export Orders executed/under execution
- \* List of orders executed in India.

During the meeting Mr Vittorio wanted the prices of 11 ratings of transformers (ranging from 63 kVa 1000 kVa). The specifications and technical parameters of transformers are different from the specifications of transformers in India and hence we could not give our quotation instantly. You would appreciate the fact that it is not possible to give an estimate without making detailed designs and calculations.

3. We had discussed also the details of a winding machine with Mr Vittorio. We are studying the cost benefit analysis of the machine and shall inform our decision to Mr Vittorio later.

4. To begin with we are [not?] contemplating any participation or technology transfer from M/s Elettromax. We wish to get the cooperation of M/s Elettromax in selling our transformers to Europe. Mr Vittorio has given the specifications of transformers up to 1000 kVa and we are submitting our detailed offer during this week. We shall also quote for specific requirements in future. We are confident of offering competitive prices when compared to the prices in the European market.

5. We shall send advance information and details of discussion points to M/s Elettromax before we plan a visit to them.



Our main objective is to offer our transformers primarily to Spain through M/s Elettromax. Based on our experience in exports, we are confident that our prices will be competitive. We request you to pay special attention to this aspect and follow up with M/s Elettromax.

Thanking you, we are,

Yours faithfully, for Sweta Transformers Ltd

(K.R. Dwivedi)

Technical Director

Shall we try and trim it? Can you pick out the essential points from this letter?

S: This is essentially a report on Mr Vittorio's visit. So we have to include points like the following:

- \* **Because of a lockout Mr Vittorio couldn't be taken to the factory**
- \* He has been given a comprehensive picture of what the company is doing
- \* Quotations could not be given to Mr Vittorio because detailed calculations were needed
- \* The company does not want to buy technology from Elettromax; it wants to **sell its transformers through Elettromax.**

G: That's fine. The order is okay, too. So here is a shorter and clearer version.

**Dear Sir**

**VISIT OF MR ENRICO VITTORIO OF ELETTRONAX, SPAIN**

Thank you for writing to us (your letter No.A 9(b)/4738 of September 28, 19—) about the feedback given by Mr Sathe.

We would have been happy to take Mr Vittorio to our factory; but it was under a lock-out. However, during our discussions with him in Delhi we gave him a comprehensive picture of our company including domestic and international orders already executed, and being executed. Mr Vittorio wanted our prices for eleven ratings of transformers ranging from 55 kVa to 1000 kVa. These we could not supply immediately

because detailed calculations were needed for making a proper estimate. We are sending our quotation to him later this week.

We are not planning to buy technology from Elettromax. Rather, we would like to sell our transformers in Spain and the rest of Europe through Elettromax. Our prices are competitive in the domestic market. We are confident that they will be competitive in the European market also.

I thank you for bringing Sweta and Elettromax together. We hope you will continue to give us your valuable help.

Faithfully yours

**(K.R.Dwivedi)**

Technical Director

S: Now it easily fits into one page. And it is very clear.

G: Lack of planning produces many monstrosities. Like this one from a well known company in Bombay.

**Dear Sirs**

We have a pulp plant in the outskirts of Bombay. We are supplying pulp in the form of slurry to an adjacent fibre plant through a pipeline.

Prior to the prolonged labour strike we had from July 1985 to October 1988, we used to pump slurry through rubber-lined mild steel pipelines. Since the pipes got very much corroded during the closure period, we thought of changing the same to H.D.P.E pipeline on the basis of recommendations that H.D.P.E pipeline is more superior and better for transporting pulp slurry of 2 to 2.5 pH.

Accordingly we had invited quotations from various parties including M/s Chemical Industries, 15, Tilak Road, Pune-5 having their Works at Pune-Sholapur Highway, Daund in Maharashtra, who claimed that they are familiar with H.D.P.E. pipeline system and that they had their earlier experience in P.I.L. Based on their quotation, we placed order with them.

Unfortunately we have a very bad experience of H.D.P.E. pipeline installed by them. To our utter dismay, the 250 OD 6 kg/cm<sup>2</sup> pressure rated pipeline supplied by them started cracking almost from the first day of its installation, even when the pressure was below 4 kg/cm<sup>2</sup>.

In spite of carrying out various repairs, the breakages were continuing in an uncontrollable manner and ultimately we are forced to replace the H.D.P.E pipeline with rubber-lined steel pipeline.

During the recent visit of shri V.G.Apte in Bombay on some other assignment, we were informed that you have excellent facilities for testing the H.D.P.E. pipes and that you would be in a position to give us an independent opinion about the quality of pipes supplied by M/s Chemical Industries, Pune.

We therefore, request you to kindly let us know whether you can undertake the testing of the pipes, and if so, the quantity, length and the place where the sample pipes are to be despatched. Needless to mention that we shall be bearing your charges for the testing etc.

Your early reply in the matter will be highly appreciated.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,

**R.K.Bhat**

Manager, Operations.

Well, what do you think of it? Can you trim it?

S: I feel that the story about how they came to have HDPE pipes is totally unnecessary.

G: You're quite right. Let's try and redraft it.

This is all we need:

**Dear Mr . . .**

We understand from Mr V.G. Apte that you have excellent facilities for testing HDPE pipes. Could you possibly test some of our pipes? We urgently need an independent evaluation of the quality of the HDPE pipes we are using for transporting pulp slurry.

If you can do it, please let me know what lengths of pipes should be sent where, and what the approximate charges would be.

Yours sincerely



A little planning has transformed it, hasn't it?

S: Yes. It's crisp and clear now. The reader doesn't need any more details to respond to it.

G: Wordiness can be seen in many of the letters on your file also. Here are a few samples.

"We wish to bring to your kind notice that we had booked an air-conditioned double room in your hotel for two days, that is, on 12th and 13th October 19—"

What the writer wants to say doesn't need so many words. The sentence can be trimmed to half its size. How about:

"We had booked an air-conditioned double room in your hotel for October 12 and 13, 19—."

S: But you've made the sentence too abrupt, almost impolite, haven't you?

G: Far from it. You feel so because you see the flabby version far too often in business letters. If you want to bring something to someone's notice, just bring it to their notice. Don't waste half a dozen words introducing it. Here are a few more of wasteful phrases I've found in your file:

- (1) "With reference to your above cited letter we wish to inform you that ..."
- (2) "This is for your kind information, please."
- (3) "You are requested to please arrange for ..."
- (4) "Your communication has been received in this office and the contents noted carefully. I am pleased to inform you that it has been acted upon."
- (5) "Further to our teleconversation yesterday, I confirm the following terms and conditions which we discussed at length."

S: With due respect to you, I feel that you're unreasonably harsh. "With reference to ..." is a standard phrase which makes it quite clear to the reader what the writer is going to talk about.



- G: But just reflect for a moment. The reference number is mentioned. There's also the subject line just after the salutation. Will there be any doubt whatsoever what you are referring to? We need to use " with reference to ..." only when you refer to something—a letter or an order or a conversation—which is not already cited. In ninety-five per cent of the letters in which you find "with reference to ...", that phrase is absolutely redundant. Rather like a thick layer of unwanted fat on one's midriff.
- S: All right, all right. How about the other phrases? You would want to get rid of stuff like "We wish to inform you..." and "This is for your kind information," wouldn't you?
- G: Quite right. You are catching on. In fact it doesn't need any great intellectual effort to see the absurdity of such phrases. Just a little reflection is all that is needed. You can, for instance, write instead of (4) and (5):

"Thank you for your letter [or fax or telex ]. We have already acted on it."  
"I confirm the following terms and conditions which we discussed on the phone yesterday."

A very short letter can at times have tremendous impact. Have you heard of the Lacedaemonians of Laconia? Philip of Macedon sent them a threatening letter: "If I enter Laconia you shall be exterminated." They wrote back just one word:

"IF".

#### **How to KISS**

- **Before dictating, ask yourself these five questions: Why? Who to? What? How? What tone?**
- **Jot down the main points and order them.**
- **Allow just one major idea in each paragraph.**
- **Use short words, short sentences and short paragraphs. Drive out hackneyed phrases which make your letters wordy.**

# 5

## Write as you Speak

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GURU: Samir, you seem to be busy writing.

SAMIR: Yes. I'm trying to revise a thank-you note. It isn't mine. It's a friend's. The guy—Shekhar Patel—is working for a food chemicals firm in town. He visited Sanjay Food Laboratories, Lucknow, last week to discuss supply of food preservatives manufactured by his firm. He was happy with the visit. So he wanted to write a thank-you note. He also wanted to confirm that he would send them a few samples. He asked me if I could revise his draft.

Would you like to take a look at it?

G: Sure.

S: Here it is:

**Dear Mr Bhandari**

We thank for your cordial courtesy extended to the undersigned on his visit to your company on 21.07.19—and had discussions regarding Class I and Class II preservatives.

We have pleasure in submitting once again Beta HC4 3 different batches and as per in-house specifications of M/s. Sanjay Labs. We request you to evaluate and revert the results to us.

Enable us to proceed for further commercial negotiation.

Thanks and assuring of our best cooperation at all times.

With warm Regards.

Yours truly

- G: Well, what do you think of it?
- S: I can't say exactly what is wrong. But somehow it sounds a bit odd. It isn't friendly enough. There are also a few grammatical mistakes.
- G: There are of course grammatical mistakes. But the real problem is with the style. Shekhar is working within a style that is not his own. He has adopted it thinking that that is the way business letters are supposed to be written. His personality doesn't get reflected in it.

Look at the use of 'undersigned', for example. Does he really need to hide behind that brick wall when he says something nice such as 'thank you'? Doesn't he use 'I' and 'me' when he speaks? Then why not when writing? Whoever uses 'as per' when he means 'according to'? 'Reverting the results' also is strange.

Notice the use of "in-house specifications of M/s Sanjay Labs". Why not "your in-house specifications"? Isn't that the way we speak? When you refer to yourself as a third person—the undersigned' rather than 'I—you distance yourself from the act of writing as well as from the reader. That unhealthy distancing is complete when you refer to the reader also as a third person—'Sanjay Labs' rather than 'you' or 'your company'.

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Groucho Marx despised clichés, especially those found in the fraudulent friendliness of business correspondence. After opening a bank account he received from an executive a standard letter ending: "If I can be of any service to you, please do not hesitate to call on me." Marx did not hesitate. "Dear Sir," he wrote, "the best thing you can do to be of service to me is to steal some money from the account of one of your other clients, and credit it to me."

\_\_\_\_ Leo Rosten, *I Remember Groucho* 1982, in  
F.S. Pepper, **20th Century Anecdotes**, Sphere 1990: 92

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Shekhar is not comfortable with that style. Yet he is trying to operate in it. The letter would sound much better if he wrote the way he spoke. Leave the third person style to clerks in government service. They never write except by order of and on behalf of someone higher up. What they are is of no importance to the contents of the letter. And they don't care how lively or friendly their letters are.

You should try to write the way you speak if you care to win the reader over.



S: That is difficult to understand. It seems to me that speaking is speaking and writing is writing. Why do you say writing should be like speaking? Aren't the styles quite different from each other?

I find that when we speak, we make many mistakes. We hesitate a lot. We often start a sentence one way and end it in a way that doesn't quite match. Such a style will sound odd in a letter, won't it?

G: Indeed it will. We should aim at a style that recreates a conversation without the warts—false starts, grammatical mistakes, hesitations and unnecessary repetitions.



***"Good morning. Can I speak to the undersigned please?"***

S: What is the conversational style?

G: It's difficult to define conversational style. Let's see if we can identify a few features that make up the conversational style. Have you noticed any?

S: We tend to use short, familiar words when we speak. We also tend to have shorter sentences.



- G: You're right. We use familiar words and short sentences when we speak because the listener has to process them as he hears them. He can't go back to the beginning of a long-winding sentence as he can do when he reads something.

We also generally prefer the active voice to the passive voice when we speak. It is very unlikely that you will hear anyone say, "A fresh parcel is expected by me." You are more likely to hear "I'm expecting a fresh parcel."

The active voice is more direct. You can see who the doer of the action is. In the passive voice the doer of the action is either moved to the end of the sentence or dropped altogether. The interest is in the action, not in the doer. That is all right in scientific writing. It won't do in business letter writing.

- S: When we speak we use many short forms: "I'm", "he'll", "you can't", "They won't", etc. These are not welcome in writing, are they?

- G: Yes and no. Yes, if the writing is very informal; no, if the writing is formal.

There is generally much less psychological distance between a speaker and her listener than between a writer and her reader. If the writing creates a feeling of "immediateness" and "warmth" between a writer and her reader, it captures the essence of the conversational style. If the reader feels that the writer is sitting across the table and speaking to him, he will find the writing livelier and more interesting. It will influence him that much more deeply.

There is of course room for wooden, impersonal writing. That is where a certain distance is expected to be maintained between the reader and the writer. This is true of formal speech also. I have no quarrels here.

- S: Are you then suggesting that we make our writing more or less conversational depending on the people we are writing to, the context, and the content?

- G: Precisely. A frightfully formal style is okay in a frightfully formal situation. What I object to is using such a style, just because one is writing rather than speaking. I'm happy to see that the *e-mail* has dispensed with a lot of deadwood in commercial writing. Most e-mails are in the conversational style. It may be because of the speed of transmission. The writer can visualise the addressee sitting at his computer and replying to her almost instantly, as in a conversation.

- *Lively letters read like conversations. They are warmer, and likely to have greater impact on the reader.*
- *In a business letter, don't adopt a supposedly proper, formal style. Write as you speak. But avoid the usual 'faults' in speaking such as false starts and unfinished sentences.*
- *Avoid big and pompous words. If you wouldn't use them in an educated conversation, don't ever use them in a business letter.*
- *Generally, prefer the active voice to the passive voice. Use the passive voice only where the doer of the action is not known or is of no relevance.*

S: Can we get back to my friend's letter and revise it?

G: Let's try together. The first paragraph is rather impersonal. It also lacks focus. Let's do just one thing in it: thank Mr Bhandari in a warmer, more personal way.

Thank you for welcoming me warmly and taking me around your factory last week. I enjoyed every moment of the visit.

Here Shekhar sounds really grateful. He doesn't merely go through the motions of proposing a vote of thanks. That he enjoyed the visit to the factory confirms to Mr Bhandari that all was well.

S: Shall we merge with the second paragraph the sentence about the discussions? They seem to be related.

G: Yes. But there is no point in saying that they had discussions. Why state the obvious? What is needed is an expression of satisfaction about the discussions:

The discussions on Class I and Class II preservatives were very useful. You will receive in a week's time samples of Beta HC4 from three different batches made according to your specifications. Will you please evaluate them and let me have the results?

Obviously it is as a result of the discussions that Shekhar is sending three samples of preservatives to Mr Bhandari. He wants the results of their evaluation. The ideas are related; so they can go together in a paragraph. It is brief and conversational in style.

- S: Why do you end the paragraph with a question?
- G: It isn't really a question. It's a polite request. It means the same as 'Please evaluate the samples and let us have the results'. Both are acceptable. The request in the form of a question is a little more polite. That's all. You can make it even more polite by using 'would' or 'could' in place of 'will'.



*"I'm sure we'll enjoy working together"*

Now to end the letter. You can't sign off without leave-taking. You don't need to throw in a string of inanities either. Say something brief. Preferably not a worn-out phrase such as "assuring you of our best cooperation/services at all times".

- S: How about "I look forward to working with you"?



- G: That's fine. You can have other variations also depending on the mood you are in: "I am sure we will enjoy working together". "If you need any more samples, do let me know".
- S: Shall I read out the revised version?
- G: Sure.
- S: Here we are.

**Dear Mr Bhandari**

Thank you for welcoming me warmly and taking me around your factory last week. I enjoyed every moment of the visit.

The discussions on Class I and Class II preservatives were very useful. You will receive in a week's time samples of Beta HC4 from three different batches made according to your specifications. Will you please evaluate them and let us have the results?

I look forward to working with you.

Yours sincerely

**S R Patel**

Sales Manager

- G: That sounds more like a conversation than a ritual chanting of commercial correspondence clichés.

Using ordinary, conversational words does not on its own guarantee a lively, conversational feel. Long, meandering sentences typical of written language, however, are sure to spoil it. Take a look at this short letter from a senior IAS officer to the coordinator of a training programme. The issue is simple. But look at the pompous way he goes on:



Sir

Sub: Training programme on Conflict Management for  
Officers of ... from 16 to 21 October 19—

Ref: Your letter dated 7.9.19—

Referring to the above cited letter, I write to inform you that the cover addressed to Mr Kaushik and said to have been enclosed to the letter cited above has not been received along with your above letter. Therefore I request you to kindly send the same, for taking further action in the matter.

Yours faithfully

Do you understand what he wants exactly?

S: I'm not quite sure I've got it. The first sentence is pretty long. Let me go over it again.

G: That is a privilege you enjoy when you read a written text. You don't normally ask a speaker to repeat a whole chunk of his speech so that you can listen to it again. That is why people tend to use short sentences when they speak. Long and involved sentences leave listeners confused.

Of course letters are written texts. They can be read again and again. But few executives have the time or inclination to treat business letters like love letters. They welcome letters that are short, clear, crisp, and lively. That helps them take quick decisions, too. So it pays to use simple words and simple sentences just as in a conversation.

- ***You can't create a lively, conversational feel if your sentences are long and involved. So keep them short.***
- ***Long sentences with several dependent clauses are difficult to understand without rereading. So keep them short.***

S: Shall I redo the IAS officer's letter?

G: Go ahead.

S: I think I'll write:

Dear Dr Dixit

**Conflict Management : October 16-21**

Thank you for your letter of September 7, 19—.

The envelope meant for Mr Kaushik, however, was not found enclosed.  
Could you please send me another set of papers meant for him?

Yours sincerely

- G: That's very good. Once you give the subject line and the reference to the letter there is no need to inflate your sentence with "referring to the above-cited letter" "the letter cited above", and "along with your above letter". These and expressions such as "for taking further action in the matter" merely make the sentence long without adding to the meaning. The only result is the weakening of liveliness and clarity. The easiest way to achieve conversational liveliness in a letter is to imagine that the reader is sitting across the desk and dictate the letter as if you were talking to him or her.

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Cordell Hull, Roosevelt's Secretary of State developed to a fine point the art of saying nothing elaborately. To one ticklish question he replied, "That situation is complicated by the interplay of many phases which are receiving our most careful analysis. However, each phase is made up of many individual circumstances. These we are attempting to investigate so that we will have a true comprehension of the entire development." Then to the confusion he had created the Secretary added, "We always want to be helpful to you gentlemen."

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\_\_\_\_\_ Benjamin Stolberg, Cordell Hull, In  
"The Vanishing American" American Mercury, April 1940  
From F.S. Pepper, **20th Century Anecdotes**, Sphere 1990: 261

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Here is the opening sentence of a letter which I came across recently. It is from the sales manager of a cosmetics company. The involved construction and the presence of words like "pursuant to" make it dense:

Pursuant to our letter dated 14.10.19— replying to your query regarding the moisture content of LPN Batch No.7246B, we have heard from our Q.C. department in this connection.

See if you can trim it and make it more conversational.

S: I think I'd change it to:

With reference to our letter of 14 October 19— our Quality Control Department has tested the moisture content of LPN Batch No. 7246B.

G: That's fine. I have one suggestion, though. Why do you use "with reference to"? Why not replace it with "As promised in my letter of ..."? A promise is certainly warmer than a mere reference. Moreover, we are so constantly battered with "referring to the above" and "with reference to" at the start of business letters that any different opening is likely to soothe us and welcome us to read on.

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Here is the draft of an order put up to President Franklin Roosevelt for approval during the Second World War:

*"Such preparations shall be made as will completely obscure all Federal buildings and non-Federal buildings occupied by the Federal Government during an air raid for any period of time from visibility by reason of internal or external illumination. Such obscuration may be obtained either by blackout construction or by termination of the illumination. This will, of course, require that in building areas in which production must continue during the blackout, construction must be provided that internal illumination may continue. Other areas, whether or not occupied by personnel, may be obscured by terminating the illumination."*

And here's what Roosevelt wrote on the margin:

*"Tell them that in buildings where they have to keep work going, to put something across the window. In buildings where they can afford to let the work stop for a while, turn out the lights."*

(Source not traced)

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S: Simple conversational language is definitely more lively and reader-friendly than formal language. But surely you can't use it in all correspondence?



Letters with legal implications, for example, have to be put into complex legal language. Trying to be conversational in them can be disastrous, can't it?

- G: Even our conversations tend to be more or less formal depending on the people we are speaking to and on the occasion. So the language of letters also can move up or down the formal-informal line depending on who you are writing to and on what occasion. Letters with legal implications are a good example of where somewhat formal language may be needed. There the focus is more on issues than on individuals, rather like in scientific writing. That doesn't mean, though, that the language is so different from ordinary conversational style that only lawyers can make sense of it. Do you have any samples of legal letters to look at?

- *Some letters are more formal than others just as some conversations are more formal than others. That is quite natural.*
- *Legal letters are generally more formal than ordinary letters. But that is no justification for making them opaque. They should be intelligible to any educated reader.*

- S: Yes, I happen to have one. When I didn't get my half yearly interest warrants from Shimla Watch Company recently, I wrote to them about it. They said they had sent the interest warrants. But if I didn't get them and if I wanted duplicate warrants, I should "execute an indemnity on a non-judicial stamp paper as per the format enclosed".

Here's the format they sent me:

**DRAFT LETTER OF INDEMNITY**

To Shimla Watch Company Ltd  
Shimla - 8

Dear Sirs

Ref: Loss of Interest Warrant No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Folio No. \_\_\_\_\_

In consideration of the company issuing to me a duplicate warrant for the Interest on debentures, for the half year amounting to Rs. \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ debentures registered in my name, in lieu of the Original Warrant No. \_\_\_\_\_ dated \_\_\_\_\_ which has been lost, destroyed or mislaid, I hereby undertake



and engage for myself, my Executors, Administrators and Assigns, to hold the said Company and the Directors and Officers thereof, harmless and indemnified against all suits, actions, proceedings, charges, damages, demands, costs, losses and expenses which may arise in the event of the said Original Warrant being paid of forthcoming at any future time, of otherwise in consequences of the said Company, issuing a duplicate to me as aforesaid, and I request that such duplicate Warrant may be issued to me accordingly.

I further undertake that in the event of the Original Debenture Interest Warrant eventually coming into my possession, I will forward it to you to be cancelled.

(Witness to the signature(s)  
With full address & occupation)

Yours faithfully

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- G: How do you find the first paragraph?
- S: Frankly, I haven't been able to get the full meaning although I have read it three or four times. It must be allright—it must have been drafted by a lawyer.
- G: How pathetic! That's not the way to look at something you have to sign. Don't behave like an illiterate villager who puts his thumb impression on documents which he can't read.
- And just because a document is legal, it doesn't have to be impossible to crack. Legal writing may need sentences which are a bit longer than the ones found in ordinary language. But there is no justification for planting a large number of dependent clauses and exotic phrases making it difficult for the reader to find his way around.
- By the way, lawyers also may fall off their high horse of thick and impersonal legal writing. In the indemnity letter, for example, the last paragraph is different from the rest. The writer says "I will forward it to you" rather than "I will forward it to the company".
- S: There is just one giant sentence in the first paragraph in the draft indemnity letter they have sent me. It is about 140 words. There are far too many words there for me to process and make sense of.
- G: About half a century ago Rudolf Flesch developed a readability formula to help people identify dense pieces of writing. He based it on a well known

principle: the longer the sentences and the longer the words in them, the less readable the text becomes.

Your watch company's indemnity letter is very difficult to read and understand because its sentences are long and the words in them big and unfamiliar. Let's see how we can convert that letter into plain and lively English. Instead of slavishly translating, let's find out what needs to be done when you have to ask for a duplicate warrant.

You have to do three things. First, declare that you haven't received the original interest warrant and that you wish to be given a duplicate warrant. Next, indemnify the company against any loss caused either by the original warrant being cashed by someone or by the issue of the duplicate. Finally, you have to promise to return to the company the original warrant if it ever comes to you.

S: That's clear and sensible enough.

G: Now let's put these ideas into a letter. *Indemnify* is the only horrible word in it; but we'll retain it as it is, because it is a technical word. 'Protect against or compensate for loss, damage', etc. can do the job but perhaps not with the same legal precision as *indemnify*. How about this draft?

#### INDEMNITY LETTER

To **Shimla Watch Company Ltd**

Shimla - 8

I, ....., son/daughter of..... and resident of .....  
..... declare that I have not received from Shimla Watch  
Company Ltd, Shimla -8 (*the company* from now on) the following in-  
terest warrants for the half year ended March/September 19—

| <b>Warrant Numbers</b> | <b>Folio Numbers</b> | <b>Amounts</b> |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------|
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------|

I request the company to issue duplicate warrants to me. I undertake that I, my executors, administrators, and assigns will indemnify the company including all its Directors and Officers against any suits, damages, demands, and expenses which may arise in the event of the original warrants being paid or the duplicate warrants being issued to me.

If the original warrants ever come to me, I further undertake to send them back to the company for cancellation.

Signature, Name, Occupation and  
full address of the witness

.....  
.....

Signature:.....

Name:.....

Date:.....

Place:.....

S: The first and the third paragraphs are easy on the eyes. But the middle paragraph is a mouthful. The second sentence of the second paragraph about indemnity is more than fifty words!

G: I would be glad to change it to something shorter and simpler like:

I undertake to indemnify the company against any loss which may arise from the original warrants being paid or from the issue of the duplicate warrants to me.

S: That sounds better. It's much shorter, too. Less than thirty words.

G: But that may make lawyers nervous. They may want us to make very clear that 'I' covers "my executors, administrators, and assigns", and that 'the company' covers "all its Directors and Officers". They may also want to specify the types of troubles the company is given indemnity against: "any suits, damages, demands, and expenses".

You will agree, won't you, that my draft is easy to understand. It is of course much easier than the original draft you received from Shimla Watch Company. Don't you think so?

S: Yes, I do.

G: That is because my version is not as dense with clauses and phrases as the original is. It is rather long because I have listed what 'I', "the company" and 'loss' stand for. Listing doesn't normally make a sentence complex or difficult to process. The presence of dependent clauses makes a sentence complex. The more dependent clauses there are, the harder it is to make sense of a sentence.

A letter can't be lively—and certainly, not lovely—if the reader has to read back and forth several times to make sense of it.

- **Write as you talk.**
- **Your letters can't be lively if the sentences are very long and involved.**
- **Write even legal letters in a way that is easy for an educated reader to make sense of.**



# 6

## Tickle the Reader's Ego

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GURU: You know, Samir, there's an ego in all of us, waiting to be tickled. While we welcome a gentle tickle as often as possible, we forget that others' egos like it too.

Our problems and our concerns loom so large in our minds that we become insensitive to others' needs. We become 'businesslike' in the ugly sense of the term.

SAMIR: There you go again with your sermon! If a business letter is brief and clear and polite, I don't think we need to tickle or massage anyone's ego. We may need to do it in personal letters, but not in business letters.

G: Don't draw so sharp a distinction between business letters and personal letters. Business writing is between people, not between robots. So egos can't be ignored. If you bruise someone's ego, they may not do business with you. You may be puzzled by their behaviour if you can't figure out why.

Let me give you an example from my own life. My ego was bruised by a friend who doesn't know even now how much he hurt me.

It happened a few years ago when he became Vice President (Finance) of his company. I had known him since the time he was a General Manager in the same company. When I heard that he was promoted to Vice President, I could have telephoned him and congratulated him. But I chose to send him a letter.

S: To save money?

G: Not really. He was just a local call away. But I thought a letter would be nicer. You can reread it and relish it in a way you can't relive a telephone conversation. I took the trouble of writing a nice letter congratulating him.



- S: Didn't he send you a reply?
- G: He did. But I wish he hadn't. In that case I could have consoled myself that perhaps he never received my letter. The postal service is so unreliable that people can get away with the reply "I'm sorry, I didn't get your letter" when they are asked why they didn't reply.

About three weeks after I sent him my letter, I got a reply. Here is a copy.

I am in receipt of your letter dated 5th February 19—, and acknowledge with thanks the sentiments expressed therein.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely

D. Shanti

for (N K Bhatnagar)

- S: This appears to be an all-purpose letter suitable for replying to congratulations and condolences. It is insipid, no doubt. Did you expect a longish chatty letter? He may have received a large number of letters. It is unfair, isn't it, to expect a long reply?
- G: It is, indeed. I didn't expect a long reply. But the least he should have done was to indicate that he had read my letter. It appears from the letter that he asked his assistant to 'acknowledge' the congratulatory messages, and the assistant acknowledged them in the most inane way one could think of. Because the assistant signed it for him, Mr Bhatnagar had no way of knowing what a horrid letter went out in his name. The text of the letter was most definitely not my friend's.

This is not the kind of letter that you should ever allow your assistant to sign on your behalf. Even the drafting should be yours unless you are quite sure your assistant has learned your style, and can sound like you. No one would mind if your reply to such letters is a little delayed. But people do mind if the reply is not genuinely from you.

- S: Imagine that you got a hundred letters congratulating you on a promotion. Would you draft a hundred different replies?
- G: No. That would be difficult. It wouldn't be necessary either. I would draft a basic text like this:

Thank you very much indeed for taking the trouble of writing to congratulate me. It is the good wishes of friends like you that keep me going.

Sincerely

Then I would write in the salutation by hand and sign the letter. Then the salutation would be what I normally call him by, not what my assistant guesses is appropriate. The moment I saw that the salutation in Mr Bhatnagar's letter to me started with "Dear Mr," I knew it wasn't really his because Mr Bhatnagar always called me by my first name and the title, Doctor, when he spoke to me. That is something his secretary or deputy wouldn't know.



- S: Are you suggesting that we always write in the salutation instead of getting it typed?
- G: Not really. Most of the time that is unnecessary. However, if you write in the salutation and sign the letter yourself, the same text can serve as very appropriate and effective replies to a large number of letters from people you know well. It reassures the reader that the letter is really from you. It also lets you put in a short postscript for special friends.

Here, for instance, is a letter I received from the Chairman of a very big manufacturing company. It is the reply to a letter of condolence I sent him on his father's death:

I am very touched by your heart-felt condolences at the sudden and untimely demise of my father. Your kind words have given me great strength to bear this irreparable loss.

Yours sincerely

I am sure the text was the same in hundreds of letters he would have sent out in reply to a variety of condolence messages. But he signed each personally. And the text made me feel that the trouble I took in sending a letter had been appreciated. His reply took nearly six weeks to come; but that didn't matter. The sky won't fall if a reply is delayed in such cases.

- S: Do you think it is a good letter?
- G: Yes. It is. Of course I would not like to use the heavy, legal word 'demise'. I'd rather say "my father's sudden death". What is striking about this letter is that in three or four lines it makes the reader feel that the writer really appreciates his gesture and thanks him personally. The reader's ego needs are adequately met.

- **Every reader has an ego waiting to be tickled or massaged. You ignore it at your peril.**
- **There is no sharp distinction between business and personal letters. Ego-stroking is needed except in purely routine correspondence.**



Many official communications seem to ignore the reader's sentiments completely. Take, for instance, this letter a neighbour of mine received recently from the Personnel Department of a big company, Minar Steels Ltd., which he had served for more than twenty years:

**Dear Mr Rahman**

According to para 6(b) of the letter of appointment dated 18.06.19— issued to you and Clause 26 of the Certified Standing Orders you will retire from the services of the Company on reaching the age of 58 years on 11.10.19—.

This is for your kind information.

Very truly yours

- S: That's awful. I see what you mean. The writer makes no attempt to treat the reader as a person with feelings. The letter is brief and to the point. But it lacks the human touch. It is cruel. And it wastes a wonderful opportunity to create goodwill.
- G: Precisely. It treats an employee's retirement rather like the scrapping of an old machine. Mr Rahman will feel dejected. Retirement is not easy for many people to accept. An insensitive letter like that makes it very hard.

Here's what I'd put in if I were to write to Mr Rahman

**Dear Mr Rahman**

On 11 October 19— you will have served Minar Steels Ltd with distinction for a little over twenty-two years. You will also be 58 on that day and start your well-deserved retirement.

We thank you for your valuable contributions to Minar Steels during the last two decades. As we say good bye to you, we wish you a happy retired life.

If we can be of any help, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely



S: Your draft sounds fine. But is it official enough? You haven't referred to the relevant paragraph in the appointment letter and the clause in the Certified Standing Orders. You've perhaps made it too personal.

G: I don't think there is any need to quote the clauses dealing with retirement when you don't anticipate any dispute.

If you think the decision you convey is not in line with the reader's expectations, courtesy demands that you give an explanation. You should treat the reader as a human being made of flesh and blood. His ego should be stroked if you want his goodwill and cooperation. And you need both, whether he is an internal customer or an external one; whether he is going to continue doing business with you or not.

S: When I write, isn't it natural that my needs are uppermost in my mind? Naturally that priority will be reflected in the letter.

G: You are dead right. Success, however, goes to those who realise that the people they communicate with have similar compulsions, that they are preoccupied with their own needs, that they cannot be won over until their needs are addressed.

Need for money is rather low in the hierarchy of needs. Right at the top is the need for recognition and appreciation. We are thrilled when others give it to us. But we often forget it when we write to others.

- ***People are made of flesh and blood. Treat them so.***
- ***It is natural that your needs will be uppermost in your mind when you write. But success goes to those who realise that the readers have their needs uppermost in their minds.***
- ***Need for recognition and appreciation is often far more powerful than need for money.***
- ***Try and exceed reader expectations. A compliment or word of appreciation is sweetest when it is least expected.***
- ***Personalising a letter may take a little time and thought; treat it as an investment.***
- ***Money is a powerful motivator, but not half as powerful as appreciation.***

G: A word of appreciation is sweetest when it is least expected. It is also very powerful. It can work miracles in a world where people thirst for appreciation and recognition. It can generate goodwill which dissolves in seconds mountains of objections and apprehensions. Money also may do the

job to some extent. But goodwill is easier to create and much more satisfying to both parties. Moreover goodwill can reach people who detest bribery and don't care about money.

S: Isn't there a danger of appreciation being seen as a blatant attempt at flattery?

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After a meeting in a mid-western city, a woman saw Alexander Woollcott standing alone in the lobby. Impulsively she went up to him to tell him of the pleasure his lecture had given her. "And," said the lady, who had grown-up grandchildren and fully admitted to having passed seventy, "I was encouraged to speak to you because you said you loved old ladies."

"Yes," said Woollcott, "I do. But I also like them your age."

\_\_\_\_\_ Fannie Campbell, *Reader's Digest*, Feb 1945,  
in F.S. Pepper **20th Century Anecdotes**, Sphere, 1990: 81

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G: Flattery is verbal bribery. It is as dirty as cash bribes. Many won't touch it. Some may turn against you, if you offer it.

No, I am not suggesting flattery. Certainly not flattery which is perceived as flattery. A gentle touch of flattery that is accepted as appreciation is different. That will influence the reader favourably. The reader should feel that she deserves the compliments. If you look hard enough you will find something worth mentioning or suggesting even in dismal surroundings.

● ***Compliments may be out of place in certain letters. But reader-orientation is never out of place, never out of fashion in letter writing.***

Compliments are not the only ways of winning the reader over. There are situations where even indirect compliments are out of place.

The reader of each one of your letters should feel that you are interested in them and their concerns. Self-centred letters tend to leave them cold. They may respond but perhaps, not with enthusiasm. Take, for instance, this memo sent by the Vice President (Finance & Planning) of a large manufacturing company to the Heads of all the Departments.

From: Arti Malhotra  
VP (Fin & Planning)  
To: All Department Heads

Date: 05 Dec 19---

Subject: **TIMELY SUBMISSION OF BILLS**

We have been observing that bills are submitted to Finance and Accounts Department at a much later date than they are received in the company from suppliers and others.

You are aware that we are preparing Monthly Accounts, and unless we reflect the expenses in the same month in which the expenses have been incurred, profitability figures get vitiated. The present practice is causing abnormalities in accounting all expenses *vis-a-vis* income from month to month.

Hence we request all the Department Heads to ensure that the bills are submitted immediately on receipt to Finance and Accounts Department and in any case not later than 15 days from the date of the bill. However, for any dispute or some other problem for which the bill could not be recommended for payment, at least send us the bills with an endorsement that the bill should not be paid till their further advice. In such cases we make provision in our accounts and finalise the profit figures.

Trust you will appreciate the need for timely submission of bills and cooperate with us.

*MD/ED/CEO for information*

- S: It's clear and brief. It also explains the reason for requesting prompt submission of bills.
- G: Agreed. It isn't a bad memo. But can you make it better—more persuasive, more reader-oriented? After all, apart from making an appeal, there is pretty little that Ms Malhotra can do to ensure that the other Departments send her their bills promptly.
- S: How would you alter the text if you were Ms Malhotra?
- G: This is what I'd write.



Thank you for regularly passing on to us the bills you receive from suppliers and other agencies. The monthly reports on the income and expenses of the company that you get are based on these.

Occasionally some bills do not reach us until two or three weeks after they are issued. This delay causes distortions in the monthly account.

Could you please ensure that the bills received in your Department are passed on to us within two or three days of their arrival? This is particularly important in the last week of every month.

If there are 'problem bills' which you don't want us to pay straight-away, just say so on the bills, and we shall take care of them when finalising the profit figures.

Thanks.

- S: The two main differences I notice are: (i) You start with thanking them for regularly sending the bills. (ii) You imply that prompt submission of bills is good for them because they will get balanced monthly reports on the company's monthly income and expenditure.

But isn't thanking the Heads of Departments in the first paragraph somewhat dishonest? Ms Malhotra is sending them this memo because they are not submitting the bills regularly. How can she start with thanking? Won't that backfire?

- G: In my version Ms Malhotra thanks the HoDs not for *prompt* submission of bills but for *regular* submission. The problem is that the bills aren't coming promptly. So there is no dishonesty in thanking the HoDs for regularly sending in the bills.

In the original version Ms Malhotra focuses on her problem and the contribution the HoDs make to it. She should have shown them some appreciation for what they have been doing or at least what they would like to do. After all they also need a clear, undistorted picture of the finances of the company. The Finance and Accounts Department is doing the job for the whole company, not for itself.

The real difference between the two versions is that in the second one there is an attempt to show appreciation to the readers for what they have been doing and to appeal to their own interests. That should work better than fault-finding.



- S: Your version is much shorter, too, although it contains all the ideas in the original version.
- G: Well, reader-orientation need not make a letter lengthy.

- *It is risky to take for granted people in one's own organisation. Internal customers need ego-tickling just as much as external customers do.*
- *Ego-bashing interoffice memos create incalculable damage to the morale of employees.*

At times considerable stroking is needed to smoothen the ruffled feathers of a strong ego. Here is a letter written about fifteen years ago by the President of an Arts and Sports Association in a small town in Maharashtra. We shall call the club BASA (Baramati Arts and Sports Association).

The letter was written to the Honorary Secretary who had put in a lot of work to set up BASA. The Secretary was a retired Civil Surgeon who spoke well, and had considerable influence and contacts. He was annoyed by certain decisions taken by the Executive Committee on a day he was absent. Hurt by it, he sent the President a brief note that he would like to resign as Honorary Secretary. It's against this background that the letter was written.

**Dear Dr Sevekar**

Having invested in BASA so much of your time and resources including a lifetime of high quality experience and an enviable range of contacts, you are justified in feeling indignant about the way certain decisions were taken by the EC last week in your absence. I think I would feel the same if I had your stature and wisdom.

But I request you not to dissociate yourself from the EC of BASA at this juncture because such an action will cripple BASA which you have reared with your money, time, and energy. Without your contribution BASA would be nowhere today.

I have neither the eloquence nor the persuasive power to make you change your mind. You will have five arguments for every one I put forward. So I don't want to shoot arrows at a rock. I request you to reconsider your decision in the interests of arts and sports at Baramati town which you love, and have served with distinction for over thirty-five years.

Yours sincerely

**S.B.Patwardhan**

S: Did Dr Sevekar take back his resignation?

G: Yes, he did. What struck me was that the President did not make any promise to change the decisions. Perhaps Dr Sevekar's view had been voted out by the rest of the EC, and so the President would not be able to do anything about it.

The ego-massaging here is essentially reassuring Dr Sevekar that his reaction was fully justified. Once his position was accepted as reasonable, he was ready to respond to Mr Patwardhan's appeal for reconsidering his decision to resign.

Ground was prepared further by referring to Dr Sevekar's eloquence, which he must have been quite proud of. Refusal to put forward any argument because he could easily demolish it is a powerful indirect compliment. Dr Sevekar's continued service was ensured by deft ego-stroking.

S: I feel that we tend to be more insensitive to those within our organisations. Superiors may take for granted their subordinates, and dispense with the precautions one generally takes in letters to external customers.

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In 1919 the 17th Earl of Derby wrote a letter to the Foreign Secretary beginning, "My Dear Curzon, I have always known you to be a cad. I now know you to be a liar." The letter did not go off in the night's bag from the Paris Embassy. The next morning Derby looked at it again. "Hmm. Perhaps it's a bit too strong. I think I'll have another go." This time the letter began, "My Dear George, you and I have known each other too long to quarrel over so small a matter."

\_\_\_\_\_ Randolph S. Churchill, *LORD DERBY*, 1960  
in F.S. Pepper, **20th Century Anecdotes**, Sphere, 1990: 109-110

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G: I agree. Many managers indulge in ego-bashing in their memos. They haven't the faintest idea how much damage it does to the company.

S: That reminds me of a friend of mine, who resigned from BCM Cosmetics Ltd last month. When I asked him why he had resigned, he merely showed me a memo he received from his General Manager (Marketing). Here's a copy which I got made:

## **BCM Cosmetics Ltd**

Inter Office Communication

From: Ramesh Sinha  
General Manager (Marketing)

To: Mr C S Yadav  
RSM, Patna

August 9, 19—

### **Sub: Appointment of Distributor**

My attention is drawn towards the request sent to Marketing Services for appointing one more distributor, M/s. Sangam Enterprises, at Patna.

At present we have five distributors in Patna and the total purchases from April to July and the average monthly purchase of each distributor is as below:

(Rs. in lakhs)

| <i>Name of the Distributor</i> | <i>Apr-July<br/>Purchase</i> | <i>Average<br/>Purchase</i> |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| BeeDee Agencies                | 1.72                         | 0.43                        |
| Beauty World                   | 1.62                         | 0.41                        |
| Sangeet Enterprises            | 0.78                         | 0.19                        |
| Gupta & Sons                   | 0.75                         | 0.19                        |
| Patna Beauty Spot              | 0.11                         | 0.03                        |
| Total:                         | 4.98                         | 1.25                        |
|                                | =====                        | =====                       |

Under the circumstances, I fail to understand the reason for one more distributor at Patna. In future, please do a thorough study and apply all your judgement before sending any request for appointing new distributor.

Regards.

**Ramesh Sinha**



|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| cc: Mr G S Dasgupta: | As discussed over phone, you have recommended the appointment without any justification which is not expected from a senior manager. We have enough no. of distributors today in the system and our endeavour should be to increase their sales instead of appointing some more stock points. Please remember authorities are given to senior managers so that they can apply their mind and if it is observed that they are misutilising the authorities, we will not hesitate to take away the same in future, which please note. |
| cc: Mr Taher Ali :   | Please do not approve the appointment.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

G: This is a case of thorough ego-bashing. Mr Sinha virtually calls Mr Yadav an unthinking fool. Surely there are better ways of rejecting a suggestion made by a subordinate.

Mr Sinha makes his criticism of Mr Yadav even more stinging by accusing the Senior Manager Mr Dasgupta also of mindlessness. His mistake was that he recommended Mr Yadav's suggestion. The threat of taking away the discretionary powers given to him is insulting, to say the least. To put it into a memo addressed to Mr Dasgupta's subordinate shows Mr Sinha's mindlessness.

You can't get the best out of people for long if you constantly point a gun at their heads.

S: I agree. If you were Mr Sinha, how would you reject Mr Yadav's suggestion without hurting his ego? Mr Yadav's suggestion does not appear to me to be a very good one.

G: I am not sure it is a bad suggestion. That five distributors are not doing very well does not rule out the possibility of a sixth one changing all that. Perhaps Mr Yadav has made "a thorough study" and "applied all (his) judgement" and found that Sangam Enterprises would boost the sales of BCM's cosmetic products in a way the other distributors have not been able to. In that case, a summary rejection of the suggestion might be a sign of poor judgement on my part. I would try and find out why Mr Yadav made such a suggestion and why Mr Dasgupta recommended it.

If I was convinced that there was no point in appointing yet another distributor in Patna, here is what I would write to Mr Yadav:



**BCM Cosmetics Ltd**

**Interoffice Memo**

From: Ramesh Sinha  
General Manager (Marketing)

To: Mr C S Yadav  
RSM, Patna

August 9, 19—

***Appointment of Additional Distributor***

You have suggested the appointment of Sangam Enterprises as a distributor in Patna. Thank you for thinking of ways to boost our sales there.

But with five distributors together managing barely Rs 1,25,000 a month in sales now, I am not convinced that appointment of yet another distributor is the right move. Let us think of ways in which we can increase the turnover of the existing distributors.

Do share with me and Mr Dasgupta any bright ideas that come to your mind.

Copy: Mr G S Dasgupta, Calcutta  
Mr Taher Ali, Building

- S: You have firmly turned down Mr Yadav's suggestion without pulling down his ego. I feel that he will be encouraged to think creatively of ways to push up sales. I like the way you thank him for his suggestion. Instead of branding his suggestion as mindless, you appreciate it as a well-intentioned and welcome gesture. That takes the sting out of its rejection.
- G: The invitation to "share with me and Mr Dasgupta any bright ideas" on pushing up sales should reinforce the positive feeling created by the first paragraph. The rejection of his suggestion now doesn't depress Mr Yadav and Mr Dasgupta; instead both are nudged to think harder and to come up with better suggestions.

I have dispensed with the detailed turnover figures of the five distributors. I have also dropped the comments to Mr Dasgupta. So now the memo is trim, clear, firm, and yet friendly. Instead of bashing Mr Yadav's ego and Mr Dasgupta's, it strokes them gently.

- *Ego-tickling doesn't mean that you say 'yes' to everything the reader asks for.*
- *There are ways of rejecting the readers' suggestions without hurting their egos.*

S: That is all very well. But the question is, can a busy executive find time to plan such memos and letters.

G: Many executives are always busy with work because they don't plan. Take Ramesh Sinha's case. Ten minutes spent on planning a good letter would perhaps have encouraged Mr Yadav to stay on with BCM Cosmetics and to contribute actively. You say Mr Yadav left his job as BCM's Regional Sales Manager in Bihar on receiving that terrible letter from Mr Sinha. Now Mr Sinha is forced to spend a lot of time finding a suitable replacement for Mr Yadav.

We don't know how Mr Dasgupta reacted to Mr Sinha's outburst. Suppose he stayed on but created trouble for Mr Sinha in quiet, unobtrusive ways just to spite him? Mr Sinha would have had to stretch his day to fight the fire he started.

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Bernard Shaw detested music with his meals—and rightly so. Once he called to the leader of a Tzigane band, which was making the usual deafening and distracting noises in a restaurant. "Could you play something if I asked you to?" "But certainly, Monsieur." "Well, would you either play poker or dominoes—whichever you like—until I have finished my dinner."

\_\_\_\_\_ Mrs Claude Beddington, *All That I Have Met*, 1929  
in F.S. Pepper, **20th Century Anecdotes**, Sphere, 1990: 413

Here's the rejection slip of a Chinese publishing house that returns manuscripts to raw authors. For the Chinese, this may be a very polite letter. But for people from other cultures, this appears to be full of sarcasm.

"We have perused your manuscript with exceptional relish. We fear, however, that if we were to publish your outstanding work, it would be quite impossible for us to ever again publish another work that would not come up to its standard. And we cannot imagine how any other work will be its equal in the next hundred years. So, to our deepest regret, we are compelled to return your incredible composition. And we beg you a thousand times over to pardon our shortsightedness and faintheartedness."

\_\_\_\_\_ Fr A. de Mello, *Prayer of the Forg Book I*,  
Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakashan 1988: 273

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Don't think about planning in isolation. Think of it as part of your overall strategy to cultivate people. Think of the time spent on planning better letters as an investment. Like an investment in superior quality tools. Panting and ranting won't get you anywhere near good products, if your tools are bad. It's a foolish manager who cuts down on investment in tools.

There was a wood cutter who earnestly worked from early morning till late in the evening every day. He got tired, but still he went on chopping without resting. But he couldn't chop as many trees as some of his friends did. He was too busy, he said, to stop and sharpen his axe.

S: I've read somewhere that starting a letter with 'I' goes against reader-orientation and that we should try and start letters with 'you'.

G: That is sound advice. But don't take it literally! There is no harm in starting the letter with 'I'; there is no special advantage in starting the letter with 'you'. You run the risk of sounding artificial if you force yourself to start every letter with 'you'.

Take that advice metaphorically. Keep the reader in mind as you plan your letter. Ask yourself what would please you if you were the reader. Then write it. It's the *thought* that matters, not the first word.

- ***A successful writer of letters thinks of the readers' needs and compulsions and respects them. That is ego-stroking.***
- ***Try to compliment the reader in a genuine, credible way. Flattery is likely to be spurned, but not a genuine compliment.***
- ***A little time spent in planning a letter that tickles the reader is an investment. It is unwise to cut down on this investment.***



## *Beasts and Beauties*



7. The Business of Selling
8. Say it with Flowers
9. Fire Fighting
10. Self on Sale
11. Hire Today, Gone Tomorrow
12. It's all in the Family



# 7

## The Business of Selling

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*"Dear Sir we are pleased to announce ourselves as trendsetters in office interior design. . ."*

SAMIR: What are you chuckling over, Guru?

GURU: It's a letter, a circular, which I got from my neighbourhood satellite cable operator. The 'Proprietor' is trying to sell the subscribers the idea that the

monthly subscription should go up from Rs 75 to Rs 100. Look at the way she...

S: She?

G: Yes, she. It's a woman—Kamini—who runs the show. Nothing strange about that. But look at the way she goes about the job.

***Kamini Kablefare***

130 Lakshmi Nagar, Guntur 522 016

4-2-19\_\_

CIRCULAR

Dear customer's,

We are now providing you 18 channels and very early two more channels will be introduced.

Complaints can be made between 8 A.M. to 8 P.M. in personnel or by phone: 3684344

We promise and try to give you a good entertaining reception. Customer's co-operation is very much necessary for us. The channels we increased is not for one customer's or two. This is for all of our customer's. We have right to revise the monthly subscription annually. But for two years we have not increased any amount. Since this is the 3rd year and number of channels are also being increased. Hence we request our customers to pay Rs 100/- towards monthly subscription from the month of January 19\_\_. (As we collect January subscription in February).

Suggestions are very much welcomed. We request our customers to pay the monthly subscription before 10th of every month.

Personnel Attention will be given to all the customer's having major or minor problems.

We are very much satisfied with your cooperation so far and hope the same in future so that we can improve and increase the reception.

Thanking you,  
for Kamini Kablefare

Kamini  
(Proprietor)

- S: There are several mistakes. Spelling, punctuation, grammar...
- G: Forget about the mistakes. Let's study her strategy, if she has one.
- S: She starts well. She announces that the subscriber will get two more channels soon. Then, all of a sudden she flits to complaints.
- G: Even her core message that the subscription should go up is presented awkwardly. She talks of her *right* to revise the subscription annually. Why, she has every right to revise it every month or even every week. That is not a good way of selling the rate increase.
- S: The order in which the ideas come isn't very helpful either in making a forceful appeal to the subscriber for a rate increase.
- G: Kamini seems to have put down random thoughts rather than attempt to persuade subscribers systematically to accept the increase.
- S: How would you revise it if Kamini asked you to?
- G: Here's how I'd change it.

**KAMINI KABLEFARE**  
130 Lakshmi Nagar, Guntur 522 016

February 4, 19\_\_

Dear Subscriber

Welcome to the two new channels we introduced on 1st February. You will be pleased with the better quality of reception and the wider choice of channels now. You will get two more channels very soon. With that you will have a choice of twenty channels.

We thank you for your patronage during the past two years. Not once have we raised the subscription during this period although prices have been going up all around us. We, however, are forced to raise it slightly—from Rs 75 to Rs 100 per month—to make sure that you get good quality reception, prompt service, and a wider choice of channels.

The new subscription rate is effective from January 19\_\_\_\_. Please make sure that a month's subscription is paid by the 10th of the following month.

We promise to pay immediate attention to any problems that might affect your viewing pleasure. Do telephone us any time between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. any day including Sundays. You are also welcome to visit our office.

We would like you to have the best. We will be grateful for any suggestions you give us to make your local cable network the best in town. We would like you to feel proud of it and to show it off to your friends.

Happy viewing!

**Kamini N (Ms)**

Proprietor

S: So you'd slip in the news of the rate increase after you tell the customer about the additional channels and better reception?

G: You could say that. My strategy is to make the customer feel that he is getting value for money. No price is high or low. A price is felt to be high or low by the buyer depending on the value they think they get for the price they pay. A price or price increase should be perceived as reasonable, as inevitable for the value added to a product or service.

In the first paragraph, I highlight what the customer is getting from Kamini Kablefare (KK). I would like him to be delighted at the new developments, at the value he is getting. The focus is on the customer, not on KK's needs or rights; on value addition, not on price increase.

S: The increase proposed is from Rs 75 to Rs 100 a month. That is, 33.3 per cent. How can you call it 'slight'?

G: In terms of percentage, 33.3 is by no means slight. But in terms of the amount of extra money you have to pay—Rs 25 a month—the increase is slight when you consider that you are getting additional channels, better reception, and better service. The use of the word 'slight' is also likely to help the customer accept the increase without a murmur. He is unlikely to work out the percentage of increase.

S: What is the purpose of the last paragraph? You want the customer to show it off to friends?



- G: Yes. I'd like him to develop a sense of ownership about KK. I'd like him to take pride in it. His 'salestalk' may bring KK more customers than a glib, trained salesperson can. That is the power of customer satisfaction and customer recommendations.

Even if the 'showing off' is to friends from other towns or from other parts of the town where KK doesn't operate, it is a reaffirmation of his perception of value for money, of being the beneficiary of something exciting. Once he takes pride in KK, he is unlikely to think of other cable operators or mind paying a little extra.

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An advertising genius once commented, "We don't sell the steak, we sell the sizzle." In the same vein, if you're selling light bulbs, don't describe the light bulb. Rather, explain what the light bulb will do for the customer. Forget about what it looks like and how the filament works. Explain how it will make it easier to see at night. Explain that electric light is cheaper and safer than kerosene lamps. Sell the benefits. Don't sell the bulb; sell the light.

\_\_\_\_\_, Barry Eigen,  
**How to Think like a Boss and Get Ahead  
at Work.** New York: Avon Books, 1990: 163

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- S: That puts a tremendous strain on KK. The company has to try hard always to offer excellent service and to retain the customer's loyalty.

- ***A sales letter is an important document. It should persuade the reader to buy the product or service being offered. Putting down random thoughts is rarely sufficient.***
- ***Make the customer feel that he is getting value for money.***
- ***No price is high or low. A customer judges it to be high or low for the value he thinks he gets from the product or service.***
- ***The focus in a sales letter should be on making the customer feel value addition.***
- ***To retain a customer a company should of course deliver what it promises in its sales letters.***

- G: Of course it has to. A good sales letter may attract customers but can't retain them if it is not backed solidly by performance. A poor sales letter can turn off a customer or potential customer even when the performance is good. Performance alone isn't enough in a crowded market place. The customer should not only get the best product or service for the price he is paying but also feel convinced that he is getting the best. That is where a good sales letter helps.

S: Let me show you a letter which I received in this morning's post. It is from **HEAD COUNT**, a manpower consultancy. It doesn't carry my name or address. Neither does it have a date printed on it. So I guess that it is a brochure in the form of a letter and it has been mass-mailed. The only indication that it is for me is my name and address on the envelope.

Here, would you like to take a quick look at it?

## **HEAD COUNT**

*(Manpower Consultancy House for INDIA & ABROAD)*

82, Kailash Colony, Pune - 412 019 Tel: 398217

Dear Sir,

It is an immense pleasure to introduce ourselves as one of the leading manpower consultancy house for professionals, organised to provide career opportunities both in INDIA and ABROAD under one roof. *Head Count* is run by a dedicated team of professionals and managed by an eminent board, which is all set to give its best.

We take pride to inform you that we have a deluge of organisations as our clients and are at present serving them to the best of our abilities and to their satisfaction. We have also got in touch with the embassies of various countries to identify suitable openings, in which we are sure to meet with success shortly.

Having tasted success, we like to excel in the field of placements through excellence of our service. The quest for perfection and the urge to thrive has forced us to look for ways to strengthen our performance, which we believe can be achieved through your cooperation. It would be our privilege to have your profile, that could enable us to take a step ahead, towards better prospects on your behalf. We assure you that complete confidentiality shall be maintained and under no circumstances shall your profile be forwarded to any organisation without your prior consent.

Herewith is enclosed a Basic Information Record Form and a self-addressed envelope, in which you are requested to furnish the required information for our record.

Wishing you goodluck in all your future endeavours and hoping for a positive response.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely  
for **HEAD COUNT**

**P.T. VYAVAHARE**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

- G: Do you want to give them your CV or fill in what they call Basic Information Record Form?
- S: Not really. It didn't arouse my interest although I was initially pleased to get a letter from a manpower consultancy without my asking. Somehow I got the impression that they were trying to help themselves rather than help me get a better job. Why should I spare my time and effort to promote their business? I have a good job and plenty of things to do.
- G: I think Mr Vyavahare has violated the first rule of selling: start with the customer; make him feel that he is going to gain something. Mr Vyavahare starts with a grand self-introduction: a "leading manpower consultancy house". I've often wondered why companies garland themselves when they should be looking after the customer.
- S: The second paragraph gives me a negative picture. When he says that they are trying to serve "a deluge of organisations" "to the best of (their) abilities" I get a picture of chaos and incompetence. Even his assertion that they "are sure to meet with success shortly" doesn't inspire confidence. The last few words "hoping for a positive response", also convince me that Mr Vyavahare is interested only in furthering his own business.
- How would you write this sales letter if you were the Chief Executive of HEAD COUNT?
- G: I'd try to interest you in job change and then suggest that HEAD COUNT can help you do that without any hassle. My version may look like this.

|                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p style="text-align: right;"><b>HEAD COUNT</b><br/>82, Kailash Colony, Pune-412 019<br/>Tel: (0212) 398 217</p> <p>March 3, 19__</p> <p>Mr S N Sinha<br/>Swan Engineering</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|



Dear Mr Sinha

As you have a good position in a good company, you may not think it necessary to look around for another job. But there are jobs here and abroad which can bring you new challenges and better compensation. You might want to find out how much more you can achieve by a job switch now.

We can take the chore out of your search for a more challenging and more paying job. With a large, up-to-date, and computerised database covering small, medium, and large organisations in India and abroad we can find you several attractive jobs. And we can do it in absolute confidence. We ensure that no one even gets a hint about your plans for a job change until you decide to tell them.

Since its launch five years ago HEAD COUNT has found better jobs of a wide variety for 3,100 people, nearly one third of them abroad.

A Basic Information Record Form blank is attached. Why don't you fill it in and send it to me in the enclosed self-addressed envelope? We'll do the rest for you.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

- S: In the first paragraph you sow in my mind the thought of job change. You've judged my attitude right. I have a good position with Swan Engineering, which is a very good company. Why should I think of another job? Why go through the hassle? You don't know what will make me think of another job—more challenge or more money. So you've put them both in. Perhaps both will attract me.
- G: I do blow my own trumpet, but not in a deafening way. I do talk about the "large, up-to-date, and computerised database," and about the large number of people (3,100) who have used our placement services and found better jobs in the last five years. It should reassure you that I am not a fly-by-night operator but a reliable, 'leading' company. The suggestion that we are good and reliable is made in a subdued way.



S: I like the way you emphasize that the job search you do for me will be completely confidential. That answers a worry I have, and I guess, a worry many people in my position will have. I'm afraid that my boss or colleagues may lose interest in me or, worse still, treat me badly if they come to know that I am thinking of a job change. You anticipate and take care of this worry very well.

Why do you enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope to get my reply? If I am interested, won't I write to you? If I am not interested, I will throw it away.

G: You will, indeed. But the self-addressed, stamped envelope and the Basic Information Record Form blank snuff out any temptation to postpone a decision on writing to me. They make it easy for you to act. The extra cost incurred is nothing compared to what we will have to spend on finding a new customer.

S: I have one final question on your first sentence. You say that I have a good job in a good company. You are right. But surely there are many people who are unhappy with their present jobs and are desperately looking for a new job. That first sentence will be inappropriate for them. So this letter will not be suitable for all prospective customers.

- ***The first rule of writing sales letters is to start with the customer. He should feel that he is getting something by paying attention to you. Start with what attracts the reader, not with what makes you great.***
- ***Avoid words and phrases which might create in the minds of the reader an impression that you are not competent or not in control.***
- ***Anticipate and deal with some of the reader's misgivings.***
- ***Make it easy for the reader to respond. Otherwise he may postpone action and forget all about your proposal.***
- ***Your customers vary a great deal. Draft different letters to suit different types of customers.***

G: What makes you think that this version will be sent to all prospects? There will be three or four different basic versions to be sent to different types of prospects. A letter to a government employee will naturally be different from one addressed to an employee in the private sector. A letter to a junior executive will be different from one meant for a senior, experienced executive.

Ideally, each prospect should get a letter drafted specifically for him. That is, of course, impractical. The next best course of action is to create four or five basic types and choose the right one for a given prospect. It will be disastrous to send everyone the same letter. A sales letter is not a wedding invitation.

- S: That reminds me of a letter we received from the United Arab Emirates a few months ago. The sender was the Managing Director of an Arab company that imported products and services from around the globe and offered them in the Arabian Gulf countries. The letter was addressed to Swan Engineering Ltd for the attention of General Manager/Overseas Manager. Our MD sent it to my boss with the remark, "Please discuss. This seems more in their interest."
- G: Did you respond to that letter?
- S: No. My boss also agreed that the Arab company was interested only in its own expansion and that we'd gain little by supplying the data they'd asked for.
- G: Can I take a look at the letter?
- S: Sure. It's a pretty long one . . . Here you are.

**Attn: General Manager/Overseas Manager**

Dear Sir

Your company address was listed in our directory as a manufacturer of products and or services. The existing potential business in our area warrants correspondence and ultimately establishing business relationship with the company of your product line and services to meet our forthcoming market requirements as soon as possible. We recently completed expansion of various Divisions and diversification into specialised service and maintenance to cater to the requirement of both Government and Private Sectors throughout the Gulf States and other selected Middle Eastern Countries.

Today's economic conditions stress the need to diversify sources of revenue and widen market territories; as a result, we have established sister companies and affiliation throughout the Arabian Gulf Countries.

Our company is presently committed to establish business association with reliable international firms of selected quality products and services, to meet the demands and expectations of end users in our market territories, viz.,

|                        |                  |         |          |
|------------------------|------------------|---------|----------|
| * UNITED ARAB EMIRATES | * STATE OF QATAR | * YEMEN | * EGYPT  |
| * SAUDI ARABIA         | * BAHRAIN        | * SYRIA | * JORDAN |
| * KUWAIT               | * OMAN           | * IRAN  | * IRAQ   |

This is a free, highly competitive market with enormous potential due to the aggressive continuous developments and growth in the above mentioned countries.

Our organization brochure is being updated and will be dispatched to you upon completion on or before January 30, 19\_\_\_\_. In the meantime, we kindly request you to provide us soonest with the following material/information for market evaluation by our concerned technical and commercial departments, upon which we will revert to you with our comprehensive reports and findings.

We would appreciate it if you would provide us the information, answers and or materials requested in the below stated 12 points.

The 12 points are:

- 1) **ADDRESS/FAX/TEL/TELEX NO.:** We require this for our records.
- 2) **CONTACT PERSON:** Name of the designated contact person for our company or our suppliers to contact directly.
- 3) **COMPANY PRODUCT INFORMATION:** The company line of: **Product, Equipment & Services.** Please be specific and comprehensive.
- 4) **REFERENCES:** List of references of Major customers who used your products and services both in the Middle East and other International Countries i.e.:
  - a) Name of Client/Customer,
  - b) Name of Project,
  - c) Country,
  - d) Type of services conducted and or products supplied.
- 5) **LIST OF NAMES:**
  - a) **Competitors:** To advise us of your known competitors in the international market.
  - b) **Country of Origin:** Your country of origin (this information will help us to determine whether our subsidiary and associated companies throughout the Middle East are already committed with any of your competitors or not.) We are only representing one company of each product line in each country.
- 6) **Special Features of Product:** Highlight advantages and technology advancement or special features if any, about your products, equipment and services compared to your competitors for our marketing people to identify.
- 7) **Evaluation of Operation:** Do you think we need any charts, curves, tables, drawings and other technical related information for our marketing and Engineering departments to best evaluate and comprehend your entire line of operation. If so, please advise and dispatch accordingly.
- 8) **Samples:** Samples of products line, (if applicable and possible) to effectively assist in our market survey (detailed market evaluation and recommendation will be sent to you upon completion at no cost if a mutual co-



operation and association between our company and your company was assured.)

- 9) **Catalogues:** For our Sales and Engineering Departments to conduct such market survey and feasibility studies report, we would require a minimum of 4 sets of catalogues, brochures and other relevant technical and commercial literatures.
- 10) **Price List:** Export price list F.O.B. (if applicable—must be competitive to penetrate market.)
- 11) **Shipping Information:** Shipping related information for C&F calculations (container sizes, packaging, weight, etc.)
- 12) **Potential Industry of Customers:** State which industry and/or industries your potential customer is part of for your products and/or services you are offering (i.e., oil and gas, petrochemical, construction, factories, manufacturers, department stores, grocery stores, or public in general...etc.) Of course we will identify all potential customers in our designated territories but it is part of effective marketing to gather such information from you to add to our other information to be accumulated.

Our initial market studies of your product line and services commercially and technically is indicative of our position to successfully promote such product line and services for our mutual financial benefits. We will send you our standard agreement for your review, together with prequalification and registration forms to your company as requested by the various Government institutions for their approved vendors' list of their tenders and enquiries. **It is required by local government institutions in all above mentioned Middle Eastern Countries to have formal written agreement between foreign suppliers and a local appointed agent, before inclusion to their approved suppliers' short list.** In the meantime we await answers and information as per our above stated 12 requirements to enable us to proceed with our market evaluation of your company's products and services in due course. Your conclusive response will avoid loss of potential forthcoming business in our area. Should you require any information or assistance, please advise and we will comply accordingly.

**Your prompt detailed response will be highly appreciated.**

Best Regards,

GEORGE STUDDEN  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

C.C. AS  
YK  
SALES  
ENGINEERING

ATTACHMENTS:  
LETTER CONTENT



- G: It's easy to see why your boss and MD didn't respond. Let's analyse the letter.

The first paragraph clearly indicates to you that Mr Studden has merely picked up your address from a directory and sent you a standard letter. You might be one of hundreds of companies he has sent the same letter to. He hasn't even bothered to find out what product(s) you manufacture or even whether it is a product or service that you offer.

- S: I agree. It is a blind matching of a letter with addresses in a directory. Mr Studden doesn't care as long as he gets some products/services from abroad and can market them profitably in UAE and the neighbouring countries.

- G: The second and third paragraphs also deal with the Arab company's expansion plans. Of course, every company is interested in its own growth. But when Mr Studden focusses on his company's growth, you get the impression that you are a mere pawn in his game plan. Naturally you are not excited. You are interested in *your* company's growth and profitability. If he offers you help in establishing a foothold in the lucrative Gulf market, you will be interested.

- S: Imagine that you are Mr Studden. Can you redraft the letter in a way that my boss and MD will be interested enough to send a reply?

- G: Let me try. Mr Studden's letter is frighteningly long. So first of all, I'll split the letter into two: a letter and a 'questionnaire'. The letter will be brief—less than a page. It will try to interest you in exporting your transformers to the Gulf. The questionnaire will ask for the information I need to get from you to examine the viability of a new business tie-up. I will also enclose an attractive brochure on my company.

The enclosures—the questionnaire and the brochure—can be the same for all prospects but the letter will be specific to your firm. I should find out from the Directory what products you manufacture. Even if the Directory doesn't specify transformers and washing machines as your products, I should be able to find out that you manufacture electrical devices and appliances.

- S: Isn't it impractical to draft a different letter for every prospect when they are abroad and the only source of information is the brief entry in a directory?

- G: You are of course welcome to shoot in the dark. If you're lucky, some targets will get hit. I find little value in mindless mailing of thousands of sales letters with a response rate of one or two per cent. I recommend more targeted, selective efforts.

When I say that the letter will be specific to the prospect, I don't mean that each letter will be strikingly different from the letters to other prospects. It

should be specific enough for the reader of the letter to feel that it is meant for him.

In my letter to your company, for instance, I'll mention transformers. As transformers are your main product, the very word should arouse your interest in a way the phrase "your product and or service" cannot. If I write to a manufacturer of textiles I'll mention textiles rather than "your product". It requires a little research, but that is essential for successful selling. Word processing makes it very simple to make this type of change in the text of a letter. Why not make them and win the customer over?

Here is how I'd draft the letter to your company:

Ladies and Gentlemen

Would you like to export your transformers to the fast growing markets of the Middle East? If you would, we could give you all the support you need to penetrate the market now dominated by Europe and South East Asia.

You may be aware that local governments in this part of the world do not put on their approved list of vendors foreign suppliers who have not entered into a written marketing agreement with a local agent. Our marketing experience, reach, and intimate knowledge of the local customs and conditions in the entire Middle East will make it easy for you to enter the market on a sure footing and to thrive there. You will find more information about our company in the brochure enclosed.

In order to examine the possibility of a tie-up we need to know each other better. I enclose a questionnaire on your company products, terms, etc. Could I have answers to these questions in the next three to four weeks?

I will be happy to answer any queries you may have on our company. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

GEORGE STUDDEN  
Managing Director

Enclosure

- S: Why have you started the letter with 'ladies and gentlemen'?
- G: Because I assumed that the Directory doesn't say who the Managing Director or the Export Manager of your company is. If I knew the names I'd call him or her by name. That would be much more effective.
- S: The first paragraph in your letter arouses my interest. Even if I have never thought of exporting to the Middle East, this invitation should make me say, "why not?" In the event of our wanting to export, you assure us of support. So I can perhaps try.
- G: Yes. My focus is on you, your needs, your dreams. You perhaps talk among colleagues occasionally about exporting as a way of expanding your business, but don't know who to contact. Now help is available. The perspective is entirely different from the one you noticed in the original letter from the Arab company.
- I go on to impress on you that our help is not just desirable but essential for you if you want to export to the Gulf. You can't market your products there unless you have a tie-up with a local company. We are local; we're experienced; we're quite big. So we can make sure that you have a painless entry into the Gulf market. In my letter I merely suggest my company's suitability for the tie-up. Any bragging will go into the brochure where a little hype is okay.
- S: Your next step is to ask for detailed information on our company. I feel I should send it to you to pursue the chance of collaboration. It's in my interest to send you the information you have asked for. You have also revealed yourself through the brochure. When I study it carefully, there may be a few questions cropping up in my mind. I can put them to you.
- G: If I have got you interested enough to fill in my questionnaire and send it to me, the objective of my brief sales letter will have been achieved.

- ***Do not make a sales letter very long if you want a senior executive to read it.***
- ***Transfer to a colourful, professionally designed brochure information on your company that need not appear in the letter.***
- ***Do not send out sales letters to all and sundry at random. Find out as much as you can about the potential readers and draft the letter in a way that indicates your knowledge and interest in them.***
- ***It is suicidal to make the readers feel that you are interested only in your growth and profits. They may not play along if they are not convinced that they benefit from collaborating with you.***
- ***If you want the readers to do something, make it as easy as possible for them to do so.***



- S: Can the middle part of Mr Studden's letter go as the questionnaire?
- G: Not really. I'd like to rearrange it slightly and make it easy for the prospect to fill in. This is what I suggest.

### QUESTIONNAIRE

*The answers to the following questions will help us examine the viability of a marketing tie-up between your company and ours. So kindly give full and accurate information. Please use additional sheets if necessary. Thank you for your time and effort.*

**1. Your company's name and address**

Telephone                      Fax                      Telex/e.mail  
(With ISD and area code-number)

**2. Contact person(s) in your company**

Name(s):                      Designation(s)  
Tel:

**3. Company's products/services to be marketed in the Middle East**

**4. Any special features of products/services**

**5. Market segment(s) in which your products are likely to be in demand (e.g. petrochemical/construction)**

**6. References** Names and addresses of up to five major customers of your products/services especially in the Middle East and Europe. If you have not yet exported products/services, major domestic customers.

**7. Main competitors (actual/anticipated) in the international market**

**8. Samples of products (if feasible)** or detailed technical specifications of products/services.

**9. Catalogues and promotional materials**  
(Please enclose FOUR copies each)

**10. Prices**  
Best export price F.O.B. (if applicable)

**11. Preferred shipping procedure**

- S: Was it really necessary to separate the questionnaire from the letter? It could have been part of the letter as in the original.
- G: I find that a long letter is rarely very effective. It frightens top executives who have very little time to spare. Sales letters should preferably go into a single A4 page.

Brevity is the virtue you should strive for even in letters aimed at others who may have more time on their hands. Equally imperative is simple, concrete language. While sales letters to executives in a trade or profession can carry some of the appropriate jargon, it should be avoided in letters addressed to people in a wide range of occupations. Simple, concrete words and short sentences grip you. Big words fly around you unable to touch you.

Let me share with you a sales letter which is about thirty years old. It was sent by Aer Lingus, the Irish airline company, to people in and around London. I don't recall where I got it from. It got into my collection because I liked it. It also had won the best sales letter award of the British Direct Mail Association in 1969-70.

Dear Madam,

Since you live in one of the most beautiful counties of England and have the sea nearby, you may consider it impossible to better your surroundings for a holiday. Have you ever been to Ireland? Whether the answer is yes or no, I am sure you will get a thrill out of browsing through this colourful booklet.

You will realise two points immediately. Ireland is certainly not a place to leave out of your thoughts for this year's holiday and secondly, Ireland is so easy to reach by Aer Lingus—quite cheap too. In all probability you have often just thought about going over there but never really got down to getting a few facts about the place.

Well, here are the facts and all you have to do now is to contact your usual Travel Agent or cut out the form on the back page of the booklet and post it today to Aer Lingus, 174 Regent Street, W.1.

So commences a wonderful holiday.

Yours faithfully

- S: It's surely brief. And the language is simple.
- G: The words are short. Just three out of the 165 words in that letter have four or more syllables in them. There is not a single word that is difficult to understand. Just nine words fall outside the thousand most frequently used words in English. Even those nine words are not too far from that core stock of common words.
- S: Is the first sentence intended as a compliment?
- G: Yes, I should think so. People generally like to hear nice things said about the place they have chosen to live in. Among themselves they may grumble about the place and paint it as hell on earth. But they get a kick out of others praising it. Here it attracts the reader's attention.
- S: Once the writer gets the reader's attention two points are presented. Ireland is worth visiting. It's quite easy and cheap to get there if you fly Aer Lingus. I think it's a good strategy.
- G: Yes, it is. The writer also suggests to the reader that perhaps she had thought of going to Ireland but never got down to finding out about the place. The booklet gives her all the facts she needs. All she has to do is to call her travel agent. Or she can cut out the enquiry card from the booklet and post it. Buying is presented as rational—based on facts, not as a result of pushing by the salesperson. Buying is also made easy. I won't be surprised if the reader phones the travel agent immediately. If she does it, the letter has done its job.

- ***Make your sales letters short, easy to read, and easy to understand. Simple, common words and short sentences are better than high-sounding words and complex sentences.***
- ***A light, conversational tone is generally more effective than a heavy, formal tone.***
- ***Present facts in such a way that the reader arrives on her own at the decision you want.***

- S: Did that letter really work?
- G: I don't know. I don't have any figures to prove anything. Besides, it's risky to trace increase in business to a single source. However, if the sales letters that go out from a firm are shaped by the interests and concerns of the prospects, there is no need to doubt the outcome. And sales letters spring from all departments.
- Some sales letters are worded so badly that they deter the reader from even making an enquiry.



- S: That is a harsh criticism. Do you have any samples of letters that turn off prospects?
- G: Here's one which a colleague of mine received last year from a manpower consultancy firm called VR 4CES. It is an unsigned letter printed on an inland letter form supplied by the post office. The only reason it didn't get thrown straight into the wastepaper basket is that he knows collecting letters is my hobby.
- The inside address is filled in by hand in a clumsy way:
- "To M/s Jain G. Dr..."
- S: It is obvious that his name was taken from an alphabetical list of names.
- G: There's no harm taking a name out of a list. But the minimum the sender should do is to rearrange it so that the first name comes first and the last name last. Now look at the letter.

Dear Sirs,

**WHAT'S VR 4CES all about**

You will be pleased to note that "VR 4CES" is a licenced manpower consultancy house, poomoted by a group of dynamic, well qualified and seasoned professionals catering to the industrial and personnel needs in the following fields:

- |                         |                         |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. SECURITY SERVICES    | 2. MANPOWER CONSULTANCY |
| 3. PLACEMENTS           | 4. I R CONSULTANCY      |
| 5. ESU & PF CONSULTANCY |                         |

Your Co-operation and enquiries are solicited in this regard for helping us to solve your worries, which are OURS at VR 4CES."

We have got separate ESI & PF codes

76-21871-162, WB/BH/23456

Respectively

We hope that taking our experience and expertise into consideration, you will avail our services as per your requirements.

Please feel free to call on us for further information and consultancy.

Assuring our best and sincere services at all times and looking forward to associate with you for mutual benefit.

Thanking U Sirs,

For VR 4CES

DIRECTOR

- S: What are they selling?
- G: Their incompetence. Every word in it cries out to the reader that the firm is not worth a second thought. The 'Director' didn't have the courtesy to even proof-read the letter. Or perhaps the quality of their proof-reading reflects the quality of their services.
- S: How will you redraft it?
- G: I can't. I don't know what services they offer and who their targets are. The five services listed are too vague for me to decide who should be targeted and what service should be highlighted. I am amazed at the casual way in which sales letters are drafted, printed, and distributed.
- S: You must also have in your collection sales letters which you like.
- G: Sure. Here's one from a finance company based in Bombay. I am not presenting it as a model. But it's good. And I like it.

**STAR FINANCE LIMITED**

1273, Shivaji Marg, Bombay - 400 102

Dear Friend,

We all dream. Of cars, houses, of starting a business.

And then there are a few of us who turn the dream into a reality. By working hard, saving every rupee, and planning carefully.

If you are one such person, about to make an investment, we at Star Finance can help you further. By taking away the worries of keeping your hard earned money secure.

As a Non Banking Finance Company (NBFC), we have a reputation of reliability and stability. Providing you good returns with absolute safety. (For details, turn overleaf)

Just like the way we have for over a lakh investors spread across 101 branches all over India. From Guwahati to Goa, Kochi to Sambalpur...reaching you, no matter where you are.

For more than a decade, we've listened to investors' queries, offered suggestions and built a reputation of trust. Moreover, you can speak to trained professionals at every branch who fully understand your needs and requirements. And who help you get closer to realising your dreams.

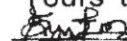
Added to this, we provide efficient, quick response through our large network.

So like the other 100,000 depositors all over the country—be it Chennai, Udaipur, Bombay or Dehradun—you'll find reliable reasons to secure your money the Star way.

Happy planning!

Thanking you,

Yours truly,



Senior Manager—Fixed Deposits

S: What do you like about this letter?

G: There are several things. First the opening sentences. The writer doesn't start with the we-are-a-leading-finance-company pitch. Instead he shares with the reader a common experience—dreaming of good things in life. That instantly removes the barrier between the buyer and the seller. They become part of a group with shared dreams, ideas.

Then the writer goes on to a subgroup most of us wish to belong to but have not managed—those who plan and save carefully. When he says “if you are one such person”, it is a gentle nudge for the reader to get into that circle of people who save wisely; that is, if he is not there already.

S: It is at this point that the writer introduces his company as people who can help the reader and others like him.

G: Precisely. The writer also highlights two qualities which cautious investors look for—‘reliability and stability.’

They give you ‘good returns with absolute safety.’

Now the reader wants to know more about the company. That there are over a hundred branches and a hundred thousand investors spread all over the country should comfort the reader. The writer also slips in the company's age. If it has been around for ten years it should be pretty stable and well-managed.

So the writer holds the reader's hand, gains his confidence, and leads him gently to the company's fold. There's no trickery. The writer starts from where the reader's thoughts are—that's all.



S: Some sentences appear to be incomplete. Is that okay?

G: Why not. That's the way we speak. Incomplete sentences used properly can create a crisp and informal conversational style.

S: Do you suggest any changes in the letter?

G: Yes. Two.

I think the sentence, "Added to this, we provide efficient, quick response through our large network" is too vague. I'd either skip it or make it clearer.

I'd also cut out "Thanking you" and put in the full name of the Senior Manager—Fixed Deposits, who has signed the letter. After engaging the reader in a heart-to-heart talk the writer can't—shouldn't—hide himself behind an inscrutable signature.

- ***A good sales letter starts with the needs of the reader. Right from the start she should feel that it is in her interest to read on.***
- ***Anticipate and deal with some of the misgivings the reader may have.***
- ***Don't shoot in the dark. Make sales letters specific to target groups.***
- ***Make the reader feel that she is getting value for money. There is no low or high price. A price may be seen as low or high depending on the value it is seen to add to the product or service.***
- ***An incompetently drafted sales letter may turn away prospective customers.***

# 8

## Say it with Flowers

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SAMIR: You said you were going to Bangalore next week.

GURU: That's right.

S: Where do you plan to stay? I recommend Hotel ...

G: I plan to stay at Gateway Hotel on Residency Road.

S: What's special about Gateway? If you haven't yet booked a room there, let me recommend...

G: I want to stay there because I like the place. The food wasn't particularly great in one of their restaurants when I stayed there last. But the service was excellent.

There's also a special reason why I want to go back to that hotel: a letter from their General Manager, Mr D D Malhotra.

S: What would the General Manager of a hotel write to you for?

G: The last time I stayed there I filled in their suggestion folder. I said that I found the stay comfortable and the service excellent. The only disappointment, I added, was the special food they promoted through *Karavalli*, their restaurant specialising in Konkani and Malabar dishes.

Many guests don't fill in the suggestion folder because they are convinced that someone like the General Manager doesn't read it; even if he does, he won't do anything about it. I answered all the questions fully and very truthfully, and then forgot all about it.

Imagine my surprise when I got this letter from the General Manager Mr Malhotra within ten days of my return from Bangalore.

**Dev D Malhotra**  
General Manager

28 November 19\_\_

Thank you very much for filling in our suggestion folder during your recent stay at our hotel.

I am happy to note that you had a pleasant and comfortable stay with us and found our facilities and services upto your expectations.

Your comment on food at *Karavalli* has been noted. I have personally taken up the matter with our Executive Chef and Food & Beverage Manager, and I would like to assure you that you will find a definite improvement during your future visits.

We will always endeavour to keep the high standard expected of us and constantly maintain the level of services in future.

Looking forward to your continued patronage and assuring you of our best attention and services at all times.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

for GATEWAY HOTEL ON RESIDENCY ROAD

DEV D MALHOTRA



- S: I don't find anything great about this letter.
- G: It may not be a letter you want framed and hung on your living room wall. But it delighted me. That's what matters. It assured me that Mr Malhotra had taken note of my suggestion and done something about it.
- Imagine that I didn't get a letter from him. I would have no special reason to go back to Gateway. That hotel would be for me one of the several in Bangalore where I could expect a comfortable stay. The special attachment that Mr Malhotra's letter has created is bound to bring back to the hotel not only me but also people to whom I recommend it.
- S: Mr Malhotra's letter appears to be written specially for you. Isn't it possible to standardise the letter so that the General Manager doesn't have to draft a different one each time he has to respond to a filled-in suggestion folder?
- G: You mean something like this?

**Dear Guest**

Thank you very much for filling in our suggestion folder during your recent stay at our hotel.

Your comments and suggestions have been taken note of. You can be sure that we will constantly maintain the highest standards of service.

We look forward to welcoming you the next time you visit this city.

Yours faithfully

- S: Yes. So time can be saved. This can be taken out of the computer memory and mailed to the guest. If a draft is available, the General Manager need not personally take care of each letter either. Someone else can sign it. Nothing will go wrong.
- G: Nothing will come out of it either. No one is fooled by ritual responses signed by some unnamed functionary.
- What made me happy is Mr Malhotra's specific reference to food at *Karavalli*. It shows that he hasn't sent me a standard, generalised acknowledgement.

S: Doesn't it take away a lot of a busy executive's time?

G: What's an executive's time for? Moreover, once you develop three or four drafts covering praise for or criticism of a few categories of service such as room service and house keeping, it needn't take more than a couple of minutes to customise them. The reader should get the feeling that his comments—positive or negative—have been noted. A standard, suitable-for-all-occasions letter won't do that.

It is worth investing a little time and effort in creating goodwill among existing customers. That is much more cost-effective than getting new customers, as any marketing expert will tell you.

Every letter that leaves your company should be such that it promotes goodwill. Every time someone gets your letter they should feel reassured that you care for them and are concerned about their welfare.

S: That's tough. We have to protect our interests, don't we?

G: Protecting the recipient's interests may well be the best way of protecting your own interests. Goodwill is like reputation. What is built up over several years can be spoilt with a few thoughtless remarks. Protecting one's own interests too vehemently may appear all right in the short term; but long term benefits flow from erring on the side of generosity to the customer.

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I set up my first stall at a one-day fair at Axbridge, Somerset. It was a hoop-la stall. I had built the stall myself and by fairground standards I hadn't been very clever at the job. My pegs were small and my rings were generously large. My stock of prizes went rapidly; and the quicker they went, the bigger grew the crowd round my stall. My fairground colleagues thought I was heading for ruin when they saw my stall cleared of prizes by nightfall.

But it didn't work out that way. I had spent £10 on prizes but I had taken £15. Some of the other stall holders had lost hardly any prizes but they had taken only £3. They had the job of packing up their prizes and carting them to the next fairground. There they would use paint and a lot of time making those battered prizes attractive again. But I would buy new stock and attract more customers. Three years later I had a dozen men working for me.

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\_\_\_\_\_, Billy Butlin, *Sunday Chronicle*, May 31, 1946, in  
F.S. Pepper, **20th Century Anecdotes**, Sphere, 1990: 154

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Take a look at this letter from a cargo operator with offices all over India and close links with foreign cargo operators. Let's call them A-One Cargo Movers.

Dear Sir,

SUB: Exchange of Gatepasses between Calcutta and Varanasi booked against our Docket Nos: 12345 Dated 22/9/19.. Ex: BLR - CAL and 12346 Dated 22/9/19.. Ex: BLR - VRS

It has been brought to our notice that for the materials booked to Calcutta and Varanasi on the same date the Transporter's copy of Gate Pass had been mixed up and the Gate pass meant for Varanasi went to Calcutta and vice versa.

We are sorry to inform you that we shall not be able to do anything to rectify this mistake because we are definitely not at fault and the responsibility of giving proper documents lies with your kindness. We are sorry to profess our inability to help you but would however advise you to take the matter up with your respective consignees.

Thanking you,

Very truly yours,

S Basavappa  
Business Development Officer

This letter was sent to the consignor—Pai Electrolinks Ltd, Bangalore—about two months after the mix-up. Obviously there were some telephone exchanges between A-One Cargo Movers and Pai Electrolinks before Mr Basavappa decided to put in writing his firm's position.

- S: The fault is entirely the consignor's.
- G: There is no doubt about it. But can A-One do anything, though not obliged, to help Electrolinks get out of the mess? If there is anyone who can retrieve the parcels and get them to the right destinations, it is A-One with their nationwide network. And I think A-One should have done it for Electrolinks, one of their regular customers.

If I were Mr Basavappa, I'd write to Electrolinks something like this.



Dear Mr Kataria

**Mix-up of gate passes**

***Our Docket Nos: 12345 and 12346 of September 22, 19\_\_***

We will be happy to help you exchange the two parcels which got delivered to wrong addresses because of a mix-up in the gate passes. I have already asked our offices in Varanasi and Calcutta to wait for your instructions and to give them top priority as the parcels have been delayed very much already.

As the mix-up of gate passes was not caused by our office, I am afraid I will have to bill you for the exchange of parcels between Calcutta and Varanasi. I shall, however, restrict the bill to the extra distance to be covered rather than treat it as a fresh booking. The charges for additional loading and off-loading also will be waived.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

- S: I daresay you are too generous. Is it perhaps because A-One isn't your company? You can serve guests generously when you are at your neighbour's wedding reception.
- G: No, not at all. I'd do the same thing if A-One were my company. This, I think, is the best way of creating the goodwill of Pai Electrolinks and retaining their custom. I didn't offer to do the exchange of parcels free, did I? So there is no cut in my revenue. Even if there was a cut in my profit, I'd still go out of my way to help the customer. It is very likely that the customer may go out of his way to patronise our services.
- S: This is all very well. But suppose that for technical reasons A-One can't do anything about it? How would you reply to Electrolinks?
- G: Before I do that, let's look at the reason given by Mr Basavappa for A-One's inability to do anything about the problem.
- "... we shall not be able to rectify this mistake because we are definitely not at fault and the responsibility for giving proper documents lies with your kind selves".

At Lake Tahoe in Nevada (USA), Sammy Davis Junior sang three songs to open a dinner show, then stopped and announced to the crowd of 850, "Folks, some nights I have it, and some nights I don't. Tonight I don't. Sorry to walk out on you—but the least I can do is have you all as my guests." He then paid the food and drinks bill for the entire audience, a gesture which cost him US \$17,000 plus tips, and won him a million in goodwill.

\_\_\_\_\_ F.S. Pepper, *20th Century Anecdotes*, Sphere, 1990: 232

It is obvious that Mr Basavappa refuses to do anything about it because the mix-up of gate passes wasn't his office's making. He's too negative. He makes his refusal to help worse by gratuitous advice: "We are sorry to profess our inability to help you but would however advise you to take the matter up with your respective consignees".

The impression Mr Basavappa gives Pai Electrolinks is this: "We've delivered the parcels according to the documents you gave us. We've done our job. I see you have a problem. Why should we waste our time on it?"

S: I agree it will have put off Mr Kataria. I won't be surprised if he switches over to another cargo mover, although the mix-up which started all this was not A-One's fault. What I'd like to know is how you'd say no to Mr Kataria without spoiling goodwill. You are not allowed to offer any discount.

G: Here's how I'd go about it:

Dear Mr Kataria

**Mix-Up of Gate Passes**

***Our Docket Nos 12345 & 12346 of September 22, 19 \_\_\_\_***

I am sorry to learn that a mix-up of gate passes by your booking clerk has resulted in our delivering two parcels to each other's destination. We would like to help you correct the mistake. But now that the delivery process has been completed according to the gate passes received by us, may I suggest that you ask the consignees to return the parcel and documents to our office nearest to them? We shall deliver them at the right address.

I am afraid I have to treat them as fresh bookings and bill you accordingly. But I will give the exchange of parcels top priority, so that there is no further delay.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

- S: So you don't give away anything.
- G: You can say that I almost casually mention that the mix-up was their booking clerk's doing, not ours. I don't offer to get into correspondence with the two consignees. I ask Pai Electrolinks to do that. What I offer is to give top priority to the exchange of parcels once they come to us with all the documents needed.

The consignor has lost time and money; I'd like to forgo a little in sympathy and transport the parcels at a concessional rate as a goodwill gesture to a regular customer. Even if I am not free to do that, the least I can do is to write a helpful letter.

Instead of telling the customer we've done our job; now you deal with the mess your good-for-nothing booking clerk has landed you in, I tell them, 'Let me help you'. The tone is positive. The letter is unlikely to make them feel that they have been let down by us.

- ***Customers' goodwill is an essential ingredient of any company's success.***
- ***Every time someone gets your letter, they should feel assured that you care for them and are concerned about their welfare.***
- ***A little thoughtfulness, a little considerateness to a customer in a letter to them can often build up their goodwill. You don't need extraordinary letters. You don't need to spend a lot of time either to draft such letters.***
- ***Protecting the customer's interests may well be, in the long run, the best way of protecting your own interests.***
- ***When you can't give any concession, at least write a helpful letter.***

- S: I guess we have to be very careful when we give bad news or turn down someone's request.
- G: Absolutely. Many executives mess up even good news letters by not focusing on what would please the reader most. The damage done in such cases is neutralised to a large extent by the good news itself. Bad news badly delivered can break people or cause resentment and non-cooperation.

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Tom Driberg, as a Member of (British) Parliament, developed an infuriating technique to deal with the shoals of abusive letters. His secretary was instructed to reply, "Tom Driberg asks me to thank you for your letter. He regrets he is unable to answer it individually as he has had a great deal of correspondence on this subject. He is, however, most grateful for your support."



There are occasions when you have to withdraw some privileges or refuse a request. A great deal of tact and planning may be needed to present such bad news especially to one's own employees.

Here is an example. Now employees of Aruna Foodchem Ltd can consult any doctor and buy medicines from anywhere and claim reimbursement upto Rs 6000 a year. The top management is convinced that this system, very convenient for employees, is abused by a large number of them.

Even those who are not ill produce fake medical bills signed by obliging doctors and get 'reimbursement' up to Rs 6000 a year.

The management decides to stop the misuse but honour its commitment to the employees' health care. So from now on, the employees will have to go to one of the five leading hospitals in the city for their treatment—inpatient as well as outpatient. At these hospitals they need not pay anything; the bills will be settled directly by the company. With the elimination of fake claims, the management reckons that the annual reimbursement limit can easily be raised from Rs 6000 to Rs 7500. The management is also willing to bear 50 per cent of any expenses beyond the limit provided they are incurred in these hospitals or others to which patients are referred by these hospitals.

Here is one way of conveying the decision—bad news—to the employees.

It has come to the notice of the Management that many employees have been submitting fake medical bills for reimbursement. It has therefore been decided to withdraw the present system of medical reimbursement with effect from 1.4.19\_\_\_\_. From that date onwards those who wish to avail themselves of the Company's contribution to their medical treatment will be required to go to one of the following hospitals: Mahavir Hospital, Sachidananda Hospital, St. Theresa's Hospital, Apollo Hospital, and National Institute of Medical Sciences. At these hospitals your inpatient and outpatient treatment upto Rs. 7500 per annum will be free provided you produce your currently valid identity card when you register yourselves or your dependents for treatment. Treatment expenses in any other clinics or hospitals will not be reimbursed by the Company unless the patient has been referred to those clinics or hospitals by a Senior Medical Officer in one of the five designated hospitals which alone are authorised to make the initial registration.

In order to help those with genuine medical problems it has also been decided that the company will, in addition, bear 50 per cent of medical expenses beyond the annual limit of Rs 7500 provided these expenses are incurred at the five designated hospitals.

Samir, what do you think of this? Imagine that you are an employee of their company.

- S: The message is clear. The reason for the change over from the existing system to the new one is given right at the start. But the memo gives me the impression that a privilege which we enjoy now is being withdrawn because it was abused by some employees. Neither those who abused it nor those who have been submitting genuine bills will feel happy about the new arrangement which is far more restrictive.
- G: Would you say that it was not a good idea to give the real reason for withdrawing a privilege?
- S: I don't know. Without the reason it should be difficult to justify such a sudden and major change in the policy affecting the welfare of the employees.
- G: But isn't the alternative arrangement better? The reimbursement limit has been raised from Rs 6000 to Rs 7500. The Company will also meet 50 per cent of expenses beyond the annual limit of Rs 7500. Those make the new system superior and more attractive.
- S: Yes. But these features are tucked away at the end. The resentment caused by the withdrawal of a privilege is so strong that we are not in a mood to judge the merit of the alternative arrangement.
- G: That is precisely it. Those who have been abusing the system resent it because they cannot continue getting easy money. They are likely to argue against the new system as an anti-employee measure. Those who have not been abusing the system also resent the bad news—they feel that the freedom to consult any doctor has been severely curtailed by the management because of its inability to check the abuse of the system by a small minority of employees. The bad news has been broken too bluntly and too soon. The overall tone is negative, one of taking away a privilege rather than of giving the employees a better alternative. How about this version?

Your company has always given top priority to your health and that of your families. In order to offer you the best medical care available in the city the company has made special arrangements with five top class, multispeciality hospitals in the city: Mahavir Hospital, Sachidananda Hospital, National Institute of Medical Sciences, Apollo Hospital, and St. Theresa's Hospital.



From April 1, 19\_\_, you and your dependents will get free and virtually unlimited care from these five hospitals. As these hospitals are in five different parts of the city, one of these will be near where you live.

All you have to do is to produce your company identity card when you register yourself or your dependents for inpatient or outpatient treatment. You don't pay anything. The bills will be sent directly to the company. Bills up to Rs 7500 a year will be fully settled by the company. That is Rs 1500 above your current entitlement. Moreover if your annual bills cross Rs 7500, the company will help you with 50 per cent of it. As 90 per cent of all the reimbursement claims so far have been well below Rs. 6000 a year, this new arrangement gives almost all of you free medical care at five top hospitals in the city without the bother of filling in reimbursement claim forms and chasing doctors for signatures.

If you have a very complicated medical problem which these hospitals cannot cope with, they will refer you to some other hospital here or elsewhere. The bills from those hospitals also will be settled by the company following the same norms, that is, full settlement up to Rs 7500 a year and 50 per cent for the rest.

With the introduction of this vastly superior system, the current practice of cash reimbursement up to Rs 6000 of medical expenses certified by any doctor will be discontinued. Initially some of you might feel it a little inconvenient to go to one of these hospitals instead of the neighbourhood doctors. But the most modern facilities and quality of medical care at these five hospitals combined with the simplicity of procedure will more than compensate for the little extra trouble.

We wish you and your families the best of health.

- S: It isn't a bad news letter any more. It is really a good news letter now.
- G: Not quite. For those who have been presenting fake bills with the connivance of neighbourhood doctors and chemists this is really a bad news letter. What I have done though, is to give the bad news towards the end of the letter after presenting the alternative in a positive—indeed very attractive—light. It doesn't accuse anyone of malpractice. So employees who have been submitting fake bills will not be able to criticise it and say the management is "casting aspersions on the employees." In other words, it



will be very difficult for them to get the majority of the employees to oppose the new arrangement.

S: This memo is pretty long. Almost 300 words. It lacks the brevity that you keep talking about.

G: You're right. But brevity is not an absolute value. Don't use two words where one word is enough. And do use two words where two words are needed. Using less would be counter-productive.

- ***When you have to break bad news to an audience—internal or external—use tact.***
- ***Often it is useful to delay the bad news until the reader's mind is prepared to receive it.***
- ***How an employee perceives the news is what matters.***

Another sure way to create goodwill and loyalty is to congratulate people and companies when they achieve something. Don't just telephone them; send a letter. That will be read several times. A letter will give greater happiness than a phone call because it can also be shown to and shared with others.

S: It is very rarely that we hear about extraordinary feats by individuals and companies we are connected with. When we do, we can meet them and congratulate them.

G: You don't need to wait for extraordinary achievements to congratulate people you know. Getting the ISO 9000 certification, bagging a big export order, an executive getting an award, an anniversary of the launch of a company—these are all occasions fit for a letter of congratulations.

Within the company, even smaller events justify a brief and enthusiastic note of congratulation. A note can be shown to people—the folks at home for example—and preserved. Here's a note a friend of mine working for a pharmaceutical company received from his Regional Manager more than twenty-five years ago. He has preserved it all these years because it boosted his morale at the start of his career.

To

Mohamed Ibrahim  
Bhopal

Hearty congratulations on your excellent TF of 105.8% and securing II rank in the region for the period ending 31.3.1970. Please keep up the good work.

You have very good chances to win a first prize in the PMC contest. Go all out in these two months on PMC camps on the following lines.

1. Give a forceful detail on PMC, highlighting the advantages in all indications printed in the literature, as we did while working together at Bhopal. This will increase the flow of prescriptions.
2. Request doctors who are traditionally with us to exclusively prescribe PMC for these two months.
3. Make a list of your purchasing doctors and nursing homes and ask them to stock a little more than usual—at least 50% more.
4. Enlist the cooperation of your good chemists. Let them stock a month's requirements in two months.

"Success comes to those who dare and act". Act now, and the prize is yours.

With best wishes

Krishna Sood

S: There's nothing earth-shaking in this letter. Still if Mohamed has preserved it all these years, I put it down to the power of a simple note of congratulations and encouragement.

G: The letter does three things. It congratulates Mohamed on his achievement, it plants in his head the idea that the first prize in the PMC contest is within reach, and finally it gives him tips on how he can manage it. Mohamed must feel that he has his boss's full backing.

- S: The ultimate beneficiary appears to be the Regional Manager himself. The sales in his region—and therefore his own performance figures—go up when sales managers under him exceed their targets. That can't hurt!

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Flowers always leave part of their fragrance in the hands that give them.

\_\_\_\_\_ Chinese proverb

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- G: The goodwill you generate in others ultimately benefits you. Even when there is no direct and immediate benefit we should try and work towards the goodwill of people we work with. Here's a letter from the Chief Executive of a cosmetics company to an Area Manager. This was sent on January 21, 1985, and is still kept by Mr Bijoy Das as a prized possession.

**Dear Mr Das**

This note is specially written to compliment you on the excellent market report submitted by you. I have requested Mr Batliwala to circulate a copy of the report for emulation.

We are also delighted to note that you are leading your team towards excellent performance. Please keep up the good work.

We wish you the very best.

Kind regards

Robert Andrews

Copy: Mr N. Batliwala

When Mr Das sent me a copy of this letter, this is what he noted in the margin. "Here's a letter I liked. Even when an ordinary report (which was expected to be sent by Area Managers) is sent with some extra efforts, and we get appreciation for the same from Chief Executive, it is commendable.

"The language is very simple and very motivating".

- S: I can imagine the excitement Mr Das must have felt when he was told that a copy of his report was being circulated among his colleagues as a model.



- G: You'll have noticed that there is nothing remarkable about the language and style of these letters. What is remarkable is the thought, the gesture. Equally remarkable is the enormous goodwill it generates. Loyalty generally accompanies goodwill.

A genuine word of appreciation is not out of place when you write to existing or potential clients. It need not always lead to anything concrete. The joy it gives the reader is justification enough.

Here is a letter I wrote some time ago to the Divisional Finance Manager of the then newly started subsidiary of a large Indian company. It was a handwritten note to him a few hours after I met him and discussed with him a possible training programme for his secretarial staff.

**Dear Mr Simhachalam**

Here is a quick note to tell you how deeply you impressed me during my brief meeting with you this morning. As I reflect on the discussion, I am struck by the realization that you stand out from nearly all the managers (of different companies including your parent company) that I have met because you show extraordinary faith in your subordinates.

While most managers constantly complain about the ineptitude, inefficiency, lack of commitment and a host of other shortcomings in their secretarial staff, you affirm your pride and full confidence in them. Combining realism with generosity, you put down any shortcomings they have to their lack of exposure and experience. How fortunate your colleagues and subordinates must be to work with you!

With your emphasis on the positive side of life I am sure you will lead your young organisation to peaks of glory.

I wish you all the best.

Sincerely

- S: Did you mean what you've put into that letter?
- G: Yes, every word of it. Compliments should be genuine for them to be accepted with delight. A touch of flattery may be welcomed by most people.

If you lay it on thick, it is unlikely to fool anyone except those who enjoy being surrounded by sycophants.

S: Did Mr Simhachalam ask you to conduct any training programme?

G: No. I wasn't planning to use it as a bait for a training programme. I wrote it because I was impressed by what he said and did. I am happy I wrote it. I am sure he felt happy to receive it. Perhaps no one had ever told him about these unusual characteristics which he had.

S: Won't people misunderstand us if we praise them? Won't they suspect that we are fishing for favours?

G: No, not if the compliments are genuine and specific. Look out for opportunities to compliment people you meet or get in touch with. Write warm thank-you notes as soon as possible after you receive some help or favour or hospitality from someone. Goodwill creation is everybody's business, not a job reserved for the public relations department.

Let me show you two versions of a thank-you letter addressed to a management consultant who conducted a well-received training programme on creative problem-solving for a group of university professors. The letter is from the Head of the Department which organised the training programme.

**Version A**

**Dear Madam**

***Training programme on Creative Problem-solving***

This is to thank you for the excellent programme you conducted for us. The participants liked it and found it very useful.

We hope you will extend your support in future also.

Yours faithfully

**Version B**

**Dear Ms Kothari**

Through your sessions on creative problem-solving you have shaken most of us. You have also snatched away from us the luxury of moaning about hurdles and doing nothing about them. You have made us think; you have inspired us. We have already started using some of the techniques you introduced us to.

The feedback from all the participants has been unmistakably enthusiastic. And you know very well how slow academics are to get excited and to admit that they have been influenced by fellow academics.

Thank you for giving us a stimulating experience. If we manage to take on some of our problems—which we have always treated as insurmountable—the credit should go to you.

All of us hope that we will have you again in our midst in the near future.

Cordially

- S: If I were Ms Kothari I'd like to get Version B although Version A is welcome, too.
- G: Version A is welcome because something is better than nothing. Consultants and trainers rarely get a thank-you note from the organisers of training programmes. Many who invite external faculty think that it is enough to say "thank you" at the conclusion of the training programme. They don't realize how sweet a written note is for the trainer.
- Now let's see what's wrong with Version A. It is so general that it can be sent to anyone who has conducted a training programme. It doesn't say anything real to the trainer. It is a ritual, empty thank-you note. It is unlikely to excite anyone who gets it.
- S: I agree. This might be a routine note that every trainer gets whether his training programme was well-received or not.
- G: The advantage of Version A is that the writer needn't think to draft it! He can safely sign and send this form letter at the end of a training seminar.



Version B must please Ms Kothari because it sounds warm and genuine. It tells her exactly what aspects of the training programme excited the participants and how they are going to benefit from it. I won't be surprised if she readily agrees to conduct further training programmes for them even if she has to go a bit out of her way. Well presented compliments gladden everyone's heart.

S: It needs a lot of time to draft such letters for every external trainer. Is it practical?

S: It is. It takes much less time than you think. The trick is to write the note immediately after the event. Exciting details of the event would then be fresh in your mind. That makes it easy to refer to specific aspects of the event. It is also useful to think of such thank-you notes as informal conversations on paper. Then drafting won't be difficult.

S: This is all very well when the consultant has conducted an excellent programme. What do we do when the programme has been a disaster? Would you recommend not sending a thank-you note?

G: I still recommend that we write a thank-you note. If a programme has been a total failure, the fault perhaps lies in us. We didn't do enough homework to find out about the trainer, her reputation, the level at which she operates, and so on.

We might truthfully write to a trainer whose programme fails:

**Dear Ms Kothari**

Thank you for mounting a well-conceived one-day programme on creative problem-solving. The most interesting session, according to many participants, was the pre-lunch one in which you showed us how to crash through conventional barriers to problem-solving.

There appears to have been some mismatch between the level you were operating on and the level at which most of the participants were. Our pre-programme preparatory work perhaps failed to give you a clear picture of their needs and capabilities. I am sorry for it.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

- S: You still look for something to compliment her on!
- G: Yes. You will find something to compliment people on if you look hard enough—even in a disastrous performance. When something goes wrong, if you can take at least a share of the blame, it helps. If you look at events dispassionately, you will find that the responsibility for things going wrong is rarely one-sided.

You will also notice that if you own up responsibility for a problem, others also come forward to share it. If you reject responsibility, others try to prove you wrong. It pays to say, "I am sorry, I made a mistake".

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Nancy Astor sat with Bernard Shaw at his death-bed. The old boy woke up suddenly from a coma and said, "Nancy, did you ever hear the story of Adela Patti's husband?" It appears that the *prima donna* and her (foreign) husband arranged a country-house party after what they supposed to be the English fashion. The guests were assembled, the music struck up, when the husband appeared running down the staircase. "You must all go away. I have found a man in bed with my wife."

Consternated, the guests hardly knew what to do and were preparing to leave when the husband appeared again: "You must all come back. It is quite all right. He has apologised."

\_\_\_\_\_ A.L. Rowse, *Memories of Men and Women*, 1980  
in F.S. Pepper, *20th Century Anecdotes*, Sphere, 1990: 19-20

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- **Compliment people and organisations when you are impressed by the way they do things. Put it in writing. They can read and reread it, and share it with others.**
  - **Don't wait for something earthshaking before you write a note to congratulate others.**
  - **A compliment is sweetest when it is genuine but least expected by the people it is sent to.**
  - **Enormous goodwill can be generated if you say sorry when something goes wrong. If you thrust the blame on others, their natural reaction will be to defend themselves.**
  - **Avoid ritual notes. They fool no one.**
  - **Goodwill is priceless. Earn it by going beyond what they expect of you. Err on the side of generosity.**

# 9

## Fire Fighting

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- SAMIR: Good morning, Guru.
- GURU: Morning, Samir. How're you?
- S: I wish you hadn't come in this morning.
- G: Oh?
- S: I'm in a terrible mood. Just shot off a stinker to Best Boards Ltd., the guys who supply us with press boards.
- G: Has that letter left your office?
- S: It might still be in the Despatch.
- G: Call it back before you do anything else.
- S: OK... Done.
- G: Now relax. And tell me, what's the problem?
- S: The quality of BBL's pressboards is very bad now. They break when they are bent into the cylinders in our EL2s. The thickness isn't uniform. It varies not only between boards but also within the same board.
- G: Did you ever tell them that quality was going down?
- S: We did. In fact during his visit to our factory a couple of months ago Mr Mishra, their Works Manager, promised to improve the quality. But there hasn't been any real improvement. Our Plant Manager keeps blasting me. I'm sick of this business. That's why I wrote that stinker.



- G: Why don't you get pressboards from some other supplier?
- S: There's only one other company that makes this special type of pressboards in the country. Their quality isn't any better. With BBL, the supply is at least regular. Imports are frightfully expensive. In short, there is no real choice. I have to whack them into giving me better quality boards.
- G: Let me see what you have put into your letter.
- S: Here you are.

## SWAN ENGINEERING LTD

**Mr A N Purohit**  
General Manager, Sales  
Best Boards Ltd  
Nagpur - 480 012

**Dear Mr Purohit**

This refers to your recent consignment of pressboards.

Are your quality control guys blind ? Otherwise how can they pass pressboards which vary widely in thickness ? There are big variations between boards and even within the same board. Your boards keep breaking when they are bent into our cylinders.

We are fed up. When your Works Manager, Mr Mishra, visited us in January, he promised to improve the quality. But he has done absolutely nothing. I don't know how you can stay in business with such shoddy products.

Anyway kindly check up and come back to us immediately. If the quality doesn't improve with the next consignment, we will look for other sources.

Yours sincerely

- G: Now cool down. Imagine that you are Mr Purohit. How would you react to this sarcastic, almost rude letter?
- S: I would be badly shaken. I'd immediately supply good quality boards.
- G: That's what you hope will happen as a result of your stinging words. But put yourself in Mr Purohit's shoes and think again. Please remember that Swan Engineering has no real option. You have to buy from Best Boards.
- S: I guess Mr Purohit could yell "To hell with it" and throw that letter into the wastepaper bin.
- G: He shouldn't. But I wouldn't be surprised if he did. You have to use an entirely different route to get him to do what you want. Spewing ash and lava may make you feel good. That's all it does. What you need is quality press boards.
- S: You don't know these guys as I do. The only thing that pierces their thick skin—and shall I add, thick head—is a shower of sharp words. I would say they expect it.
- G: That is a very good reason to use a different approach. Stress the positive. Tell him your expectations are high. He should feel ashamed that he has not lived up to the image you have of him. Don't use sarcasm. Don't let your anger guide your words.
- S: I am not a saint, Guru.
- G: You don't need to be. But you must be sensible. If you want to thrive in business, follow the biblical advice: Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.

- ***Anger is a natural response when people you count on let you down. But it is unwise to display it in a letter. Sarcasm is not recommended either.***
- ***Do unto others what you would have them do unto you. At least, do not do unto others what you would like them not to do unto you!***

Here's what I'd write to Mr Purohit if I were you.

Dear Mr Purohit

**Quality of recent consignments of press boards**

Because of the consistently high quality of your press boards we have been buying them regularly from you for almost two years now. But your recent consignments, I am afraid, are not upto your usual standard. Uniform thickness is not maintained between boards. Thickness varies even within the same board as the sample piece (sent under separate cover) clearly shows. Many boards break when bent into the cylinders.

During his visit to our factory two months ago, your Works Manager, Mr Mishra, saw for himself the problems and promised to improve the quality. But he does not appear to have been able to make good his promise.

If the quality does not improve with the next consignment, I am afraid we will look for some other supplier.

We will indeed be extremely reluctant to break off the excellent relationship we have built up over the last two years. I am confident that you will not let that happen.

Yours sincerely

- S: Now I see what you mean. Your version is firm without being harsh. It starts on a positive note, and tries to appeal to their self-respect. I think it has a good chance of persuading them to send us better quality boards. There is very little we can do if they don't. So an explosion may not work.
- G: Even if there are several suppliers, it is good to cultivate one or two of them rather than flaunt your money power as a buyer or your legal rights as specified in a contract. Other suppliers also may turn out to be equally unreliable. You know more than I do how long it takes to build up a mutually satisfactory relationship between buyers and suppliers. We shouldn't let it get disrupted at the slightest provocation.
- S: If good words fail repeatedly?



- G: Cancel the order or stop buying from them. But continue to use good words. You never know when you will need to eat your words and go back to them!

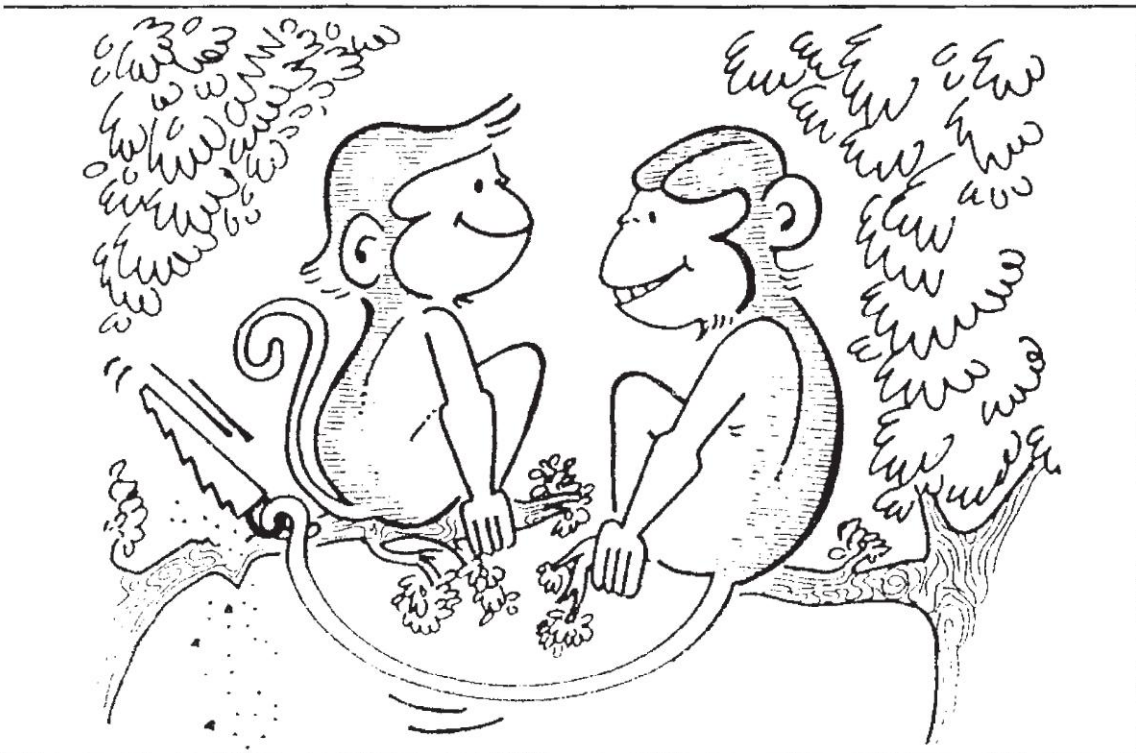
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When H.W. Nevinston was literary editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, George Bernard Shaw, who reviewed for the paper, declined to work except on special terms and wrote threatening the paper with all the powers of the Author's Society. Nevinston replied, "Dear Sir, I am directed by the editor to inform you that he will see you damned before he gives you more than five pounds for the article in question."

Not to be out-abused Shaw replied, "Dear Sir, please inform the editor that I will see him and you and the whole *Chronicle* staff boiled in Hell before I do it for that money."

\_\_\_\_\_ Cecil Roberts, *Half Way*, 1931  
in F.S. Pepper, **20th Century Anecdotes**, Sphere, 1990: 6

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"Frontal attack tends to put the other party on the defensive."

Frontal attack tends to put the other party on the defensive. They will find some fault or other with your position or the way you have done your part of the contract. If mutual accusations lead to a full blown dispute, you are likely to be the bigger loser.

Here is a letter which I collected from a big Indian company in the private sector. See how pathetic it is. If the writer of the letter is not exaggerating wildly, the attempt to get quality from the supplier went on for over six months with no success. In spite of several phone calls, telexes, and letters, there was no improvement. If they were by the same writer and in the same mould, it is not difficult to see why they all failed to rein in the supplier.

Dear Sirs,

**Sub:** *Supply and erection of HDPE 10" pipeline for a pressure of 6 Kg for pumping acidic pulp slurry from Pulp Division to Staple Fibre Division about 1 KM distance.*

We have placed with you orders dated 25.1.19-- for supply of 10" HDPE pipes and fittings for a pressure of 6 KG (Sq.cm) as per IS 4984/1987 and for its erection at our site, for pumping acidic slurry from our Pulp division to Staple Fibre division at Chandrapur, a distance of about 1 KM. The terms and conditions to be complied with are fully detailed in the orders.

Accordingly, you have completed despatch of pipes and fittings by 14.3.19-- and assured us that the entire pipes and fittings will be erected and pipeline work will be completed and commissioned within two weeks thereof. But you did not do so and we have intimated you the fact by telex messages and requested to expedite completion of pipeline work immediately, which you finally did and requested us to commission.

Accordingly this was done, but the same started giving way right from the day of its commissioning and had broken at several places and slurry started leaking from the pipes. This breakage of pipeline must have caused only due to your poor workmanship and using of substandard quality pipes.

Even though the agreement between us is to supply and erect pipeline for a pressure of 6 Kg. The pipeline could not withstand even a pressure of 4.5 Kg., hence it is a clear violation of the terms and conditions of the order issued by us. It is also pertinent to mention here that the pipeline has not been laid properly. In spite of your making many experiments in the laying of pipeline and constant changing of flanges and rubber packing, still breakage of pipes and leakage of slurry are taking place.

Due to too often breakage and leakage of pipeline we have incurred heavy production loss in both Pulp and Staple Fibre divisions. Further we have to

lay substitute pipeline also to avoid stoppage of Fibre division. All these defects and consequent repairs involved extra cost and the Company has to incur due to your supply of inferior quality of pipes and bad workmanship.

We have been informing you about the above defects from time to time and requesting your Mr Hussain to come and see them personally, but for one reason or the other you have been avoiding. Only on 4.8.19— you visited us. Even on that day the pipe had broken. Though you assured us of your immediate action, nothing worth mentioning was done and pipe continued breaking intermittently. On 2.9.19— and 3.9.19— again the pipes have broken and heavy leakages and wastage of pulp have taken place affecting production both in Pulp and Staple Fibre divisions. We have been intimating you over telephone and through telex message about the state of affairs and the condition of the pipeline, its breakages, leakages as and when they have occurred, and the same should be treated and read as part of this letter. After commissioning the pipeline the Company has incurred heavy production loss which is only due to the inferior quality of pipes and bad workmanship for which you alone are responsible and liable to compensate. We are assessing the actual loss incurred by us on account of loss of pulp slurry, loss of production and other expenses incurred by us like changing parts, employing labour etc., and you are liable to pay the same for breach of contract committed by you.

You are, therefore, once again requested in your own interest to get the pipeline properly laid, erected and commissioned as per the terms and conditions of the Contract, to avoid further liability. We hope you shall take all steps requiring to fulfill your obligations as per the terms and conditions of the Contract.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully

S: It reads like a charge sheet.

G: Yes indeed. And it's too long—about six hundred words. I wonder why he starts from Genesis. Anyway this letter looks unlikely to change the heart of the HDPE supplier if the dozens of letters and telexes in the past six months made no difference.

S: Was this letter sent by some overzealous junior executive?

G: No. It was signed by the Joint Executive President (Tech) of the company. That company is part of a well known group. Perhaps the letter was drafted by some subordinate. But the Joint Executive President should have had the sense to read the letter before signing it. There are several mistakes which he could easily have corrected.



- S: How would you revise it if you were the Joint Executive President?
- G: I don't think I'd like a pile of ineffectual letters and telexes to build up in the first place. So I should give you two versions—one which I would send when the problems were first discovered and another which I would send if the first one did not evoke any response at all.

**Dear Mr Tiwari**

***Erection of HDPE pipes***

Thank you for laying the HDPE pipes by the end of March in spite of the several problems you had.

Perhaps because of the hurry in which your people had to execute the job, the quality of workmanship appears to have suffered. The pipeline leaks in many places. We are not sure that all the pipes can stand up to 6 kg/sq cm pressure at which acid slurry is being pumped. We are worried because leakage of acid slurry can have disastrous consequences. Leakage of slurry or, worse still, breakage of pipes may force stoppage of production in both the pulp division and the staple fibre division.

So could you please ask Mr Hussain to examine the pipeline thoroughly in the next week or so. Please authorise him to replace any pipes which are not upto the standard specified in our order, and to re-lay sections where the workmanship is not satisfactory.

Yours sincerely

- S: You have given them a way out. You appreciate the difficulties—real or fake—that they had in laying the pipes. You also attribute the poor quality of their material and workmanship to the hurry in which they had to work to meet the deadline.
- You don't antagonise them. You don't get their hackles up. Most probably they will try to replace the poor quality pipes and redo the joints. They wouldn't want their image to suffer. By suggesting concrete action in a fixed time you also tell them that you are firm, that you mean business.

Suppose, however, that they ignore your letter. Or suppose that Mr Hussair comes and goes without relaying the pipes to your satisfaction. What would be your next step? They might take your politeness to be a sign of weakness.

- G: If I fail to get Mr Tiwari to understand the seriousness of the problem and to do what I believe should be done, I may have no option but to go to court. In that event I shall write a letter like the following:

**Dear Mr Tiwari**

***Erection of HDPE pipes***

Thank you for sending Mr Hussain to our factory last week. He carefully examined the HDPE pipeline laid by your technicians and did relay certain sections which were badly leaking. That allowed us to resume pumping slurry.

However, since his departure yet another pipe split open and started leaking heavily. As a result we have had to stop production in the pulp division. The pipeline has thus become a major worry for all of us.

In the next four weeks, please have the entire pipeline replaced by HDPE pipes which can withstand 6 kg/sq cm pressure as specified in our original order. If that is not done, I am afraid we will approach the consumer court. This is a step which we would not at all like to take because we value your association with us. I trust that you will not make us take the extreme step of going to court.

Yours sincerely

- S: You are very brief without appearing to be brusque.

- G: I hope so. I start on a positive note showing appreciation for the step they have already taken. I treat that as a genuine attempt by them to give us good service. Then I quickly go on to our dissatisfaction with the quality of the pipeline and our worry about safety and production.

The plan to go to court is presented in a matter-of-fact manner. It is then counterbalanced by our desire not to rock the boat.

I like these letters to be brief because they have greater weight than a letter that goes on and on, whining and whimpering.

- ***When you complain, start on a positive note. It generally cools people down.***
- ***If you hold out any threats, be brief.***
- ***Throughout the letter project your reluctance to complain.***

- S: Have you come across letters of complaint which achieve their objective without being shrill and irritating?
- G: Sure. Here is a letter written by a couple to Kamal Shoe Company. Read it and see how you would feel if you were the Customer Care Manager of the Shoe Company.

**Dear Sir**

Ever since we discovered Kamal at your exclusive showroom on Abid Road, Hyderabad, in 1990, neither my wife nor I have stepped into any other showroom for our footwear. We liked your shoes and sandals because they are light and the leather is soft but strong and durable. Although the range is limited and the prices high, we kept buying Kamal because of their quality.

Recently, however, we felt very disappointed. The stitching on the straps of my sandals came undone within a week of my buying them. And the stitching on the side of the uppers of one of the shoes (Ajanta model, beige colour) came undone within six weeks of purchase. During those six weeks I had worn them just about 15 times.

The sales staff at your show room have been very courteous and are mending the shoes free of charge. While I am grateful for that, we don't wish to waste our time and fuel (the shop is 12 km from our house) taking new shoes and sandals to the showroom for repairs and 'servicing'.

As you are committed to quality, the least you can do now is to reimburse my fuel expense for a total of 48 kms (four trips by car for handing in the footwear and collecting it). I know you are under no legal obligation to do this. But then loyalty is not a matter of legal rights, is it ?

Faithfully yours



- S: I think I'd send the couple a Rs 100 or Rs 150 voucher which they can redeem when they buy Kamal Footwear next time. That way I can retain their patronage without losing money.
- G: That is fine. The question, though, is whether the letter attracts you or makes you defensive. A letter of complaint that makes you defensive cannot achieve its objective of getting a problem solved. It tends to make the reader think up various excuses for not doing what you expect them to do.

- ***If a letter of complaint makes the reader defensive, it is unlikely to get the problem solved***
- ***Try and find an excuse for the reader's lapse. Then he won't hunt for them.***
- ***Ideally, start a letter of complaint with a genuine compliment or word of appreciation for what is good about the product or service.***

- S: Do you have a formula for writing letters of complaint?
- G: No. I don't have a formula. But when I have to make a complaint, I try to start with what I am happy with. If I can't find anything to compliment the reader on, I try to guess what might have caused the problem I have to complain about. I look at it from their point of view. That is, sympathetically. I start the letter with it. That generally produces a favourable response. When you defend them, they don't have to be defensive!

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The advertising department of Lever Bros received a letter which begins as follows: Sir, ref. your advertisement which says "If it's safe in water, it's safe in Lux". Now about my goldfish—"

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Times, Diary* in  
F.S. Pepper, **20th Century Anecdotes**, Sphere, 1990: 23

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Here is a letter I wrote to a company from which I bought prerecorded video cassettes by post. The company had advertised that those who ordered four cassettes or more would get a year's subscription to *Business India* free. I ordered four cassettes and sent a demand draft along with the order.

When the cassettes arrived, I found that two of them were defective. This is how I complained and asked for replacement.

**Ladies and Gentlemen:**

The four 'management self-help' video cassettes you sent me have arrived. So has the first issue of *Business India*. That was very prompt. Thank you.

The response to your advertisement must have been overwhelming. Understandably the control over the quality of the cassettes may have slipped here and there when attempting to despatch all orders promptly. Two cassettes ('Leadership' and 'Receptionist') play very well indeed. But I am afraid the cassette on 'Effective Communication (verbal)' is unsatisfactory. The picture shakes and jumps frequently. The top of the frame is distorted.

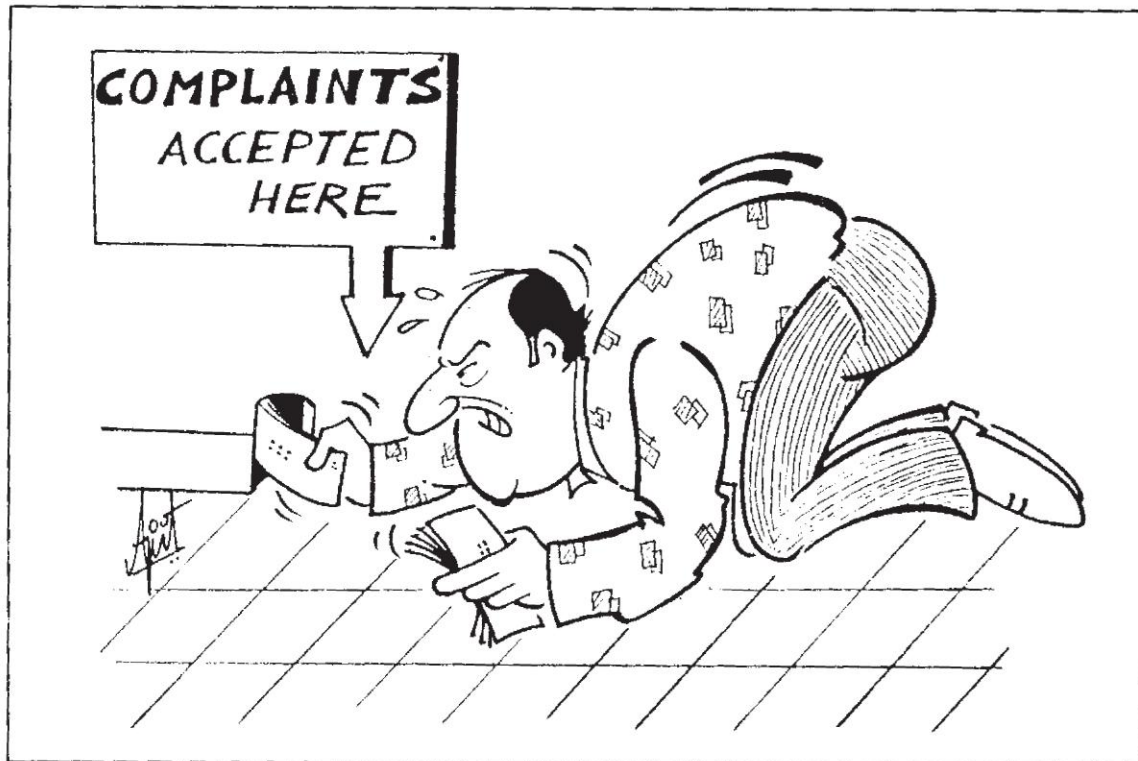
The one on 'Non-verbal Communication' I could not watch at all because my VCR (Hitachi) does not accept it in spite of my repeated attempts.

I would like these two cassettes—on 'Verbal Communication' and on 'Non-verbal Communication'—to be replaced. I am returning these two cassettes separately (by registered post). May I have an immediate replacement?

Faithfully yours

- S: Did you get the replacement?
- G: Yes, I did. In a fortnight. Frankly I was surprised. I expected them to drag their feet and ask me at least for the extra postage. But they didn't. The replacement came with a brief note of apology. I felt quite pleased.
- S: That reminds me of the other side of complaints. How should we respond to a letter of complaint?
- G: What do you generally do?
- S: We find that most complaints are baseless or exaggerated. So we are cautious when we deal with them. We throw some of them straight into the waste bin. To a few, we send a reply showing where they are wrong. It is

very rarely that we detect any mistakes on our part. Even in those cases we try to wriggle out because if we encourage people to complain, there may be a flood of frivolous complaints.



*"If we encourage people to complain, there may be a flood of frivolous complaints".*

G: Hold it. Let me ask you a question. How often do you write to companies complaining about their products or services?

S: Well, not often.

G: You are no different from most people. You don't write to complain every time you feel unhappy about a product or service. You may of course complain informally to your friends and colleagues. You may also stop using a product or service if you are not happy with it. But writing a complaint requires extra effort and few people do it.

I'd say a letter of complaint is a favour the customer does you. You should welcome it, take it seriously, and respond to it invariably. Just as adversity



brings out the true character of a person, the way you handle complaints reveals the true character of your company.

- S: Are you suggesting that we accept all customer complaints?
- G: No. We must, however, accept that complaints come to us when our products or services have failed to give the customers satisfaction. The fault may not be ours. Nevertheless, we must thank those who take the trouble of writing.
- S: I don't quite see why we should thank people who complain. Wouldn't acknowledging the complaint be enough?
- G: We should thank them because they give us valuable feedback. They help us identify the defects of our products or services. But for their letters, we may never come to know of certain flaws in our products or services.

If the complaint is valid, I suggest an unhesitating apology at the very beginning of the reply. That will cool down the people who are mad at us. An unconditional apology is useful even when there is no complaint, but you feel your company has made a mistake.

It is amazing how much anger and discontent can be dissolved instantly in the simple word, SORRY, said with sincerity. Remember, you fight fire with cold water, not with a bigger fire.

To err is human. To forgive is equally human too. What's more, forgiveness often leads to special attachment. Your worst critics may turn into your most loyal advocates.

- ***Treat with respect and gratitude all letters of complaint you receive.***
- ***A customer who complains to you about your products or services is doing you a favour. It helps you refine your products or services.***
- ***Never ignore a complaint no matter how frivolous or untenable it appears.***
- ***The way you handle customer complaints reveals the true character of your company.***

Let me give you an example from my own experience. I am going to show you the letters without altering the names of the people and companies involved.

I bought a Hero Puch LE, a two-gear bike, from Mody Motors, Secunderabad, in July 1994. It had an annoying defect. The engine would start knocking at all speeds in both the gears as soon as I closed the throttle. I took the bike

back to the dealer a couple of times. What they did made little difference to the bike's irritating habit of knocking. The dealer's explanations weren't very convincing either.

As there was no improvement even after the bike had done 500 km, I sent the following letter to the company.

August 8, 1994

The Senior Manager  
Customer Care  
Hero Motors  
601 International Trade Tower  
Nehru Place, New Delhi - 110 019

**Dear Sir**

I bought a Hero Puch LE recently (4 July 1994) from your dealer Mody Motors, Secunderabad. (Engine No:258189; Frame No: 265268)

The bike performs very well in both the gears when I accelerate it. But the moment I close the accelerator to slow down, the engine starts knocking somewhat frighteningly even when the speed is quite high (say, 15 kms in the 1st gear and 30 kms in the 2nd gear). As the knocking is uncomfortable and potentially dangerous when turning corners or crossing roads, I took the bike back to the dealer's workshop three times so far.

The dealer's people, especially Mr Nataraj, the workshop supervisor in charge of Hero Puch, have been very courteous and very helpful. But in spite of their best efforts the problem is as bad today as on day one although the bike has done over 500 kms by now. To avoid the knocking and fluttering even at high speeds I find myself changing into neutral as soon as I close the acceleration anticipating a stop or obstacle ahead of me. But that just doesn't seem right.

The knocking has taken the pleasure out of riding my Puch. Will you please arrange for an engineer to inspect the engine, and to replace it if he can't solve the problem?

Can I hope to ride a smooth Puch by the end of August?

Yours faithfully

Copy: Service Department, Hero Motors,  
P.B. No. 44, Ghaziabad, U.P - 201 001

Mody Motors,  
183/184, R.P. Road,  
Secunderabad - 500 003

- S: You start on a positive note and even praise the people in the dealer's workshop. Is it genuine?
- G: Indeed it is. The knocking in the engine doesn't take away the other positive features of the product and of the people.
- S: How did the company respond?
- G: Marvellously. Acting on a copy of my letter marked to him, the dealer arranged for the Service Engineer from their Chennai Regional Office to inspect the bike. In the meanwhile, the Deputy Manager (Service) from their corporate office in Delhi sent me the following letter.

**Dear Sir,**

**Sub:** *Your Hero Puch Eng.No:258189 & Chas.No.265268.*

We have for reference your communication dated 8.8.1994 regarding your aforesaid vehicle.

At the outset we sincerely regret for the inconvenience which might have been caused to you in the matter.

Kindly note, immediately matter was referred to our below addressed regional office for providing necessary assistance on your vehicle on priority. We therefore hope, by the time this letter reaches you, our regional service engineer/rep must have contacted you to attend your vehicle. If not so, he will get in touch with you very soon. Till then, please bear with us

M/S. Hero Motors  
6, 1st Main Road  
C.I.T. Colony  
Chennai - 600 004



Once again regretting for inconvenience caused, if any.  
Thanking you & assuring of best services to our valued customers always,  
  
Yours faithfully,  
  
For HERO MOTORS,  
Sd/-  
DY. MANAGER (SERVICE)

S: The language of that letter is awful, isn't it? "We have for reference your communication dated.... regarding your aforesaid vehicle" and "We sincerely regret for the inconvenience which might have been caused..." appear strange. The writer's name is not given. The last sentence is too general; it is not directed to the individual who complained.

G: I agree. It isn't a great letter. I think it was taken out of the computer memory. This text is probably meant for people who complain about Hero Puch from the Southern Region. The Deputy Manager has merely put in details like the engine and chassis numbers.

In spite of such flaws the letter did soften me because it apologised twice—at the beginning and just before the end. I was delighted by the prompt response. The next day I got the following by fax.

**Dear Sir,**

We refer to your complaint of engine problem in yr Hero Puch bearing Eng. No: 258189/265268. V Deeply regret for the inconvenience caused to you in this regard. With a copy of this fax MSG we are advising our service engineer Mr. G. Jayaraman to attend your bike. Therefore, we should request you to kindly get in touch with him at Mody Motors, Secunderabd (Ph: 70971/72) Today, if not convenient Pls., contact him on 24th Aug. '94 at Laxmi Motors, Hyderabad (Ph: 311174/312526) who will do the Needful.

We once again regret for the inconvenience caused to you in this regard.

With Kind Regards,

s/d  
Ashutosh Khosla  
Regional Manager

- S: Did you take the bike to the Service Engineer ? Did he solve your problem to your satisfaction?
- G: I took the bike to him. He, along with the workshop supervisor of Mody Motors, Mr Nataraj, tried to solve the problem. They worked on it for two days. I rode the bike for a few days after their repairs. I wasn't happy. So I wrote again, this time to Mr Khosla.

Dear Mr Khosla

September 1, 1994

***Trouble with Hero Puch: Eng. No: 258189/265268***

Thank you for responding promptly and positively (your fax of August 22, 1994, Ref 610 P01) to my letter of August 8. Acting on a copy of my letter marked to him, Mr Bipin Pandya of Mody Motors also wrote to me and asked me to present the bike for examination by your Service Engineer Mr G Jayaraman. I felt—and still feel—glad that I bought the bike from a company and a dealer who care about the customer.

Mr Jayaraman and Mr Nataraj (Workshop Supervisor, Mody Motors) worked on the bike on August 22 and 23. They are aware of the problem but have not been able to solve it. They have reduced the knocking to some extent but at the expense of the effortless pick-up it originally had. That is unsatisfactory.

Mr Khosla, I do not take any pleasure in complaining or taking the bike to the dealer's workshop again and again. But I feel that I should let you know that my Puch still operates well below expectations. I do hope that the problem will be solved. I hope I will be able to write and tell you soon that my Puch is running as it should.

Sincerely Yours

Copy: Mr Bipin Pandya, Mody Motors, R. P. Road, Secunderabad-500 003

The Senior Manager, Customer Care, Hero Motors 601 International Trade Tower, New Delhi-110 019

S: The first paragraph is again very positive. You praise the prompt action taken by the company at different levels.

I don't understand why you say in the third paragraph: "Mr Khosla, I don't take any pleasure in complaining..." Was it necessary?

G: Well, I was beginning to wonder if I gave them the impression I was one of those people with unreasonable expectations. People who are impossible to please. I didn't want them to feel that I was one of those nuts who get a kick out of complaining.

S: What did this letter lead to?

G: The Service Engineer and the Workshop Supervisor took it up as a challenge and worked hard on the bike for several days. When I got it back in the first week of October, I wrote one final letter to Mr Khosla with a copy to all involved:

**Dear Mr Khosla**

**October 3, 1994**

***Hero Puch Eng. No 258189/265268***

Adversity, say wise men, brings out the true colours of a man. Consumer complaints do the same to companies, I guess.

Your company—right from the corporate office in Delhi to the dealer's workshop in Secunderabad—responded swiftly, sympathetically, and generously to my complaint about the knocking in the Hero Puch engine.

Thank you very much. The bike was returned to me yesterday after repairs and replacements of certain parts. Now the engine runs much more smoothly than before. I am convinced that every effort has been made to address the problem to my satisfaction.

Allow me to record here my appreciation for Mr Bipin Pandya of Mody Motors and his workshop supervisor Mr Nataraj. Both went out of their way to be of help.

Now I can recommend to friends Hero Motors and Mody Motors—with confidence.

**Sincerely Yours**



Copy: Mr Bipin Pandya, Mody Motors, R P Road,  
Secunderabad - 500 003  
The Senior Manager, Customer Care, Hero Motors  
601 International Trade Tower, New Delhi-110019  
(Ref: HM/SER/MD 109/7095/1985 of 27.8.94)  
Mr K Nataraj, Workshop Supervisor, Mody Motors  
Secunderabad - 500 003

- S: So you've become their fan!
- G: You could say that. I was impressed by the way they responded to my complaint. The relationship which started with unhappiness ended in one of satisfaction and loyalty. A different way of handling my complaint could have led to bitterness and possible loss of business for the company.
- S: How would you react if I said that the company's response was good because your letters were reasonable?
- G: I can't speculate on how they would have responded if my letters had been abusive. My advice is to respond positively even if the complaints you receive are unreasonable and in abusive language. It is easy to turn off customers. Any one can do it without much effort. You should acknowledge and accept the sentiment behind a complaint even when the complaint is untenable for technical or practical reasons.

- ***Treat all complaints with respect, even the ones which come in abusive language.***
- ***Acknowledge the disappointment behind a complaint even when the complaint is untenable.***
- ***The simple word 'SORRY' can melt mounds of objections.***
- ***Fight fire with cold water, not with a bigger fire.***

- S: Could you try and draft a reply to this letter ? We've recently received it from the Chief Engineer of a State Electricity Board.

In it he complains that the power losses he measured in certain components of the 1000 kva copper-wound transformers we supplied to the Electricity Board are up to 11.7 per cent; that is, 1.7 per cent above the maximum specified by us. His complaint is not at all valid because in our agreement it is clearly stated that the standard applicable is IS 2026. That permits upto 15 per cent losses for any component provided the overall loss is 10 per cent

or less. Our transformers perform within the range promised. The Chief Engineer has got the overall loss figures and individual component loss figures mixed up.

Obviously we cannot accept the complaint. The Chief Engineer should have studied the specifications before shooting that complaint at us. Aren't we justified in telling him that he hasn't done his homework? Can you blame me if I ignore his letter?

- G: - The best way to deal with this complaint also is to accept it and then to give him in a nonthreatening way the relevant technical details. Here's how I'd reply.

Dear Sir

**Power losses of 1000 kva Transformers**

*Your letter No HSEB/MED/263 of Dec 2, 19—*

You are right to feel unhappy that the power losses measured in certain components of the 1000 kva copper-wound transformers we supplied are a little more than 10 per cent. Our aim also is to hold down the inevitable losses within the specified maximum.

Please note, however, that IS 2026 is the standard mentioned in the agreement. As you are aware, IS 2026 permits up to 15 per cent losses for any component provided the overall loss is 10 per cent or less. The losses you measured on our transformers come within this range.

We thank you, however, for writing to us. Your letter will stimulate us to work harder to develop and to offer you transformers with much lower losses.

Yours faithfully

- S: You accept the spirit of the complaint but reject the core of the complaint that the losses cross the limits specified in the contract. I wonder, though, if you need to do that when the client hasn't done his homework and is clearly wrong.

- G: It is good not to make them feel that their complaint was foolish. If the complaint is in a gray area, they will cling to their position. Even if the complaint is patently wrong, and they are forced to withdraw it, you may lose their goodwill. You may win a battle but lose the war. What is the point in proving that you are right and the Chief Engineer wrong if he switches over to some other manufacturer of transformers?
- S: A couple of years ago, I didn't get interest warrants for three consecutive half-years from Venad Aquafarms Ltd for their debentures. I wrote to the company complaining about it. Here is the reply I got from them.

**Dear Investor,**

We refer to your letter regarding non-receipt of Interest warrant for the period ended 31st March, 1993/ 30th September, 1993/ 31st March, 1994.

On verification of our records, we found that you have received and encashed the interest on debentures held by you vide warrant No AL 382718263 for Rs.712/- on 28 June 1994 for the half year ended March, 93/ September, 93/ March, 94.

This is for your information.

Thanking you and assuring you of our best services always.

Yours faithfully  
for Venad Aquafarms Ltd

Mohamed Raza  
Deputy Manager (SEC & LEGAL)

- G: What do you think of it? How did you feel when you received it?
- S: I was livid. I inform them that I haven't received interest warrants for three consecutive half years, and they have the cheek to write back and say that I have received and encashed them. What do they think of me? That I encash warrants and then ask for duplicate warrants pretending not to have received the originals? I think it is highly...
- G: Hold it. Try and guess what may have happened. Isn't it possible that someone else may have stolen the warrants from the post and cashed them



after opening an account fraudulently ? Isn't it possible that you yourself encashed them soon after you got them, but have forgotten all about them?

S: Yes, they are both possible, and there may be people who do such things. But I didn't receive them. How can they say that I received them?

G: It's the offensive tone of the text that makes you indignant. I must say it is very insensitive of a company to send out such a letter. It's a pity that such letters get sent. You don't need to be a juggler of words to write a simple, sensible letter. Take a look at this alternative.

**Dear Mr Sinha**

We are sorry to learn from your letter of August 19, 19— that you have not received the interest warrant on your VAL debentures for the last three half-years.

It appears that the warrant (No. AL382718263) which we sent you on June 12, 1994 was cashed by someone at SBI Purana Pool Branch in your town on June 28. Please check with the bank if there is an account in the same name as yours. When you show the bank the documents which prove that the interest warrant belongs to you, we are sure they will recover the amount and return it to you. If you face any difficulty, please write to us.

We are sorry for the inconvenience the nonarrival of the warrant has caused you.

Yours sincerely

Mohamed Raza  
Deputy Manager (Sec & Legal)

S: How can you say that the warrant was cashed at the Purana Pool Branch on June 28?

G: If we have sent a warrant and if the customer complains that he hasn't received it, we should be able to find out from our bank if the warrant has been cashed, where, and by whom. We shouldn't jump to the conclusion

that the warrant was encashed by the person in whose favour it had been issued. If the complaint comes from the investor who has already cashed the warrant but has forgotten about it, we should bring it to his notice indirectly rather than call him a liar. We shouldn't embarrass him.

All I am trying to say is that if the customer has taken the trouble of writing to complain, we have to respond in a way that satisfies him. It is tempting to say that we have posted the warrant and so our responsibility is over. But we can't survive for long with such an unfriendly, insensitive attitude.

- ***When things go wrong, don't blurt out your complaints. It is unwise to display in a letter uncontrolled anger or stinging sarcasm. It may give you a sense of relief; nothing more.***
- ***When you write a letter of complaint, start on a positive note. If there is anything you can compliment the reader on, start with it. A word of appreciation about what is good about the reader disarms him/her.***
- ***Look at the issue from the reader's angle. If you can think of an excuse for his/ her failure to come up to your expectations, mention it so that when you defend them, they don't have to hunt for excuses.***
- ***Apologise even for mistakes which are not strictly yours. The simple word SORRY can put out a big fire.***
- ***Thank people who complain to you about your products or services. They are doing you a favour by giving you valuable feedback.***

# 10

## Self on Sale

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Samir: Can you do me a favour? I've found a Senior Purchase Manager's job advertised in the latest issue of *Business Week*. I'd like to apply for it.

I've prepared the draft. Could you please go over it?

Guru : I thought you were quite happy with the job at Swan.

S: I am happy. But this ad is from a company in Calcutta, and the position is in their plant in my home town, Bhubaneswar. The salary appears to be attractive, too. So I'd like to send them an application. Here's my draft.

G: Let me see the ad first.

S: Here you are.

We are Alpha-Eastern Engineering Ltd, part of the sixty-eight year old Eastern Group. We are leaders in the manufacture of state-of-the-art compressors. We are the first compressor manufacturer in India to get ISO-9000 certification. Our foreign collaborator Toshichi Corporation is the global leader in compressor technology.

We need the following personnel in the Materials Department for our plant at Bhubaneswar.

### 1. GENERAL MANAGER—MATERIALS



## 2. SENIOR MANAGER—PURCHASE

**The Job:** The incumbent will be responsible for planning, procurement and vendor development activities. He will identify new vendors and suppliers.

**The Person:** The candidate should be a mechanical engineer with a minimum of ten years' experience in related fields. He should be willing to travel extensively.

**The Compensation:** The salary and perks will be no less than the best in the industry.

Apply in confidence within 15 days to:

The Vice President (HR)  
Alpha-Eastern Engineering Ltd  
C-123, Chandra Bose Sarani  
Calcutta - 700 003

G: What makes you think that you'll fit in?

S: Well, I have an excellent degree in mechanical engineering and I have over ten years' experience specifically in purchase and materials management. For the last five years, I have been a Purchase Manager for Swan. So I think I'm ready for a higher rung as Senior Purchase Manager.

G: Good. Let me see your application.

S: I have a Curriculum Vitae and a covering letter. Here is the CV.

### Biodata of Mr S.N.Sinha

|                |   |                           |
|----------------|---|---------------------------|
| Full Name      | : | Samir N.Sinha             |
| Father's Name  | : | Narayan P.Sinha           |
| Sex            | : | Male                      |
| Date of birth  | : | 8 June 19..               |
| Health         | : | Excellent                 |
| Marital status | : | Married with two children |
| Hobbies        | : | Bird watching, Gardening  |

|                            |   |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Address for correspondence | : | Plot No 56, Periyar Nagar<br>Chennai - 600 028                                                                                                                                |
| Telephone                  | : | 821635 (Res) 818794 Ext 426 (Office)                                                                                                                                          |
| EDUCATION                  | : | BE (Mechanical) from<br>Regional Engineering College<br>Kharagpur (92.6% marks; second rank<br>in the university.)(1976-80)                                                   |
|                            | : | Higher Secondary School: St Albert's<br>School for Boys, Bhubaneswar. Maths,<br>Physics, Chemistry. I class.<br>Marks: 88.8% 1974-76.                                         |
|                            | : | High School: St Albert's School for<br>Boys, Bhubaneswar. 91.4%. 9th rank<br>in State. 1973-74.                                                                               |
| EXPERIENCE                 | : |                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 1992—present               | : | Manager—Purchase. Swan Engineering.<br>Duties include identifying suppliers,<br>placing orders, and buying raw<br>materials as well as components.                            |
| 1988—1992                  | : | Deputy Manager (Purchase), Beacon<br>Pumps Ltd, Calcutta. Duties included<br>assisting Purchase Manager in all aspects of purchase.<br>Some independent decision-making also. |
| 1982—1988                  | : | Assistant Manager, Beacon Pumps Ltd, Calcutta.<br>Duties included helping Purchase and Stores<br>Managers.                                                                    |
| REFERENCES                 | : | Dr Sarat Biswas, Professor and Head,<br>Department of Mechanical Engineering,<br>REC, Kharagpur PIN: 781025                                                                   |
|                            |   | Mr S Gunasekaran,<br>General Manager (Production)<br>Coimbatore Industries Ltd<br>Coimbatore - 631012                                                                         |

G: I'm pleased to see that you've used good quality paper and laser printing. Many people waste their money and effort when they send out letters and CVs that look ugly and cheap. Those applications soon find a place in the waste paper bin. I'm glad yours is attractive.

Before I take a close look at your CV and covering letter, however, let me ask you a question. Our approach to drafting applications for employment depends on the answer. Do you think that a firm does you a favour when it offers you a job?

S: Yes, I should think so. Unless you are an entrepreneur, you depend on someone to give you a job. Very few people can grow a business or create a job for themselves.

G: I think differently. A firm isn't doing you a favour when it hires you. It hires you because it needs you for it to grow and function. A firm needs people as desperately as individuals need jobs. If a commercial firm acts like a branch of Sisters of Charity, it won't last long.

When you apply for a job, you are not asking for a favour; you are selling your skills and services. You are on sale, as it were. And the principles that apply to selling products and services apply to selling the self also. You don't beg a customer to buy a product; neither should you beg a firm to give you a job.

People buy a product or service when they think that they get value from it. The product or service that meets their needs more closely is perceived as more valuable and so commands a better price. You don't buy things to help others; you buy them to help yourself.

- ***A firm doesn't do you any favour when it hires you. It buys your talents and services in its own interest.***
- ***Try to attract the potential employer's interest, not sympathy.***

S: When we *apply* for a job, we ask for something. And the decision to give us a job or to refuse it depends exclusively on the employer, doesn't it?

G: 'Applying for employment' is strictly speaking a misnomer. It should really be 'offering one's talents' for a price—salary and perks. And your CV—also called biodata, data sheet, and résumé—is a sales brochure on yourself, not a list of your educational qualifications and jobs held. It should attract the potential employer. The details you put in should arouse his interest and convince him that it is worth 'buying' you. In a world that is full of competing products, packaging plays a crucial role.

S: My CV is brief. It's just a little over a page. I've put in just my relevant educational qualifications and a brief description of the duties I have performed on my jobs.

G: Your CV is certainly brief. Let's see if it can be made better. Let's also see if you can make your experience in materials management appear a bit more exciting to the potential employer.



If your resumé stands out from the rest, the chances of your being offered the job also brighten. You've passed the first test well—your stationery and typing are attractive; they create the right impression. That, however, should be supported by the contents.

Don't call yourself 'Mr' in your CV. Your full name should be enough. The first part of your CV can be reduced considerably. How about this?

**SAMIR N.SINHA**

Plot No 56, Periyar Nagar

Chennai - 600 028

Tel: (044) 821635 (Home); 818794 (Office)

**POSITION SOUGHT: SENIOR MANAGER - PURCHASE**

- S: You've left out several important pieces of information!
- G: Have I? Unless your father is a former prime minister of India, why do you drag in his name? It doesn't add any weight to your CV. It merely makes the CV longer. Your name, address, and telephone numbers are the crucial pieces of personal information needed. I've added the STD code to your telephone number. That is a helpful gesture to the reader.
- I've also put in 'Home' instead of 'Res'. You and I don't have residences, Samir; we have homes. Residence is used generally to refer to the houses Ministers and the like live in, especially 'official residence'.
- S: You've left out my date of birth, sex, information on marital status and hobbies.
- G: The Vice President (HR) of Alpha-Eastern isn't your grandma to take a keen interest in your zodiac sign, the number of children you have, their sex, ages, the school they go to, and the rest. Your potential employer is interested in the talents you bring to the job. Let's focus on them. If he wants to know your approximate age he can easily find it out from the year in which you got your school leaving certificate. Your sex is clear from your full name.
- S: I'm sure he'll be interested in my health.

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There was a private soldier who went on sick parade. "What's the problem then?" asked the M(edical) O(fficer). "I've got a pain in my abdomen, sir." "Now listen, soldier," said the MO. "Officers have abdomens; NCOs have stomachs. What you've got is bellyache."

\_\_\_\_\_ Frank Muir and Simon Brett,  
Frank Muir Goes Into, 1979,  
in F.S. Pepper, **20th Century Anecdotes**, Sphere, 1990: 40

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- G: Sure. But would any one write "Health: Poor"? Everyone writes: "Health: Excellent". Then what's the point? Let's spare the space for things which are likely to interest the potential employer.
- S: You have put in a new item, 'Position Sought'. Doesn't it mean that we can't use the CV for any other company? Other companies may have different designations.
- G: It isn't a good idea to send off photocopies of an unfocused CV to various companies. Read it each time you apply for a job. You have to shape the CV to suit the job advertised. The core will not change. But you will want to highlight details which will interest the advertiser.

Even if you don't make any changes, don't send photocopies of your CV to any advertiser if you are interested in the job. Get it printed out on executive bond paper for each advertiser even when you send your application to a box mentioned in newspapers.

- **Don't put into your Curriculum Vitae personal details which are obvious or which are of no interest to the potential employer.**
- **Never send out photocopies of your CV. Shape the CV to suit the position you seek. Send a print-out of the CV taken after the changes are made. Even when there are no changes, get a fresh print-out on good quality stationery, and send it.**

- S: That will make job search an expensive affair, won't it?
- G: Yes, I agree. But the best way to bring down the cost is not to rely on cheap photocopies or handwritten letters and CVs but to reduce the number of applications you send out. Apply only when you feel that you are reasonably well qualified for the job advertised. Applying indiscriminately for jobs is as economical as shooting in the dark.

From personal details you move on to **Education**. Put yourself in the employer's shoes and ask yourself what about the candidate would interest

you more as the Vice President (HR) looking for a Senior Manager-Purchase: the education he had more than fifteen years ago or the professional experience he has acquired in the last three or four years?

S: I guess it's recent and relevant experience that will be more important. Still education is vital, especially when the academic career is brilliant.

G: A fresher with little or no work experience would naturally highlight his academic achievements. That's as it should be. But a middle level executive like you knocking on the doors of senior management should focus on what you have done for the present or previous employer. Educational qualifications should of course be mentioned. But they can come towards the end of the CV. Let's focus on your work experience first.

S: I've worked for two employers in three capacities. In the CV I've started with Swan Engineering because I'm a Purchase Manager there. That's just one step below Senior Purchase Manager.

G: That is a very good strategy. In a CV, we list both educational and employment achievements in the reverse chronological order—the most recent first—and work backwards. The principle is the same: the most recent achievements are likely to be most relevant to the job you apply for.

Under **Experience** you have given a summary of the duties you have had. There's nothing exciting about it. Any purchase manager would have these or similar duties. So what's the big deal? The Vice President (HR) of Alpha-Eastern will have dozens of CVs from Purchase Managers with similar duties mentioned under **Experience**. Why should he call you for an interview?

S: What else can I write? You don't suggest I pad the CV, do you?

G: Certainly not. Never put into your CV anything untrue. It doesn't pay in the long run. It's unethical, too. What would interest the potential employer is not so much the duties you performed as **how** you performed them. So go beyond mentioning the duties. Can you think of any savings you achieved or simplification you created in the purchase and materials management area at Swan?

S: Yes. Last year I saved Swan Engineering at least Rs 4 to 5 million because I identified new suppliers who had lower prices and greater punctuality. In fact, last year I got the 'most valuable manager of the year' award from the Chairman of Swan Engineering for the savings I achieved.

G: That is something that should definitely go into your CV.



- ***In your CV, highlight what will interest the potential employer: academic achievements if you have a good record but little experience; relevant experience if you have been working for some time.***
- ***Don't merely list the duties you have performed. Instead highlight the quality of your experience by pointing to the innovations you have introduced or profits you have made.***

S: I also simplified the entire process of placing orders and keeping track of them. I don't know how much time and money it saved, but now it's simple enough for anyone in the Purchase Department to monitor it efficiently. Obviously there are savings.

G: That too should find a place in the CV. It is also good to mention how much purchase you handled, how many people reported to you and who you reported to.

S: Swan Engineering has three Purchase Managers. Each of us handled about Rs 55 million last year. I report to GM-Purchase; I lead a team of seven executives.

G: Good. That information gives your potential employer a reasonably good idea of how big and complex a purchase operation you can be entrusted with.

S: I can't recall any specific contribution I made to Beacon Pumps Ltd when I worked there as Deputy Manager-Purchase and as Assistant Manager. I assisted the Purchase Manager. As an Assistant Manager, I also helped the Stores Manager.

However, in my last job as Deputy Manager at Beacon Pumps I was virtually in independent charge of routine purchases amounting to about Rs 10 million. There's nothing on paper, but my boss there at that time, Mr Santanu Mahapatra will vouch for me. During 1985-87 I also managed import documentation. There wasn't much; but documentation was my duty.

G: Let's put all this information into your CV under the subhead, ***Professional Experience.***

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Q: When does a hill become a mountain?

A: When it fills out an application for employment.

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\_\_\_\_\_, Marilyn Vos Savant in *Parade*  
From *Reader's Digest*, Indian Edition, May 1996

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## **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

### **Purchase Manager (1992–Present)**

Swan Engineering Ltd, 122 Mannar Kottai  
Chennai - 600 061

- Manages about Rs 55 million worth of purchase annually. Reports to GM-Purchase; leads a team of seven executives.
- Saved between Rs 4 and 5 million by identifying new suppliers, especially two from Singapore, who supplied quality raw materials at lower prices and on schedule.
- Won from Chairman of Swan Engineering Ltd **Most Valuable Manager of the Year** award for 1995–96.
- Developed and implemented a simpler purchase system that makes it easy to monitor the operation.

### **Deputy Manager - Purchase (1988–92)**

Beacon Pumps Ltd  
Kistapur, Calcutta-700 078

- Managed almost independently about Rs 10 million worth of routine purchase.
- Assisted Purchase Manager in all aspects of purchase, especially identifying and assessing new suppliers, and in import documentation.

### **Assistant Manager (1982–88)**

Beacon Pumps Ltd  
Kistapur, Calcutta - 700 078

- Assisted Purchase Manager in all aspects of purchase, especially import documentation.
- Assisted Stores Manager in his work.

- S: This is more impressive. Particularly the section on my experience as Purchase Manager at Swan. There is also a clear sense of 'flowering' starting with merely assisting a Purchase Manager and ending as someone who can take on a senior position confidently.

Now perhaps we can go on to educational qualifications.

- G: Yes. Your academic records are excellent. But what is going to impress the potential employer most is not what you did fifteen years ago but what you are now. So we won't go into a detailed picture of your academic career. As you have no postgraduate qualifications, you may put in your School Leaving and Higher Secondary exam results. BE, standing alone, may look rather thin. If you have some postgraduate qualification, you can drop the lower qualifications such as School Leaving and Higher Secondary.

#### **EDUCATION**

- BE (Mechanical) 1980. Regional Engineering College, Kharagpur. Second rank in the University; 92.6% marks.
- Higher Secondary 1976 88.8% marks
- High School. 1974. 91.4%; 9th rank in the State of Orissa.

Are you a member of any professional organisation? Or have you published anything?

- S: I haven't published anything except a couple of letters to the editor in *The Hindu* on politics and ethics. I am a member of the Executive Committee of the Indian Institute of Materials Management, Chennai Chapter. I am also a member of Madras Management Association.

- G: Well, put those also in. They are not like your children and hobbies. They reveal a professional strength.

Now the references. I notice that you have a Professor from your old college and a General Manager in Coimbatore. The Professor knew you about fifteen years ago. Perhaps his views will not be of much weight now. Why have you brought in Mr Gunasekaran, a General Manager from a company you have never worked for?

- S: Frankly, he is just a friend. I met him several times during my search for suppliers of components for Swan.



- G: I'm not sure he is a good choice. Alpha-Eastern might find Mr Gunasekaran's views on you valuable. They might also reject them. It is safer to give names of people who know you professionally and can give an objective assessment of your talents. Bring Mr Gunasekaran in only if he has had professional contacts with you. If he has supplied you with components, and can assess you as a Purchase Manager from a supplier's perspective, he will prove to be a valuable reference.
- S: Who do I turn to then, for reference?
- G: Your current boss or her boss is the ideal reference. And like most ideals it is difficult to achieve.
- S: The problem is that you may not want her to know you are looking around for another job until you have an offer or two in your pocket.
- G: When you consider the enormous value the potential employer attaches to a confidential assessment of your talents and interpersonal skills by your current or previous employer, you should try for it. Take her into confidence and get her cooperation. Most bosses understand the need for career advancement and are aware of the limitations within their own organisations. They themselves might be looking for a change.
- S: There are cases in which the boss might be unhappy with you and might even be working against you.
- G: Of course. Her heart might be as hard as granite; I won't be surprised if you can't get even a word of praise from her however hard you try. Except in such cases get your boss to help you with your job search. Get someone senior in your firm to be your reference if you can't get your boss or her boss. A boss you worked for in another firm three or four years ago may be a good reference, too.
- S: A former boss is all right. Won't I embarrass my current boss by asking her to be a reference? What would her boss think of her if she helps me leave the firm? Won't she be considered disloyal to the firm?
- G: You have a point there. Some people don't even mention in their job application the name of the firm they are currently working for. They merely indicate their position in general term such as "a personnel manager in a Rs 180 crore, export-oriented, paint manufacturing company employing about 250 people".
- S: What should I do?

G: You should answer it yourself after carefully examining the climate in your company. If you can confide in your boss and make her your ally, your job search becomes easy. If you can't, get a former boss or someone whose views on you will be respected by the advertiser.

Tell me, have you asked the referees for permission to cite their names?

S: No, I haven't. Need I be so formal?

G: Basic courtesy demands it. That's not enough. You should also let them have a copy of your CV and application. Don't expect them to remember your achievements. Don't expect them to divine which of your achievements you are planning to highlight in a particular job search. This is especially true of your professors. They see hundreds of students year after year. Don't expect them to remember your name and face!

S: Isn't it simpler to get a few testimonials from people who have taught you or people you work for?

G: No. There are two drawbacks. First, the testimonial will tend to be rather general, not specific to the job you have applied for. Second, testimonials suffer from lack of credibility. Grapes are made to appear like watermelons in testimonials.

A confidential letter sent by your referee direct to your potential employer will be a very valuable support for your application.

- ***Get your boss or her boss to help you with your job search. Theirs are the most valuable references.***
- ***Always seek people's permission before citing their names as references. Also send them a copy of your CV when you ask them to be a reference.***
- ***Open testimonials are of little value.***

S: Then we will have no control over the content of that letter.

G: That's right. However, it is possible to draft a letter on their behalf. Send it to them and tell them that you prepared the draft to help them save time, and that they could of course reject it outright or make any changes they thought fit. If you draft such a letter, be as objective as you can in assessing yourself. Use language that doesn't make the referee go red in the face with embarrassment. Also take care not to write both the references in the same style and highlighting the same points.

- S: There's something I forgot to ask you about. The salary. Need I mention my current salary or the salary I expect?
- G: You must if the ad specifically asks for it. If there is an unbridgeable gap between what you expect and what the company can offer, mentioning your expectations in the CV or the covering letter can save both parties a lot of time. But if the ad doesn't specifically ask for this information, don't volunteer it. Impress the hirers first, and then quote your price.
- S: - Now shall we put together the revised CV?
- G: Sure. Here we are.

**SAMIR N. SINHA**

Plot No. 56, Periyar Nagar

Chennai - 600 028

Tel: (044) 821635 (Home); 818794 (Office)

**POSITION SOUGHT: SENIOR MANAGER—PURCHASE**

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**Purchase Manager (1992—Present)**

Swan Engineering Ltd, 122 Mannar Kottai

Chennai - 600 061

- Manages about Rs 55 million worth of purchase annually. Reports to General Manager-Purchase; leads a team of seven executives.
- Saved between Rs 4 and 5 million by identifying new suppliers, especially two from Singapore, who supplied quality raw materials at lower prices and on schedule.
- Won from Chairman of Swan Engineering Ltd **Most Valuable Manager of the Year** award for 1995–96.
- Developed and implemented a simpler purchase system that makes it easy to monitor the operation.



**Deputy Manager—Purchase (1988–92)**

Beacon Pumps Ltd

Kistapur, Calcutta-700 078

- Managed almost independently about Rs 10 million worth of routine purchase.
- Assisted Purchase Manager in all aspects of purchase especially identifying and assessing new suppliers and in import documentation.

**Assistant Manager (1982–88)**

Beacon Pumps Ltd

Kistapur, Calcutta-700 078

- Assisted Purchase Manager in all aspects of purchase, especially import documentation
- Assisted Stores Manager in his work.

**EDUCATION**

- BE (Mechanical) 1980. Regional Engineering College, Kharagpur. Second rank in the University; 92.6% marks.
- Higher Secondary. 1976. 88.8% marks
- High School. 1974. 91.4%; 9th rank in the state of Orissa

**PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

Member, Executive Committee: Indian Institute of Materials Management, Chennai Chapter

Member, Madras Management Association

**REFERENCES**

Ms Michelle D'Souza  
General Manager (Purchase)  
Swan Engineering Ltd  
122 Mannar Kottai  
Chennai-600 061

Mr Sudhir Bannerjee  
Managing Director  
Beacon Pumps Ltd  
Kistapur  
Calcutta-700 078

S: Here's my covering letter. How do you find it?

S.N.Sinha  
(Purchase Manager)  
Swan Engineering Ltd  
122 Mannar Kottai  
Chennai - 600 061

May 14, 19..

The Vice President (HR)  
Alpha-Eastern Engineering Ltd  
C-123, Chandra Bose Sarani  
Calcutta - 700 003

Dear Sir

***Application for the post of Senior Purchase Manager***

I wish to submit my application for the post of Senior Purchase Manager which you advertised in the latest ***Business Week*** (May 2-8, 19—). I enclose my Curriculum Vitae for your perusal and kind consideration.

I am looking forward eagerly to a favourable response from your end. Assuring you of my best cooperation.

Yours faithfully

S.N.Sinha  
Enclosure: Curriculum Vitae

G: It is clear. It refers to the ad to which you are replying. It's also brief. Perhaps it is too brief. It reads rather like a covering letter for a cheque or a report.

What I find strange—almost objectionable—is the servile language you use. It immediately makes you look like a beggar and gives the potential employer the upper hand. We have to make it read like a sales letter not an appeal for alms.

- S: I'm not sure my letter is servile. I've used a style that is very common. It may not be a sales letter; but then I'd never thought of an application for a job as a sales proposal.
- G: Your application won't be rejected. It is adequate. You may be called for an interview. My aim is to make it more impressive so that you have an edge over the others who also may be called for an interview with the Vice President (HR) of Alpha-Eastern.

- ***Hold your head high when you apply for a job. Don't use servile language. Don't beg for a job. You're selling your talents.***
- ***Be assertive. Believe in yourself. Let your application reflect it.***

Let's start with the salutation. 'Dear Sir' is okay because the advertisement doesn't give the name of the Vice President (HR) to whom you have to send the CV. If I were you, however, I'd telephone Alpha-Eastern, find out his or her name (with the right initials) and put it in the inside address. I'd then have 'Dear Mr Patnaik' or 'Dear Ms Patnaik' rather than 'Dear Sir'. The idea is to treat him or her not as a kind job-giver but as a person you'd like to work with.

- S: Won't some people be offended if I don't use 'Sir' here?
- G: The Vice President is just a rung or two above you. If he or she gets offended when you call them by their name, you may not want to work with them! Assert yourself. Don't be timid.

Let's move to the body of the letter. Let's avoid expressions like "submit" "perusal" "kind consideration"; and "looking forward eagerly to a favourable response." When you use such expressions, you are calling out to the reader: "I'm a beggar. Treat me like one." The phrase "from your end" is absolutely comical.

- S: I wouldn't like them to reject my application thinking I am arrogant.
- G: Of course not. You don't need to tell them that you're their last hope and that their search for the perfect Senior Manager—Purchase stops with you. Let's take the middle path. How about this?



Samir N. Sinha  
Plot No. 56, Periyar Nagar  
Chennai - 600 028

May 14, 19\_\_

Ms L.S. Patnaik  
Vice President (HR)  
Alpha-Eastern Engineering Ltd  
C 123 Chandra Bose Sarani  
Calcutta - 700 003

**Dear Ms Patnaik**

***Senior Manager—Purchase: Application***

Your advertisement in the latest *Business Week* (May 2–8, 19\_\_) interests me because I have the kind of qualifications and experience you are looking for.

As my CV (enclosed) shows, I have been perfecting purchasing skills since 1982 when I took up my first job. Currently I manage Rs 55 million worth of purchase annually with a simple purchase system that I developed. I believe I can bring to the job of a Senior Purchase Manager not just proven techniques and experience in vendor development but also a creative approach to problem-solving. I am used to extensive travelling. I rather enjoy travelling and meeting people.

I would be happy to answer any queries you might have. I would also welcome an opportunity to discuss with you how I can make a major contribution to Alpha-Eastern.

Without disturbing my schedule I can come to Calcutta / Bhubaneswar for a day either in the last week of May or the second week of June. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours

S.N. Sinha  
Enclosure: CV

S: I can't say this is arrogant. Still I'd feel a little uncomfortable with this style.

G: Tone it down to what you feel comfortable once you banish from your mind the thought that applying for a job is begging for a job. I also suggest that you show your CV and covering letter to a couple of people and ask for their comments. Drop or water down phrases which appear too aggressive. You must be assertive, not aggressive. Go a little beyond what is considered safe. Glory awaits those who take risks. If a company doesn't take you because you are assertive and you know your worth, they are the losers, not you.

Here are some samples of servile or cliché-coated language found in application letters.

#### AVOID THESE

1. With reference to your advertisement published in the *Times of India* of 12.5.19\_\_ for the post of Assistant Manager, I beg to offer my services for the same/I beg to apply for the same/I hereby submit my application for the job.
2. While casting a glance at the *Indian Express* this morning I suddenly encountered your advertisement for a Deputy Manager in your esteemed organisation. I hereby beg to offer my candidature for the said job.
3. With due respect, may I beseech your kind indulgence to the Post recently advertised in *The Hindu* dated...
4. In view of the above facts, I cherish the hope that you will be kind enough to consider my candidature bestowing a special favour on me.
5. I may take this opportunity to give you a solemn assurance that I will spare no pains in the discharge of my duties with extreme devotion.
6. I beseech you, sir, that in view of the above mentioned qualifications and experience I may please be absorbed against the vacancy advertised.
7. Should I be fortunate enough to get a chance to serve your reputed firm, I shall strain every nerve to perform my duties to the entire satisfaction of my superiors.

S: You have put in my home address instead of my office address in the covering letter. Why?

G: You can use the office address if you don't have a reliable home address. But it is best to avoid your office address. There is a risk of your Inward Mail clerks opening your letter unless there is in your company a strong convention that letters addressed to you without the designation (or with the designation in brackets as you have done) are private and confidential. You don't want all your colleagues to monitor the progress of your job search stroke by stroke, do you?

Even more undesirable is sending off a job application on your present employer's letterhead. That alone might spoil your chances of being considered for the job you have applied for. It is best to have your own personal letterhead giving your home address. If not, use good quality plain paper.

S: Thanks. I hadn't thought about these complications when I gave my office address in my application.

Shall we go back to CVs? There are biodata forms available in the market. What do you think of them?

G: When you have strong legs, why would you buy third-rate crutches? Avoid printed CV forms. Shape your CV to your personality and talents on the one hand and the requirements of the employer on the other.

Printed CV forms may have items which are not applicable to you. You may have to write Nil or Not Applicable. Some may mislead you.

Other things to be avoided include poor quality stationery, handwritten covering letters, error-ridden language, poor quality photocopies of certificates. Everything about your application—the stationery, typing, the envelope—should spell class. More than half the selling of the self should be done through the CV and the application letter.

S: Many people manage to get jobs in spite of poor applications and matching stationery. So I wonder if you need to be so particular about what we put into our job application.

Here's a letter which a Personnel Manager in a Bombay firm showed me recently. It is a handwritten letter accompanying a photocopy of his CV.

**Sub:** *Application for Asst Manager—Project/Process.*

**Dear Sir,**

I Raj Kiran Bakshi was completed my graduation in Chemical Engg from Punjab University and completed my post-graduation from Kanpur.

I have been working in Chemical Industries from April 1993. I am having the experience in process development, trouble shootings. Describing erationing and commissioning various plants. Since I am belongs to Lonavla, which is very near to Bombay. I wish to come Bombay and to start my carrier grow in Bombay.



I wish to apply for the above post. Please find here with enclosing my bio-data. I would be very grateful for calling for the interview.

Thanking you sir

Yours faithfully

(R.K. Bakshi)

ADDRESS FOR COMMUNICATION

Flat 107, Sumitra Apartments

DBN Road, Nagpur - 13

This is what the GM-Personnel noted on the letter: "Pl. call him if we have not yet finalised the list." So he gets a call for interview although his application isn't great.

- G: Yes, he will be called *if the list hasn't yet been finalised*. That is dicey. He doesn't start as the favourite. If the CV and letter had been impressive, the GM's note would probably have been: "We *must* call this guy. Please phone him or send a telegram if it's too late to write." If we want a job, we should apply for it in a way that wins the employer over.

Let me show you an application which the Principal of a school in Ahmedabad received recently in response to an advertisement for high school teachers. The application is on his own letterhead. I can't figure out why he chose deep pink paper to have his letterhead printed on. It stands out from the rest of the letters in any bunch—for the wrong reason. Here, let's go over his letter.

P.L. Shah

Ph No. 512806

M.Sc, M.Phil (Physics)

Kamalanagar

H.No. 52

LECTURER

Ref: According to your add in the  
News paper Times of India

Date: 26.05.19\_\_

Respected Sir/Madam

I, P.L. Shah residing at the above mentioned address. Regarding myself currently I am doing philosophy. And since 5 years I am in teaching field and 1 1/2 year as lecturer. Currently I am free. And I request you to give me the response as soon as possible.

Of course I am a double degree fellow in politics just like 'ALL ROUNDER'

Yours sincerely

P.L. Shah

S: This is incredible. I wouldn't believe anyone could write such an application letter if I didn't see it with my own eyes. Well, did Mr Shah get the job?

G: No. He didn't even get a reply. His letter ended up in my collection through a mutual acquaintance—that's all that his letter achieved.

Mr Shah's may be an extreme case of stupidity. Many applicants display lighter shades of stupidity. Thus they rule themselves out of better jobs they are quite capable of doing or at least of higher salaries that they deserve.

S: What do you think of applying to firms which have not advertised any jobs but may have the type of jobs I am interested in?

G: You don't need to wait for advertisements. You can send in an application if you are reasonably sure that a company might benefit from hiring you. Replying to an ad is like offering a face cream to a customer who specifically asks for it. Sending an unsolicited letter of application is like offering a face cream to a customer who you think needs it and will buy it although she hasn't asked for it.

If you market yourself well, a company may create a position for you and absorb your talents. The most common unsolicited letter of application, however, is written when you hear from some source that a position that suits you is falling vacant or has fallen vacant.

S: When you don't have an advertisement to respond to, what do we do about the item, 'position sought'?

G: If you hear that a Senior Manager—Purchase is retiring or joining another company, and if you are interested in that position, you can specify it. If

there is no such clear opening, you will do well to indicate the specific area you are interested in rather than a specific position. You can, for instance, say, position sought: Senior Management—Purchase.

Here again I don't recommend shooting in the dark. Do investigate a bit about the company before you dash off a job application. Send your letter to a specific individual with decision-making powers rather than "To whomsoever it may concern" or "to M/s Jobfield (P) Ltd" or even "to the GM—HRD."

S: How should we start the covering letter?

G: It depends. If you have heard about a vacancy from someone known to the employer, it is useful to start with it: "Mr K.N. Kar, General Manager of Swift Wings Ltd, mentioned to me the other day that you are looking for a Senior Purchase Manager. If the position hasn't been filled yet, would you please consider me?"

S: If the news of a vacancy comes from a low level employee of the firm that is looking for personnel do we mention the source?

G: It's upto you. If you feel it might help, mention the source's name. If not, you can start with a simple statement such as "I understand that you are looking for a Senior Purchase Manager."

Even if there is no specific information about a clear vacancy, you may write to a firm you wish to work for. You may want to start a little more dramatically to attract favourable attention and to project your confidence in yourself. A direct question may do the job: "Would you be interested in hiring someone with a flair for simplifying procedures and cutting down the process of vendor development? If you would, will you please examine my CV, enclosed?"

S: It appears somewhat rude.

G: Rude? I don't see anything rude here. I see signs of self-confidence and a clear perception of self-worth. Employers are not looking for rude people. Nor are they in love with unassertive, anaemic wimps. If you have confidence in yourself, others also will have confidence in you. Let your job application convince the employer that you believe in yourself, and that she stands to gain by hiring you.



- ***Applying for jobs is not begging for jobs. It is selling your knowledge and skills.***
- ***Market yourself just as you market a product or service. Make yourself attractive to the hirer.***
- ***Have confidence in yourself and in what you can offer a firm. Let your letter show it. Employers like to hire doers, not crybabies.***
- ***Arousing pity may be an effective way of getting alms. Arousing admiration is the best way of getting a job offer and holding a job with self-respect.***



# 11

## Hire Today, Gone Tomorrow

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G: You seem to be mighty pleased today, Samir.

S: Delighted is the word. I've been promoted to Senior Manager. Here's the letter from the Vice President. I got it this morning. Take a look:

**Dear Samir**

Congratulations! You have been promoted to Senior Manager (Purchase) effective June 1, 19—.

The MD and I had no difficulty in deciding on your promotion. Your ability to devise simple solutions to complex problems, your commitment to the company, and your knack of getting the best from our suppliers have impressed us.

In addition to a new monthly salary of Rs\_\_\_\_\_ you will have a company-leased furnished flat in place of HRA. Other perks and entitlements are given in the draft agreement being sent to you.

We are proud of you, Samir. Keep up the good work.

G: It's indeed a good jump for you, especially with the company flat and other perks. Congratulations.

S: They're of course welcome. It's not just the promotion that thrills me. It's the new Vice President. She thinks I'm good. And she tells me so without any 'ifs' and 'buts'. You won't guess how many times I've read this



Dear Mr Mathur

We are pleased to promote you to the position of a District Manager in \_\_\_\_\_ Region effective June 15, 1984, at a salary of Rs\_\_\_\_\_ with Head Quarters at \_\_\_\_\_.

As a District Manager you will no longer be entitled to receive Dearness Allowance. However, you will receive House Rent Allowance @ 25% of your salary.

As a District Manager you will have to train not only new men but also make all the men in your district good producers. You will have to provide the necessary leadership and inspiration and will be primarily responsible for the performance of each individual representative under your supervision. You will be on probation for a period of one year from the date of promotion. Your confirmation at the end of the period will be contingent upon performance of duties entrusted to you to the satisfaction of the Management and issuance of a confirmatory letter, in writing, by us to that effect.

Wishing you all the best in your new assignment.

Very truly yours...

- S: It's dreadful. It starts well; but with the second paragraph, there is an about-turn in the tone. It makes you wonder if the P&A Manager is against the promotion. The tone is impersonal and negative.
- G: Let's see what spoils the tone. In the second paragraph, the writer starts with and so highlights what the District Manager will lose rather than gain on promotion. It is more appropriate in a letter announcing a demotion or suspension.
- S: In the third paragraph, the new responsibilities are presented as a cross to be carried rather than as an interesting challenge or opportunity. That isn't very encouraging to a young person being promoted.
- G: Quite. It is as though the P&A Manager is not at all confident that the new District Manager will be able to do the job well. The writer almost frightens the promotee into saying, "I don't think I can do all that. I'm sure to fail. Please! I don't want this promotion". The sentence about the condition for confirmation completes the process of demoralisation.

Coming after such a devastating display of lack of faith in the promotee, "wishing you all the best..." acquires a new meaning: "You'll need tons of luck even to survive. God help you!"

letter. Each time I read it I get inspired to work harder. I wouldn't like to let her down.

G: I'm glad you've said it. That's what I'd like to tell executives everywhere.

When we give good news we should do it warmly and enthusiastically. It works wonders for the people who receive it.

- Let's look at your letter once again. Your Vice President arouses your interest by starting with "Congratulations". Then she gives you the good news. The second paragraph is really a justification for offering you a promotion. Many think that it is unnecessary to give any explanation when the news given is good. They are mistaken.

S: Here it reassures me that I am good and that I deserve the promotion. It helps me enjoy it. It makes me feel proud of myself.

- ***Good news should be given with warmth and enthusiasm. Use of a legal-bureaucratic style spoils it.***
- ***Focused and specific praise is far more powerful than vague expressions of appreciation.***

G: You take the explanation seriously because it is not vague or general but specific. It tells you exactly where the company finds your contribution noteworthy. I don't think you would be half as excited if there was no explanation or if the explanation offered was general or standardised.

S: Perhaps. I liked the last two sentences also: "We're proud of you, Samir. Keep up the good work." Except for my name, there is nothing specific about them.

G: They are indeed standard expressions. But they become individualised here because of the earlier paragraphs which give specific reasons for your promotion. You know that the Vice President means what she says.

S: None of the promotion letters I got in the past ever lifted my spirits like this one.

G: You're lucky. Some promotion letters depress you. Hard to believe? Well, here is a letter a friend of mine received way back in June 1984. It came to him from the Personnel and Administration Manager of a well-established company he had been working for. Take a look.

Dear Mr Mathur

We are pleased to promote you to the position of a District Manager in \_\_\_\_\_ Region effective June 15, 1984, at a salary of Rs\_\_\_\_\_ with Head Quarters at \_\_\_\_\_.

As a District Manager you will no longer be entitled to receive Dearness Allowance. However, you will receive House Rent Allowance @ 25% of your salary. As a District Manager you will have to train not only new men but also make all the men in your district good producers. You will have to provide the necessary leadership and inspiration and will be primarily responsible for the performance of each individual representative under your supervision. You will be on probation for a period of one year from the date of promotion. Your confirmation at the end of the period will be contingent upon performance of duties entrusted to you to the satisfaction of the Management and issuance of a confirmatory letter, in writing, by us to that effect.

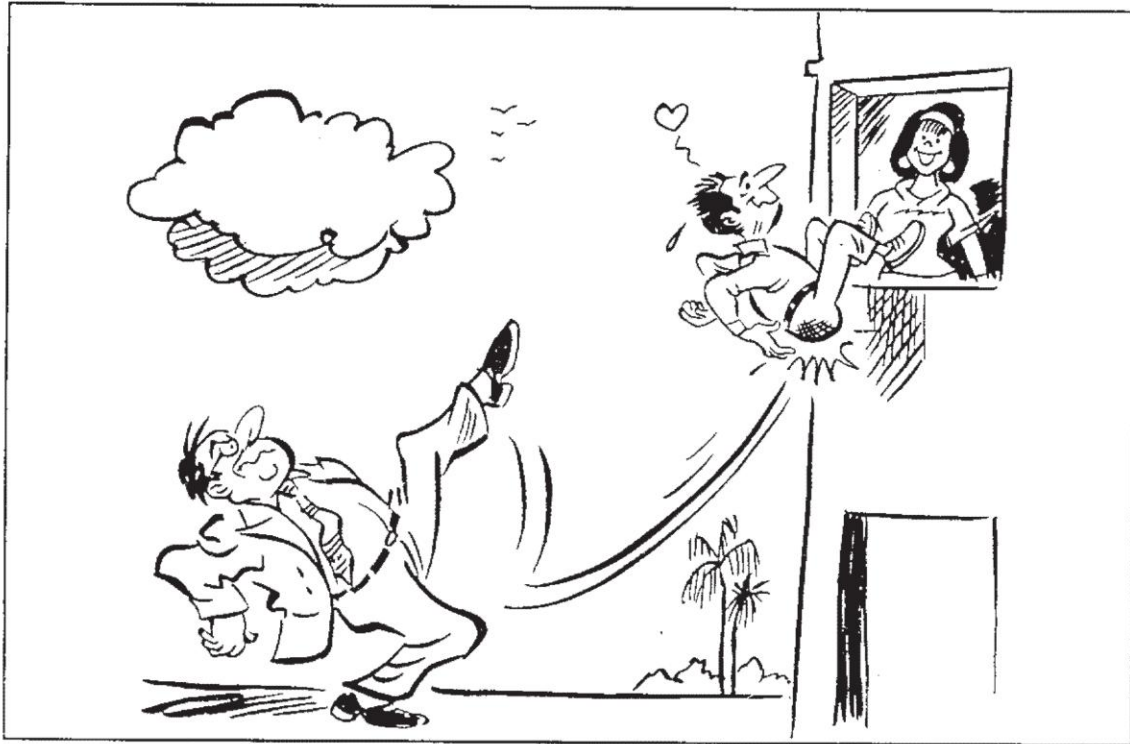
Wishing you all the best in your new assignment.

Very truly yours...

- S: It's dreadful. It starts well; but with the second paragraph, there is an about-turn in the tone. It makes you wonder if the P&A Manager is against the promotion. The tone is impersonal and negative.
- G: Let's see what spoils the tone. In the second paragraph, the writer starts with and so highlights what the District Manager will lose rather than gain on promotion. It is more appropriate in a letter announcing a demotion or suspension.
- S: In the third paragraph, the new responsibilities are presented as a cross to be carried rather than as an interesting challenge or opportunity. That isn't very encouraging to a young person being promoted.
- G: Quite. It is as though the P&A Manager is not at all confident that the new District Manager will be able to do the job well. The writer almost frightens the promotee into saying, "I don't think I can do all that. I'm sure to fail. Please! I don't want this promotion". The sentence about the condition for confirmation completes the process of demoralisation.

Coming after such a devastating display of lack of faith in the promotee, "wishing you all the best..." acquires a new meaning: "You'll need tons of luck even to survive. God help you!"





***The tone in some promotion letters is dreadful.***

- S: The P&A Manager appears to be more concerned with technical details like withdrawal of dearness allowance and formalities of confirmation than with the person being promoted.
- G: Yes. He's so carried away by his bureaucratic style that he doesn't even realize the redundancy in "issuance of a confirmatory letter, in writing". Besides, the letter is silent on what the reader is anxiously looking for: recognition of his work. And what is sad about this letter is that none of this is deliberate. The Personnel and Administration Manager thought that he was writing a proper promotion letter. Perhaps he didn't think anything. He may have merely filled in the blanks in a standard promotion letter available on file.
- S: If you were writing this letter, how would you go about revising it?
- G: There are of course many equally acceptable ways of writing a letter of promotion. Here is what I'd write.

Dear Mr Mathur

Your impressive performance as Sales Executive has convinced us that you are ready for a bigger challenge. So we are happy to promote you to District Manager, \_\_\_\_\_, effective June 15, 1984. Congratulations!

Your new salary will be Rs\_\_\_\_\_ per month. You will also get 25% of this salary as house rent allowance in place of the dearness allowance you have been getting.

We are confident that as District Manager you will inspire and lead all the Sales Representatives in your district; that you will train them in your winning salesmanship. We expect you and your team not to just meet the target for your district but to exceed it.

We hope to confirm you as District Manager this time next year at the end of the mandatory probationary period.

We expect great things from you. All the best!

Yours sincerely

- S: If I were the Sales Executive I would prefer your version to the original one. The entire letter is built around your confidence that he merits the promotion and that he will do very well in the new position. It gives him an image to live up to.

- ***A promotion letter should be a warm and supportive one, not a mere legal document.***
- ***The promotee should be made to feel that she deserves the promotion.***
- ***The letter should give her a new and bigger image to live up to.***

But haven't you compromised on the technical aspect? You haven't for example, clearly stated that he would be on probation for a year and that he wouldn't be confirmed unless his performance was satisfactory.

- G: Isn't that clear from the expression "mandatory probationary period" and "hope to confirm"? If you feel that a clearer statement is necessary, a document that lists all the terms and conditions of the appointment can be

enclosed. But the letter should be warm and supportive, not just technically correct. It should stress the positive. It should inspire loyalty. It should boost morale.

S: I think appointment letters also should have these qualities.

G: Sure.

S: I'd like you to look at an appointment letter. A friend of mine got it last year from the food chemicals company he is working with. Shall we go over it together?

G: Why not?

S: Here we are.

**Dear Mr Khan**

This refers to your application and subsequent interviews you had with us. We are pleased to appoint you as Regional Sales Manager based at Chandigarh effective June 15, 19—. The following terms and conditions apply.

You will be paid a basic salary of Rs\_\_\_\_\_ per month in Grade C.

You will be paid a fixed dearness allowance as per the rules of the company. At present the allowance applicable for your grade is Rs\_\_\_\_\_ per month.

You will be eligible for conveyance reimbursement of Rs\_\_\_\_\_ per month, subject to your owning and using a two-wheeler for commuting to and from your residence and your place of work.

You will be based at Chandigarh. However you are transferrable to any location or to any of our offices in India or overseas.

This appointment is subject to favourable report of antecedents from your previous employer(s) and referees.

We welcome you to our organisation and trust that we will have a long and mutually rewarding association.

Please communicate your acceptance of this appointment in writing by June 6, 19—.

Yours sincerely



- G: What's the company's name?
- S: Aruna Foodchem Ltd. They make superior quality food colours and preservatives.
- G: Your friend has been working with them for about a year, hasn't he ? What does he think of the company?
- S: He thinks it is a wonderful set of people. He enjoys being with that company. This is his fourth job. He thinks that this has been the best of the lot. People are informal, friendly, and accessible. They work like a family.
- G: Then the appointment letter is a misleading one.
- S: What do you mean?
- G: There is no trace in that letter of Aruna Foodchem's vitality, informality, or warmth. It sounds like a dry legal document rather than an invitation to join a company.
- S: Of course it is a legal document. It is not like a promotion letter given to someone already working with the firm. It has to be clear and precise so that disputes don't arise.
- G: Clear, yes. But not to the extent of edging out other virtues. We shall soon see how to combine clarity with warmth. Before that, let's see what makes this letter too cold.
- S: I think the sentence welcoming the selected candidate should not have been buried in one of the last paragraphs. It should have been in the very first one.
- G: I agree. Although the first paragraph does carry the good news of the offer, there is no appreciation for the candidate's talents or performance at the interviews. The first sentence merely refers to his application and interviews. There is not a word on how good they were.
- Of course one can infer that they must have been all right; otherwise the company wouldn't have offered him the position of Regional Sales Manager. Such inferences can't quench our thirst for open statements of praise. As children we expect them from our parents, teachers, and friends. As adults we expect them from our bosses, colleagues, and even customers. At home we expect them from spouses and children. How can a company ignore it?
- S: The clause about the appointment being subject to favourable reports from previous employers and referees might scare away candidates who might be

considering offers from other sources. I think that that clause should be dropped. If the company has any reason to believe that reports from a candidate's previous employers are very important, it should wait for them before making the offer.

- G: I agree with you. That clause reflects the company's lack of faith in its own selection. It should conduct the major enquiries before making a final selection. Once the candidate is told he has been selected, it is unwise and unfair to hang a sword of disqualification over his head. Many companies have standard appointment letters which are equally insensitive to the needs and feelings of job applicants. The company's main concern seems to be to hedge itself against those whom it selects rather than to welcome them. Here's an appointment letter which a friend of mine received from a big, Mumbai-based company. His name and other details have been masked. All I have added are paragraph numbers.

Mr .....

.....

Dear Sir,

1. With reference to your recent interview, this is to confirm that subject to your being found medically fit, the Company is prepared to offer you employment in the Management category at the level of ..... with effect from ....., 19—.
2. Your salary from the date of your joining the Company will be Rs..... (Rupees.....) per mensem.
3. You will have to make your own arrangement for accommodation but the Company will pay a Rent Element on the clear understanding that the Rent Element may vary and may be changed by the Company from time to time. You will also be entitled to other allowances as applicable to your level and which may vary from time to time.
4. You will be on probation in the first instance and provided your work is found satisfactory, you will be confirmed in the Company's employment on completion of one year's service.
5. You will be required to join the Company's Provident Fund Scheme for the time being in force in respect of the employees of the Company and for which you are eligible.
6. Your service with the Company will be subject to the Company's instructions, rules and regulations for the time being in force as applicable to the Company's Management and your duties will be as laid down by the concerned

Manager or his deputy to whom you report. Your service is transferable anywhere in India.

7. You will be required to sign the Company's usual form of Service Agreement. Your employment with the Company may be terminated by either party giving to the other not less than one month's notice in writing or one month's salary in lieu thereof.
8. If you accept this offer as herein stated, will you kindly return the duplicate copy of this letter with the Acceptance Clause set out at the foot thereof duly signed.

Yours faithfully

9. **I ACCEPT THE TERMS SET OUT ABOVE.**

Signature:.....

Date:.....

- S: The very first paragraph spoils the tone by saying "the company is prepared to offer you employment". It sounds as though the company doesn't mind having him although it would be much happier without him.
- G: The Company's paranoia comes through in the third paragraph. Instead of making a straightforward offer of rent allowance the Company highlights its negative attitude: "We don't care where or how you live. Without assuming any responsibility for your accommodation, we will give you a contribution to help you pay the rent".
- S: Even contribution to the Company's Provident Fund is presented as a requirement rather than as an invitation to a benefit.
- G: In paragraph 8, the Company betrays its lack of enthusiasm by saying "if you accept this offer as herein stated". It doesn't appear to care whether he joins the firm or not. This letter is as warm as an iceberg.
- S: How would you redraft this kind of letters to make them warm? You shouldn't sacrifice clarity and legal requirements.
- G: I will split an appointment letter into two: a letter announcing the selection and an attachment that lists the terms. Here is how the Aruna Foodchem letter could go. With a few changes, it can serve the Mumbai-based company also.



**Dear Mr Khan**

Welcome to the Aruna Foodchem Family!

We are impressed by your track record and by your performance at the interviews. So we gladly offer you the post of Regional Sales Manager, Chandigarh, effective June 15, 19—.

Two copies of the terms of this appointment including the details of the salary are enclosed. Please sign one and send it back to me by June 6, 19— to indicate your acceptance. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to ask me before signing.

You will find Aruna Foodchem an exciting set of people to work with, and a company with excellent career prospects. Let's join hands to make world class food colours and preservatives.

Yours sincerely

- S: You clearly tell the selected candidate that his track record and performance at the interviews were impressive. It helps him accept your offer confidently, as something that he deserves. Similarly, when you say "Please sign one and send it back to me... to indicate your acceptance", you sound positive that he will accept the offer. It shows your interest in him.

But how appropriate is the last paragraph in a letter of appointment?

- G: For people who do not grab any odd job that comes along, it is not always easy to choose between offers. They wouldn't want to make a wrong career move or to be with a bunch of stiff, unfeeling people. A reassurance of this kind might tilt the scale in your favour when they are weighing different options.

The last sentence is to make him feel that the company has a vision, and that he is being invited to join the team pursuing it. That might excite some people, give them a mission, and make them 'feel included'.

If the company is open, exciting, and vision-driven, the appointment offer should reflect it. And a company should never forget that it is built on people, that it cannot survive, let alone thrive, without enthusiastic and dedicated service from its people.

- S: How about the terms and conditions which you said you would put into an attachment?
- G: Here is a sample.

**ARUNA FOODCHEM LTD**

Terms governing the appointment of Mr N. Salim Khan as Regional Sales Manager, Chandigarh, effective June 15, 19—.

Grade : C

Basic Salary : Rs ... a month

Dearness Allowance : Rs ... a month

Conveyance : Reimbursement upto Rs... a month provided he owns and uses a motorised vehicle for travelling to work.

Posting : At Chandigarh. He may, however, be transferred to any place in India or abroad.

**ACCEPTANCE**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, accept the position of Regional Sales Manager, Aruna Foodchem Ltd, Chandigarh. I also accept the terms of appointment given above. I shall report for work on ...

Signature:

Date:

- S: What is the advantage of separating these details from the letter? These could easily have been incorporated in the letter.
- G: If there is just one item like the salary to be mentioned, it can be put in the appointment offer. But it is difficult to keep the appointment offer warm and friendly with many cold facts stated in a precise and legally acceptable way. The warmth of the offer letter will not be spoilt by the matter-of-factness of the terms if they are separated.

- ***An appointment offer should be a pleasant and joyful one. It should reflect the attitude of the firm.***
- ***The selected candidate should be welcomed as a valuable addition to the team.***
- ***Separate the terms of the job from the job offer letter so that the legal requirements are made clear without any loss of warmth and friendliness.***

S: We have been talking about people who are selected for appointment and people who are promoted. How about people who are not considered for appointment—those who are rejected outright and those who are eliminated at different stages of the selection process?

G: They deserve very sensitive treatment. If they apply in response to a company's advertisement, a reply that doesn't bruise their ego should be sent to every rejected candidate. They are like the guests you invite to a party. A soothing reply should be sent even to people who send in unsolicited applications, especially serious ones.

S: Isn't it rather expensive to write to people who are not being considered seriously? Besides, what do we gain from investing time, money, and effort on people we don't want to recruit?

G: Enormous goodwill. Think of every letter that goes out of your firm as a sales letter or a public relations letter. You have to create and maintain the goodwill of people who know you and are interested in working with you.

Treat it as an investment or as an advertisement. Companies spend millions to advertise themselves and to promote cordial public relations. Here you win an unsuccessful candidate over. It's money well spent. Besides, basic courtesy demands that we answer questions even from a stranger.

S: As far as I know, our Personnel Department doesn't write to rejected candidates. If they contact us on the phone, they are told that they have not been selected. The argument against writing to them is that it costs a lot of money and time. Now I see that it doesn't hold water.

Let me tell you about a 'rejection slip' which I received from a firm in Bangalore about a year ago. I don't think it helped me think well of that firm although I am grateful to them for letting me know. I hadn't been selected. And their letter put me out of the misery of having to wait indefinitely.



Dear Applicant

With reference to your recent application for a post this is to inform you that you have not been selected.

Yours faithfully

Personnel and Admin

The 'letter' was a cyclostyled slip. Someone had initialled it between 'yours faithfully' and 'Personnel and Admin'. There was no way of knowing who did that.

I felt let down because I had spent quite some time preparing my CV and covering letter for them. And I thought I had almost everything they had mentioned in their ad.

G: I am not surprised that you felt let down. You were. "Dear applicant" tells you it is a standard form letter. You were not sure your application had been studied carefully. You felt your efforts had been wasted. The silver lining is that it put to an end your misery of waiting.

S: How would you inform candidates who are short-listed and interviewed, but don't get the job in the end?

G: Here is what one could write:

**Dear Mr ...**

Thank you for attending the interview last week. The selectors on the panel were impressed by your track record and performance at the interview. The competition, however, has been very keen and there were a few whose qualifications and performance matched our requirements more closely than yours. So the positions have been filled.

I thank you for the interest you have shown in Swan Engineering and for the time you have spent with us.

We wish you all the best.

Yours sincerely

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S: What you are telling him is that he is good, but someone else happens to fit the slot more closely.

G: It may disappoint him but not break him.

If the rejection is at an earlier stage, there are two sets of people to deal with: those who meet the minimum requirements, and those who don't. To the first group we could write:

**Dear Mr ...**

Thank you for your application for the position of Sales Executive which we advertised recently.

The response to the advertisement was very good. Some of the applicants meet our requirements much more closely than you do, and they are being called for an interview. I am afraid I will not be able to take your application any further.

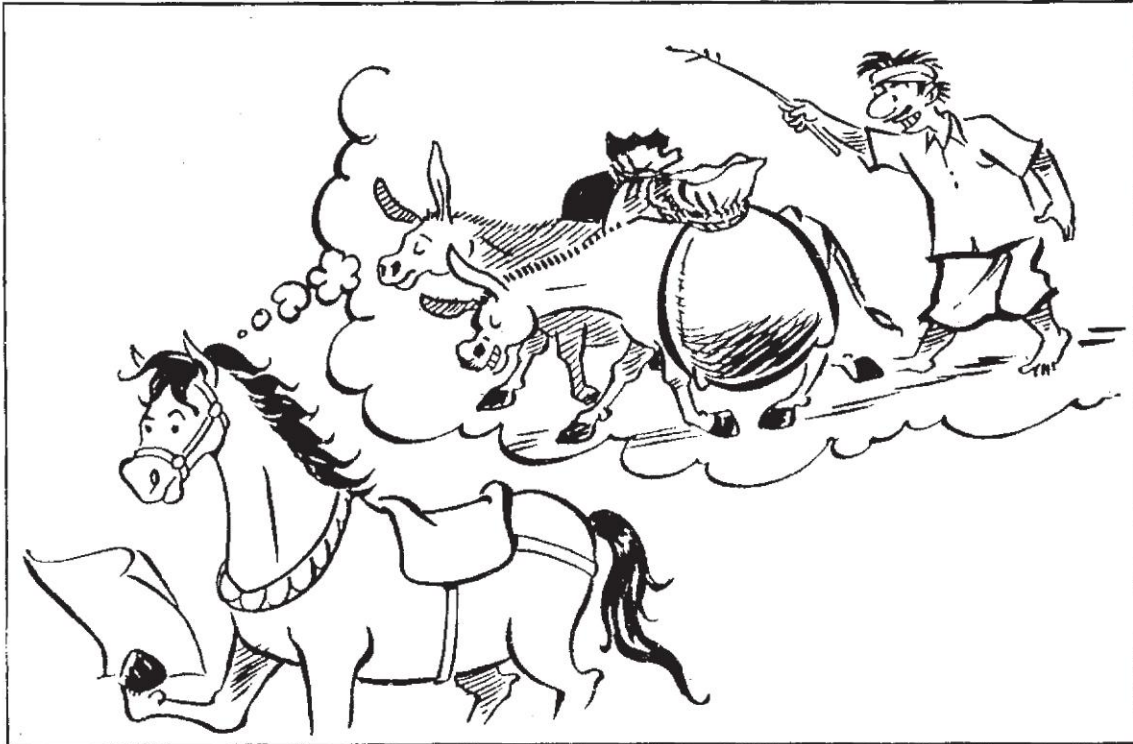
I thank you for the interest you have shown in joining Swan Engineering. I also wish you success in your search for a suitable job.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

S: The strategy seems to be the same. There are other candidates who fit our slot better than you do. So we can't take your application any further.

G: That's right. I also thank him for the interest he has shown in Swan Engineering, and wish him good luck. That is the minimum we owe to people who have responded to our ad and who would perhaps be asked to join us if we didn't get any better applications.



*"... a couple of candidates matched our expectations a little more closely".*

To those people who have applied for a job they are not at all qualified for we can write:

**Dear Mr...**

Thank you for the interest you have shown in working with Swan Engineering. But I am afraid your qualifications and experience do not match the post of Sales Executives we advertised recently.

We wish you all the best in your search for a position that suits your talents and qualifications.

Yours sincerely



S: What would you write to people who apply for jobs which have not been advertised? Do you think it necessary to write at all? Isn't it impractical?

G: Study the letter. If it is a serious application, a reply should be sent.

Here's a reply Roshan, a friend of mine, received from a firm in Dubai. It was a local application because he was at Dubai when he applied to Salehsons Corporation for a job.

When he gave me a photocopy of this letter he remarked that he liked this rejection letter more than some of the acceptance letters he had got from some firms.

21 February 19..

Mr Roshan Sardesai  
P O Box AB 158  
Dubai  
UAE

Dear Mr Sardesai,

Thank you for your recent enquiry regarding possible employment with Salehsons Corporation. At present there are no vacancies suitable to your talents and qualifications, but your application will be kept in our current file for reference should an appropriate need arise.

It is the policy of Salehsons to promote from within wherever possible, except in cases where special qualifications are needed which require many years of study and training.

We regret that we are unable to offer you a more positive answer at this time and wish you every success in your future career.

Yours sincerely,

**Peter Henderson**  
Manager-Human Resources

- S: I see why Mr Sardesai liked it. It doesn't make him feel rejected. He's told that right now there is no job that suits his talents, experience, and qualifications. He's also told that his application would be kept in their file for future reference. Yes, although the news is bad, it doesn't make Mr Sardesai feel bad either about himself or about the company.
- S: How about people who resign and leave the firm? Often resignations are unpleasant both for the firm and for the individuals leaving.
- G: Resignations are of two broad categories. People resort to the first type when they get a better job offer from another firm (bigger pay, bigger position, better town, nearer home, etc.) or when certain personal developments (marriage, death in the family, spouse's transfer, etc) make it difficult to continue in a job. There is usually no dissatisfaction with the firm.

Resignations of the second type result from clashes with colleagues, lack of support from the top or some other unpalatable factor related to the firm. At times people are advised by the firm to resign. Very polite and very generous acceptance letters are called for in all cases of resignation irrespective of the circumstances which led to the resignations.



*"We're putting your application in our active file".*

- S: At times people who leave after a fight send in bitter resignation letters. Do you suggest generous acceptance letters even in such cases? Won't that be a sign of weakness?
- G: Not at all. It is just the opposite. It is a sign of maturity and wisdom. This is not to condone rudely worded resignation letters. No matter what the circumstances in which one leaves a firm, one should use very civil language in one's resignation letter.

Even if a resignation letter is curt, the firm's acceptance letter should be polite and generous. A firm has much more to lose than an individual in such cases.

Here is an acceptance letter which I found in a company's file. I don't know if the resignation followed the offer of a better job by a rival firm (the most likely cause) or some disagreement with the firm. And that doesn't matter.

Dear Miss Nair,

Sub: Relieving reg.,

This has reference to your letter dt. 26th March '96 tendering resignation from the services of the Company.

Please note that you have been relieved from the services of our organisation with effect from 1st April 96.

You are requested to handover all the Company's property to our Branch Manager Mr Sudesh Pillai at the earliest to enable us to settle your account.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely  
for ALPHA COSMETICS LTD

B.S.R. Vara Prasad  
Sr Manager—Sales Administration

How do you find it?

- S: The letter is matter-of-fact and businesslike. If the firm is unhappy about the resignation, there is no trace of that feeling. The resignation is treated as one of those things that keep happening in the firm.



- G: You are right. The letter is polite and functional. But I think it can be made much better. It will gain much from an injection of feelings into it. Here's an alternative way.

**Dear Miss Nair**

With deep regret we accept your resignation from Alpha effective April 1, 1996.

We thank you for your valuable contribution to Alpha during the past eighteen months. You helped Kottayam Branch become one of the top ten branches of the company countrywide.

Do hand over to Mr Sudesh Pillai, Branch Manager, any company property you might have in your possession. This, as you know, is needed for settling your account.

I wish you all the best in your new assignment.

Sincerely yours

B.S.R. Vara Prasad  
Sr Manager (Sales Admin)

Copy : Mr Sudesh Pillai, Branch Manager,  
Alpha Cosmetics Ltd, Kottayam - 688 575

- G: What differences do you notice in the alternative version?
- S: First of all, Mr Vara Prasad appears to be really sorry that Miss Nair is leaving. He thanks her for her contribution to the firm. What makes it sound genuine is the credit he gives her for the distinction achieved by the branch she served. Most probably she wouldn't have managed it single-handedly. But she will surely have contributed something to that success. That is acknowledged. In the original acceptance letter I don't find any trace of either appreciation for her contribution or regret at the parting of ways.
- G: This is because many companies think of the employees who leave or are asked to leave as people who don't matter any more, people not worth any

further attention. How wrong they are! If people leave with goodwill, the pay-off will be tremendous. So even dismissal letters should be drafted with sensitivity.

S: Once a person resigns, there is a sudden growth of distrust in the firm. Everyone is on guard.

G: That attitude is obvious in the third paragraph of the original letter: "You are requested to hand over all the company property to our ... at the earliest ..." One is made to feel that without some pressure, one will not hand over company property. Contrast it with the way the same requirement is handled in the alternative version. "Do hand over ... any company property you might have in your possession. This, as you know, is needed for settling your account". "Any company property you might have in your possession" recognises the possibility that all company property may have already been handed over.

S: I don't think I agree with you here. I mean I don't think any lack of trust in the departing employee is obvious in the third para of the original letter. That is just a way of writing. Of course, the alternative is much nicer.

G: All I am saying is that a little thinking and a proper attitude can lead to letters that people cherish and letters that create a fund of goodwill.

- **Personnel letters—both internal and external—are sales letters.**
- **Appointment and promotion letters should be warm and enthusiastic. They should reinforce the employee's perception of self worth.**
- **Letters accepting resignations should signal regret at the parting of ways and appreciation for the contributions made. This is particularly so if the resignations are sought in unpleasant circumstances.**

# 12

## It's all in the Family

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Samir : We have been looking at letters between companies. Shall we now look at letters within companies?

Guru : Why not? Letters and notes within a company—memos—are as important as letters between companies. There are some important differences in format and style; but the basics are the same.

S: What are the main differences?

G: A letter that goes out to another company is like a meal at a restaurant. There are certain formalities. It is important for the waiters to observe certain courtesies. The guest also is expected to behave in a certain way.

A memo is like a home meal. A home meal isn't elaborate. It's simple and informal. There is little ceremony. At a home meal you don't say, "Would you be kind enough to pass me the salt, please". Unless, of course, you want to be sarcastic. You know everyone in the family pretty well. So you take a lot of information for granted. Taking anyone for granted may, however, invite trouble.

Similarly in memos we drop addresses, salutations, complimentary closes, even full signatures. The language tends to be simple and direct. Most memos are very brief, too. Some memos fail because too much is taken for granted.

S: Is there a standard format for memos?

G: There's really no need because it's for internal communication. However some companies, especially large ones, use printed memo forms to make sure all memos carry certain basic information: Here are a couple of widely used 'memoheads':



| <b>MEMORANDUM</b> |       | <b>APL</b> |
|-------------------|-------|------------|
| To:               | From: |            |
| Subject:          | Date: |            |

| <b>APL interoffice memo</b> |          |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| To:                         | Date:    |
| From:                       | Subject: |

APL is the name of the company. It stands for Ayur Pharmaceuticals Ltd. Guidewords are given for the basic information that a memo should carry: to, from, date, and subject. A printed form is not needed if the memo carries this basic information.

- S: Now that all offices are linked by intercom, isn't it a waste to send memos to one another?
- G: Not quite. 'Memo' is the short form of memorandum, meaning 'to be remembered' or 'to be noted'. Memos are an easy way of putting interoffice communication in black and white. They prevent disputes on what message was sent when, to whom, by whom, etc. A lot of inter-departmental and intradepartmental communications need written back-up. This is essential in the corporate set-up where many people belonging to different levels work together and where people come and go. There may be many messages to be remembered and acted upon; so it may be unwise to rely on the spoken word.

A memo could be hand-written and sent across or faxed or e-mailed. Because of its swiftness, simplicity and flexibility, the e-mail is increasingly being adopted by companies for interoffice and intra-office communication.

- **Memos—letters and notes to people within a company—are as important as letters between companies.**
- **Letters are like a meal in a restaurant while memos are like a home meal. Memos tend to be brief and informal. They also skip information which is common knowledge in a company.**
- **Memos are the written back-up of a great deal of interoffice oral communication.**
- **All memos should carry the following basic information: To, From, Date, Subject.**

S: When we call colleagues to a meeting, we send them memos. Here's a memo I got this morning.

To: S N Sinha  
Subject: Truck Strike

From GM-Purchase  
Date: May 21, 19..

There will be a meeting at 11 am on Tuesday May 25, 19.. to discuss the national truck strike called by the National Truck Drivers' Union. You are requested to attend the meeting.

G: It's brief. It's clear that you are expected to attend the meeting convened by the GM-Purchase at 11 am on Tuesday, May 25. It is also clear that the meeting will discuss the national truck strike.

But this memo is too brief. It takes too much for granted. It doesn't carry some essential information a memo of this type should. Where will you meet? If the meetings convened by the GM-Purchase are always held in her office or, say, in Conference Room 2, it's part of your shared knowledge, and there is no need to mention it. Unless it is absolutely clear to everyone invited to the meeting, the place should be mentioned.

From the memo it isn't clear who else is invited to the meeting. You can't prepare yourself properly for a meeting if you don't know who else is coming to the meeting.

The agenda isn't focused enough to guide your preparation. As a result, you might skip the meeting. Or you might arrive at the meeting like the way you arrive at a fair. You have certain general expectations, but no clear idea of what you'll get there and what you can do there. An ineffective memo can thus lead to an ineffective, wasteful meeting.

S: This is the way we always get invited to meetings. How would you draft the memo?



*"It wasn't clear from the memo who else was coming."*

- G: Here's how I'd draft it. I assume that the invitation goes to all the supervisory staff in the Purchase Department and that the GM expects the meeting to take about an hour.

To: All Supervisory Staff  
**Coping with national truck strike**

From: GM-Purchase  
May 21, 19..

Shall we meet in Conference Room 2 from 11 a.m. to 12 noon on Tuesday, May 25? We have to draw up contingency plans for getting raw materials in the event of a national truck strike from June 18. By way of preparation, please go over the 1989 files to find out how we coped with the truck strike in September 1989. Also telephone your counterparts in other firms in the city for ideas before you come for the meeting.

Distribution: PSR, RST, SNS, KP, ALM, PP, RL



S: Why do you say from 11 am to 12 noon? We normally mention only the starting time.

G: That is not enough. How can you prepare yourself well for a meeting if you have no idea whether it is for thirty minutes or three hours? How can you plan the rest of the day if you don't know for how long you will be in the conference room? The convenor's estimate may go wrong. But it is better to have some estimate than none at all.

If you suggest the kind of preparation expected of the attendees, they are likely to come to the meeting with some specific ideas and figures. Often meetings are a colossal waste of several people's time because no one comes prepared; everyone thinks on their feet. Issues once settled are reopened.

S: At times the meeting is not for all the supervisory staff. It may be for three or four people. How do you indicate it in the invitation?

G: Simple. Let's say to this meeting only four people are invited. At the guide word 'To' you can write SNS, PSR, KP, RL. If these initials are not easily recognized, their full names should be mentioned. Every invitee should know who else is invited.

S: Why have you said "Shall we meet..." rather than "there will be a meeting..." or "You are requested to attend a meeting of ..." etc? Does it mean that the time and date mentioned are tentative?

G: No. The informal language makes it livelier. It certainly sounds friendlier. In a memo to our colleagues, we can easily cut out a lot of formal expressions without being impolite in the least.

- ***A memo inviting people to a meeting should answer these questions: Where? When? For how long? Who all are expected to attend?***
- ***An invitation to a meeting should as a rule also include a clear idea of the agenda.***

Here's a memo sent by the General Manager-Finance of a Rs 200 crore manufacturing company in Nagpur to the General Manager-Personnel. It contains all the information needed; but it is wordy and tediously polite.

30th June, 19..

FROM

TO

P N Sastry  
General Manager-Finance

Mr S V Pant  
GM-Personnel

This has reference to your Inter-Office Memo dated 29th June, 19... for arranging the Car under Hire Purchase Scheme to N T Purohit.

It may kindly be noted that we have made arrangements for procurement of Cars under **HIRE PURCHASE SCHEME** from two leading Finance Companies as given hereunder:

1. M/s AutoFin People  
28, S.P.Road  
Nagpur - 440 012  
Contact Person: Mr Santosh  
Tel: 668217/668128
2. Mr Madhav  
M/s Nagpur Finance Ltd  
557 Kamptee Road,  
Nagpur 440 005  
Contact Person: Mr Ibrahim  
Tel: 378121/372587

The availability of the Cars from the aforementioned sources depends upon the type and the colour of the cars as required by our Executives from time to time. Since, we have tied up the financial arrangements, your Administration Department should be able to approach any of the above Finance Companies and arrange the vehicle. However, the Documentation etc. as required will be taken care by us after the procurement action is finalised by the Administration Department. Further, in view of our earlier bad experience in recovering the initial 50% money which is working out to Rs.25,000/- approximately. In all future cases, you may advise the concerned Executives to deposit the same before vehicle is arranged.

Trust, that you will find the same in order.

Regards,

**P.N. Sastry**

COPY TO: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

S: I think the first sentence can be reduced to two short lines:

Subject: Car hire purchase for Mr N T Purohit

Reference: Your memo of 29 June

G: Very Good. We may even get rid of Subject and Reference. How about a single line highlighted by boldface or underlining or italics?

***Car hire purchase: your memo of June 29***

S: How can you drop 'Mr N.T.Purohit'?

G: Because the hire-purchase arrangement made by the General Manager - Finance is for executives of his company in general, not exclusively for Mr Purohit. Moreover, you refer to the Personnel Manager's memo which obviously mentions Mr Purohit. So Mr Purohit's case also is included.

S: "It may kindly be noted ..." appears to be unnecessarily polite. Wouldn't "Please note..." be enough?

G: Why have that introduction at all?

Why not get straight into the core message? Once food is served at home you don't wait for someone to tell you 'Please eat', do you?

Cars can now be hire-purchased for our executives from either of these two finance companies.

or

We have arranged with the following finance companies for hire-purchase of cars.

Even the next paragraph can be trimmed considerably. What's its gist?

S: How soon you can get a car from these companies depends on the type and colour chosen by the executives. The Administration Department can procure the car; the Finance Department will take care of documentation.

G: Let's say that rather than get into heavy expressions like "the aforementioned sources" and "after the procurement action is finalised by the Administration Department".

The next paragraph also is unnecessarily wordy. All Mr Sastry wants to say is that the executives should be asked to make the initial deposit of about Rs



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25,000 before the car is bought. Otherwise recovery becomes difficult. I don't know why that should be so, but that is Mr Sastry's experience, and he has every right to say so.

The last line is totally unnecessary, too.

S: Shall we put the memo together?

G: Sure.

|                                                                                                                                                                                             |                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| To SVP, GM-Pers                                                                                                                                                                             | June 30, 19..    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                             | From PNS, GM-Fin |
| <b><i>Car hire purchase: your memo of June 29</i></b>                                                                                                                                       |                  |
| Cars can now be hire-purchased from either                                                                                                                                                  |                  |
| AutoFin People Ltd                                                                                                                                                                          |                  |
| 28, SP Road, Nagpur 440 012                                                                                                                                                                 |                  |
| Contact: Mr Santosh Kelkar                                                                                                                                                                  |                  |
| Tel: 668217/668128                                                                                                                                                                          |                  |
| or                                                                                                                                                                                          |                  |
| Nagpur Finance Ltd                                                                                                                                                                          |                  |
| 557, Kamptee Road, Nagpur 440 005                                                                                                                                                           |                  |
| Contact: Mr Ibrahim Said                                                                                                                                                                    |                  |
| Tel: 378121/372587                                                                                                                                                                          |                  |
| How soon you can get a car from these agencies depends on the make and colour of the car the executives choose. Admin can buy the cars. We will take care of the documentation and payment. |                  |
| Before you buy a car for an executive, please get from him/her a deposit of Rs 25,000. Otherwise recovery becomes difficult.                                                                |                  |
| <b>(P.N. Sastry)</b>                                                                                                                                                                        |                  |

S: Do we need to repeat the sender's name at the bottom of the memo as you have done?

- G: Not really. It's okay for the sender to sign against his name at the top of the memo. Some put down a short signature or their initials. Signing at the end gives the memo a closure. It's really a matter of personal choice. Unless there's a very good reason why a company adopts a particular format, this should be left to individual preferences. The larger the company, the greater the need for a standard format. In general, the memo format need not be made rigid. After all it's for internal consumption.

What we need to focus on is the language used in memos. It should be simple and direct. I find the language in many memos unnecessarily servile and wordy. Here is a memo sent by a Production Manager of a pharmaceutical company to his General Manager.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| APL                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                      |
| From Manager-Production                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | To GM-Production     |
| No PC/28/19..                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Date: April 16, 19.. |
| <br>Dear Sir                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                      |
| This is to bring to your kind notice that around one tone of printed foil with the old name Ayur Herbal Drugs Ltd on it, is lying with us. Strip packing foil can be washed and reused as plain or after printing. But blister packing foil has to be scraped. |                      |
| Kindly advise us so as to get rid of unwanted stock lying in our stores.                                                                                                                                                                                       |                      |
| The list of different products foil is enclosed herewith for your kind perusal and necessary action.                                                                                                                                                           |                      |
| <br>Regards                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                      |
| <br>CC: Materials Manager                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                      |

It must be quite uncomfortable if you have a tonne of foil lying with you! Seriously, the informality of a memo shouldn't be stretched to include awful spellings like 'tone' for 'ton' or 'tonne' and 'scraped' for 'scrapped'. They're sure to irritate the reader. It shows lack of courtesy to the colleagues who have to read it. In some cases a spelling mistake or error in punctuation can lead to misunderstanding. Or the reader may have to call you up to find out exactly what you mean. There's no justification for such sloppiness no matter how busy you are and how informal the memo.

- S: I feel expressions like "this is to bring to your kind notice", and "for your kind perusal and necessary action" should go. They are too formal, aren't they?
- G: Quite. What does the Production Manager want?
- S: He wants his General Manager's advice on what to do with a ton of packing foil with the company's old name—Ayur Herbal Drugs Ltd—printed on it.
- G: So that is what he should put into the memo.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>APL</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                          |
| To: G.M.-Production                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | From: Manager-Production |
| <b>Old Packing Foil</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | April 16, 19..           |
| <p>We have about a ton of packing foil with our old name AHDL and different product names printed on it (list attached).</p> <p>Strip packing foil can, after washing, be reused for printing labels; nothing can be done with blister packing.</p> <p>What would you like me to do with the lot?</p> |                          |

That is all that is needed.

- S: Now the text is clear and direct. But would the GM-Production be offended that the language is too direct, not polite enough?
- G: This is a vicious circle. You think he would be offended by direct language, and use servile language. He puts up with such silly language convinced that you aren't capable of anything better. Afraid that he might offend you, he refrains from correcting you. This circle has to be broken. I suggest that you do it. Direct language need not offend anyone.

- ***Don't use excessively polite language in a memo. Use simple, direct, conversational language.***
- ***Make memos brief and to the point.***
- ***Brevity, however, should not be confused with rudeness and abruptness. A memo should be warm and polite.***

- G: Brevity and direct language are certainly virtues. However, we shouldn't appear to sound rude and abrupt. Even within a family certain norms of politeness are followed, aren't they?



Here's an e-mail memo sent by a systems analyst to another in a distant branch of the same software development company.

**Laxman**

Refer TR 383. On going through code I found that:

1. In XYZ, the function BCD is being called with options = 3. Why?
2. Explain the removal of loops depending on the direction. Only after getting a reply from you, I can proceed on this.

**Vikram**

S: Frankly, I can't make sense of this mail.

G: Neither can I. But it makes sense to people who develop computer software. My point is that the language is devoid of the softness of politeness. No matter how busy you are, you can't afford to sound boorish. After all, you need their cooperation. They are made of flesh and blood, not files and chips.

S: How would you revise this mail?

G: Depending on Vikram's relationship with Laxman and the degree of help needed, I'd use one of these two.

**Laxman**

Could you spare a moment? Need your help desperately.

I've been struggling with TR 383. Could you tell me why in XYZ the function BCD is being called with "options=3"? Also, how are loops removed when ... I'd be happy if I got a quick reply. You know I can't get on until this is sorted out.

Thanks very much.

Cheers !

**Vikram**

**Laxman**

Could you please refer to TR 383? On going through the code, I find that in XYZ the function BCD is being called with "options=3". I just can't figure out why it is so. Could you explain the removal of ...

Laxman, I would appreciate a quick reply. You know I can't get on with the work until I sort this out.

Thanks very much.

**Vikram**

S: Now they are more like a personal request. Laxman is likely to give Vikram immediate help.

G: The trick is to make the memos conversational without crossing the limits of courtesy expected among friends and colleagues.

There is of course another set of memos—brief status reports—in which the language may be matter-of-fact. Here's an example.

To: Manager-Purchase

From: Manager-Production

May 14, 19..

**Rejection of Cartons**

We are returning to the stores the whole lot (300) of cartons supplied by Super Packagings. Here are the defects:

1. The name of the company is printed in a corner, and in brick red instead of orange as specified in our order.
2. TM is not printed along with the brand name.
3. Supplier's name is not printed on the flap.

Copy: Stores Manager

Here is yet another example. It is from an Assistant Manager (Personnel) to his boss, Senior Manager (Human Resources). The boss has asked the Assistant Manager how many people have responded to their recent ad in *Times of India* for executive positions.

To: Senior Manager (HR)

From: Sonali Maini

**Response to ad in Tol**

August 12, 19..

Here's a summary of the responses so far to our ad in *Times of India* (August 2) for managerial positions:

| <b>Position</b>               | <b>Number of applications</b> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Senior Manager-Marketing :    | 17                            |
| Manager-HRD :                 | 28                            |
| Manager-Accounts :            | 9                             |
| Assistant Manager-Marketing : | 64                            |

S: It's just plain figures. Nothing remarkable about it.

G: That's right. It's functional. It gives the Senior Manager a clear idea of how many people have responded to their ad in ten days. No interpretation is needed here. It is straightforward factual reporting. It doesn't use sickening expressions like "for your kind perusal and necessary action."

- ***Dry, matter-of-fact language is acceptable in memos which give brief factual status reports.***
- ***The type of language to be used in a memo depends on its purpose, its reader and its author.***

Short investigative reports also may be presented as memos. Such memos involve the writer's interpretation of the facts he collects. Some investigative reports may also carry recommendations.

S: We had an interesting 'investigation' recently. We lost a major order because our confirmation didn't reach the buyer by the deadline—5 p.m., June 17. The Marketing Manager was surprised because he had signed the confirmation by noon on that day, and had instructed his secretary to get it faxed immediately. The records showed that it was faxed about 1 p.m. on June 18, a full day after it was to have been sent.

The GM-Marketing was furious. He asked the Marketing Manager to find out why there was a day's delay. He couldn't find out whose fault it was. His secretary Rajni said that she took the letter to the fax operator immediately after it was signed, and left it on his—the fax operator's—table.



The operator said that he faxed it as soon as he got it around 1 p.m. on June 18.

There was of course no record which showed when the letter was handed over to the fax operator. Most probably the letter lay on the Fax operator's table for a whole day before he saw it and faxed it. Because we don't have a fax register we have no record of when a letter is handed to the operator.

- G: Let's draft a memo which the Marketing Manager could have written on his investigation:

To: VSR

From: LNB

**Day's delay in faxing letter**

July 2, 19..

On June 17, I signed an important letter around mid-day and asked my secretary Rajni to have it faxed. It wasn't faxed until 1 p.m. the following day. As a result, we lost a major order.

I investigated the delay. Rajni said she took the letter to the fax operator as soon as it was signed. But she left it on his table as he was not at his desk. When questioned, the operator told me that he hadn't got the letter from Rajni until noon on June 18.

In the absence of any records it is impossible to say whose fault caused the delay. May I suggest that the fax operator maintain a register? It should carry the following information: the time letters to be faxed are handed in, the signature of the person handing them in, the time each letter is transmitted by fax, and the operator's signature.

- S: This memo introduces the problem, gives a brief account of the investigation, and offers a suggestion for preventing such problems. I think that the GM should get from it a clear idea of what happened and how this can be prevented in future.

- G: That is all that is needed. You don't need to bore the boss with details of the investigation. And yet you need to include enough information to help him understand the kind of investigation carried out.

A memo can confirm in writing agreements reached at a meeting. Here is a memo written by a highly valued General Manager-Strategic Planning to the Chairman and Managing Director of his company.

**MARCO**

To : B.S.Rastogi

From: J.N.Vakil  
May 12, 19..

This will confirm the agreement we reached at yesterday's meeting in your office.

1. I can take up to twenty-one days a year for consultancy outside the company provided those clients are not in competition with MARCO.
2. In return I will forgo half the annual paid holiday I am entitled to.
3. I will ensure that consultancy outside the company does not in any way affect my contribution to MARCO.

Will you please sign this to indicate your concurrence, and return it to me after retaining a photocopy?

If you have any reservations about any aspect of the agreement, please call me.

S: Is it like the minutes of a meeting?

G: You could say that. Here of course there are just two people involved. Mr Vakil puts in writing the agreement he and his Managing Director reached after negotiation. He also wants the memo back with Mr Rastogi's signature. A memo like this helps both the parties in the event of a dispute later on about exactly what agreement they had reached.

For the same reason instructions also often go to subordinates in the form of a memo. Here is a sample.

To : Assistant Managers

From : Senior Manager - Sales

**New Year gifts to customers**

Nov 28, 19..

Effective December 1, 19.. gifts with company's compliments may be given away only to customers I have approved. Please prepare a list of customers to whom you feel New Year gifts should be given. Let me have the list by December 15.

Distribution: NSV/RRN/PSN/LM/VT/LSG

- S: So none of the Assistant Managers can now say they didn't know they were supposed to get the Senior Manager's prior approval for giving away new year gifts to customers.
- G: Precisely. Oral instructions, especially those given to several people, tend to get varied interpretations. A memo eliminates misinterpretation provided, of course, the language used is clear and concise.

- ***Memos are used for a variety of purposes such as reporting briefly on an investigation, confirming oral instructions, confirming oral agreements, etc.***
- ***Well drafted memos forestall disputes about what is agreed to be done by different people.***

- S: Can we consider a notice put up on the office bulletin board to be a memo?
- G: Why not? Notices carry information, instructions, etc. of a general nature and intended for a large number of people. It is, however, risky to convey important messages through the bulletin board. Many don't read notices.

If a few people don't read a notice about an office picnic or a party, there will perhaps be no disaster. But if a few people fail to read a notice about changes in medical reimbursement regulations or about restrictions on the use of taxis for official travel, you can expect serious problems.

It is also important that those who put up a notice sign their names legibly. If a reader has some queries, he should know who he can get the answers from.

---

Here is a secretary's notice which appeared in the Travellers Club in Paris before a visit by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.

#### NOTICE

Members should limit their invitations to their wives and daughters, and should not invite their mistresses unless they are the wife or daughter of another member.

\_\_\_\_\_ F.S. Pepper, *20th Century Anecdotes*, Sphere, 1990: 93

- 
- S: We have looked at a variety of interoffice memos. What would you say are the most common defects?
- G: Many memos are too wordy. Some memos are excessively polite, especially the ones which are sent up the ladder. Some are too abrupt, even rude. It is important to strive for the middle path.



When you sit down to write a memo to someone—subordinates or superiors—ask yourself how you would present the same ideas orally to the same person(s). Use that very language in the memo, and you are unlikely to go wrong.

- **Memos are written communications within a company. They should be like a home meal. Simple and informal.**
- **A company may have a format for memos. In the absence of a form, start with the following basic information: To, From, Subject, Date.**
- **A memo drops certain courtesies found in intercompany letters because it is addressed to a member of the same corporate family.**
- **The language used in a memo should, whenever practicable, be conversational. However, no words that might offend the reader of the memo should be used. Neither should the language of the memo be wordy or excessively polite.**

- S: We have been talking for quite a while about business letter writing. Can you put your advice into a nut-shell?
- G: Nut-shells are for nuts. Let me think of my suggestions as ten checkposts. Here we are.

#### **YOUR BUSINESS LETTER: TEN CHECKPOSTS**

1. **Structure** *Is the structure logical? Are the ideas clear and easy to understand? Is each para built around one main idea? Is the transition from one point to another smooth?*
2. **Orientation** *Is it reader-oriented? Does it take into account and subtly project the interests and needs of the reader?*
3. **Length** *Is it longer than a page? If it is, can you trim it to under one page? Is it too short and too matter-of-fact?*
4. **Coverage** *Is the letter complete? Is all the relevant information (including the appropriate reference) given? Is there anything irrelevant?*
5. **Style** *Is the style appropriate to the occasion, purpose, and person reading it?*
6. **Tone** *Is the tone polite (even when you have reason to be angry or annoyed)? Is it positive? Is it warm and friendly? Or is it cold, bored, or unconcerned?*
7. **Language** *Does the language of your letter follow the usual rules of grammar, vocabulary (including spelling), and punctuation? Is it easy to understand?*
8. **Looks** *Does the letter look attractive? Is the stationery decent? Is the typing well-designed and well-executed without ugly corrections, overtyping, etc? Is the format pleasing to the eye?*
9. **Creativity** *Does the letter reflect a thinking mind? Or is the text full of worn-out phrases?*
10. **Effectiveness** *Is it persuasive? Is it the kind of letter you would like to receive?*

**DON'T POST YOUR BUSINESS LETTER  
UNTIL IT PASSES THESE CHECKPOSTS.**

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- S: Thank you, Guru. You've taken me deep into the craft of business letter writing.
- G: You're welcome, Samir. All I've done is to raise your awareness about certain aspects of business letter writing. It's up to you to develop your own style. All the best!

## Appendix

### Rogues' Gallery

Here are fifty 'rogues' picked up from real letters. The rogues are not all untouchable. Some are pompous, some ugly, some flabby, some plain wrong. It's best to avoid them in business letters. Why not employ the leaner, smarter alternatives?

#### ROGUES

1. Kindly intimate us of having done the needful in this regard.
2. Your representative may call on the undersigned on any working day.
3. A copy of the report is enclosed herewith for your kind perusal and necessary action.
4. It is advised that your personal visit to the bank would facilitate the opening of the account very much.
5. You are requested to expedite the matter and to give us the report.

#### ALTERNATIVES

- Will you please confirm it?  
OR  
I look forward to receiving your confirmation.
- Your representative is welcome to call on me on any working day.
- A copy of the report is enclosed.  
OR  
Here is a copy of the report.
- Opening of the account will be easy if you come over to the bank.
- Please let me have your report soon—perhaps in a week ?



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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6. Kindly do the needful of submitting the samples to your clients and give us the necessary feedback on the acceptance of our product.                           | Will you please give the samples to your clients and get their feedback ?                                                                                          |
| 7. Enclosed herewith please find details of the damage.                                                                                                           | The details of the damage are enclosed.<br><div style="text-align: center;">OR</div> Enclosed are the details of the damage.                                       |
| 8. We are desirous of purchasing 120 Nos (one hundred and twenty numbers) ceiling fans.                                                                           | We wish to buy 120 (one hundred and twenty) ceiling fans.<br><div style="text-align: center;">OR</div> We wish to order 120 (one hundred and twenty) ceiling fans. |
| 9. Pursuant to our letter dated 04.05.19__ replying to your query regarding moisture content of Flopaxin Batch No. 012345, we have heard from our Q.C department. | Our Quality Control Department has checked the moisture content of Flopaxin Batch No. 012345. (Your query of April 21, 19__ and our letter of May 4, 19__)         |
| 10. We are in receipt of your letter dated 2 August, 19__ and thank you for the same                                                                              | Thank you for your letter of August 2, 19__.                                                                                                                       |
| 11. We await an early compliance with our enquiry.                                                                                                                | We look forward to receiving your response by the end of the month/in the next two weeks.                                                                          |
| 12. This is to inform you that we have asked our representative in Riyadh to call on you.                                                                         | We have asked our representative in Riyadh to call on you.                                                                                                         |

- |                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13. You may be rest assured that the information you furnish will be kept confidential.                                                                                                    | I assure you that the information you give will be kept confidential.                                                                     |
| 14. This is for your information.                                                                                                                                                          | <i>Superfluous. Avoid it.</i>                                                                                                             |
| 15. We trust that a perusal of the list will induce you to place early orders.                                                                                                             | <i>Cut!</i>                                                                                                                               |
| 16. Any personal attention you may be able to extend to Mr Sharma will confer an additional obligation on us.                                                                              | We will be very grateful for any help you give Mr Sharma.                                                                                 |
| 17. We must really insist upon greater promptitude in regard to deliveries.                                                                                                                | We insist on prompt deliveries.<br><i>OR</i><br>We must have prompt deliveries.                                                           |
| 18. We beg to advise you that our winter sale will open on October 3.                                                                                                                      | Our winter sale opens on October 3.                                                                                                       |
| 19. Sub:—Toys and games—supply of—noncompliance with request—present moment—regarding<br>Ref:- Your communication No. Nil, dated 21 December 19__.                                         | SUPPLY OF TOYS AND GAMES<br><br>Thank you for your letter of December 21, 19__.                                                           |
| 20. While acknowledging the receipt of your complaint cited above, it is to intimate that the case is being investigated and a further communication may please be awaited in this regard. | Thank you for writing to us about ... (your letter of October 14, 19__.)<br>The investigation has started.<br>You will hear from us soon. |

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 21. The inconvenience caused to you in this regard is very much regretted and assure you that such recurrences will not happen in future.                                                                                                                                                                                              | We are sorry for the inconvenience it has caused you. We assure you that it will not happen again.                                                               |
| 22. You have not sent samples of Ferraplex.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Could you please send me a few samples of Ferraplex? Please ignore this request if you have already sent them.<br>OR<br>We are waiting for samples of Ferraplex. |
| 23. Human resources are the most important factor, that distinguish between perfection and excellence, especially in the present economic scenario, where quality has become the "BYWORD" for any activity.<br><i>(First sentence in a letter from a 'manpower consultancy house' offering their services to a manufacturing firm)</i> | <i>Gibberish! Cut!</i>                                                                                                                                           |
| 24. Please revert soon after evaluation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Please let us know the result of the evaluation as soon as possible.                                                                                             |
| 25. We hope the above quoted prices are competitive and shall thank you to favour us with your valued orders.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | We are confident that our prices are competitive because of the value we add. I look forward to receiving your orders.                                           |
| 26. Thanks and assuring of our best services at all times.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | We assure you of the highest standards of service.                                                                                                               |



- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 27. We are now in a position to offer the same for Rs 500 per kg.                                                                                                                                                                                   | We can now offer it for Rs 500/kg.                                                                                                  |
| 28. We have for reference your letter dated March 3, 19__ intimating the change in your address and mandate. At the outset we confirm having noted the change in your address as above in our records. We have also noted your mandate particulars. | We have entered in our records the changes in your address and your mandate (your letter of March 3, 19__.)                         |
| 29. I request your goodself to permit us for the same.<br>(=to sponsor a meeting)                                                                                                                                                                   | May we sponsor the meeting?                                                                                                         |
| 30. Please be advised that it is not physically possible to follow up claims after they are processed by us and sent to the Accounts Department.                                                                                                    | We do not follow up claims once we have processed them and passed them to Accounts.                                                 |
| 31. Please be informed that Mr Nagarwala's application has already been processed on 4.5.19__.                                                                                                                                                      | Mr Nagarwala's application was processed on May 4, 19__.                                                                            |
| 32. Vide our covering letter dated 25.1.19__, we have forwarded Form 10 and Form 19 duly filled in, in all respect to your office. Copy of the covering letter is enclosed for your reference.                                                      | We filled in Form 10 and Form 19 and mailed them to your office on January 25, 19__ (please see copy of covering letter, enclosed). |
| 33. We wish to inform you that we have not received the                                                                                                                                                                                             | We have not yet received the claim form from your office.                                                                           |

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claim form from your Office and hence there is no question of any verification nor returning the same.

As soon as we do, we shall verify the details and return it to you.

34. You are required to kindly compute all dues to Mr Waghale under various heads and keep the same ready so that the amount can be handed over to him on the last date of his service, that is, 17.6.19\_\_.

When Mr Waghale retires on June 17, I would like to give him all the money that is due to him. So please compute the dues and get a cheque ready.

35. This is in reference to the telecon the undersigned had with you on the above mentioned subject.

Thank you for letting me speak to you on the phone the other day about ... / Thank you for speaking to me on the phone the other day about ...

36. Reference is made to your letter dated nil.

Thank you for your recent letter.

37. Refer your advertisement in Electronics Journal of September 19\_\_ regarding BM-90 Snap Action Switch.

We read with interest your advertisement on BM-90 Snap Action Switch in *Electronics Journal* of September, 19\_\_.

38. Under the subject letter you had promised us to revert us in a month's time. But we are unable to understand why you have not revert us for the subject matter till date.

In your letter of November 18, 19\_\_ you promised to write to us in a month's time. It is four months now, and we are still waiting.

39. In case if the amount is not credited to your account, please procure the statement from your banker and forward the same to the undersigned

If the cheque has not been credited to your account, please send me a statement from your banker. I shall consider issuing a fresh pay order.

so that I can look into  
the aspect of issuing  
a fresh pay order.

40. Your earliest reply will  
be highly appreciated at  
our end.

We would be very grateful for  
a prompt reply.

41. We are sending herewith  
the cheque No. 654321  
dated 28.9.19\_\_ for  
Rs. 8,00,000/- (Rupees  
eight lakh) drawn on  
Grindlays Bank, Kochi which  
please find in order.

I enclose a cheque (Grindlays  
Kochi No. 654321 / 28.9.19\_\_)  
for Rs. 8,00,000 (Rupees eight  
lakh).

42. I am to invite your  
attention to your letter  
cited above and to inform  
you that your request for ...  
cannot be allowed.

We examined your letter very  
carefully. I am afraid we  
cannot allow your request for ...

43. We wish to draw your kind  
attention to our communi-  
cation dated 8th September  
19\_\_ requesting you to  
pay for ...

May I remind you of our  
request (September 8, 19\_\_)  
that you pay for ...

44. We invite you as per your  
usual custom to pay cash  
on delivery and avail of  
30% discount.

We invite you to pay cash on  
delivery as usual and avail  
yourself of a 30 per cent  
discount.

OR

Why don't you continue to pay  
cash on delivery and get 30  
per cent discount ?

45. The grills were fabri-  
cated as per your  
instructions.

The grills were fabricated  
according to your instructions



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- |                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 46. We have pleasure in submitting our estimates as under: ...                               | Here are our estimates:                                                                                                                                                |
| 47. If you are not clear in mind on any point, please let me know.                           | If you need clarifications on any point, please ask.<br>OR<br>If you have any queries, I will be happy to answer them.                                                 |
| 48. Further to our telecon yesterday I confirm the following terms and conditions:           | I confirm the following terms and conditions which we agreed upon over the phone yesterday.                                                                            |
| 49. We regret to hear the sudden demise of Mr Ramakrishna, and our condolences for the same. | We are very sorry to hear about your husband's sudden death. It must have been a severe blow to you. Please accept our condolences/Please accept our deepest sympathy. |
| 50. For which act of kindness I will be ever so thankful to you.                             | I am deeply obliged to you for this act of kindness.<br>OR<br>Thank you very much indeed.                                                                              |

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