

JANUARY MEETING

*Putting Words in Their Mouths:
The Art and Ethics of Speechwriting*

BY DAVID EPSTEIN

Barack Obama is an eloquent exception, but many of our modern would-be Patrick Henrys often flounder a bit, as in "Give me Liberty, or, or, ... Gadzooks! What's that other thing?" Fortunately, professional speechwriters have come to the aid of today's orators. For our first IWOC meeting of 2009, we have the pleasure and benefit of learning the ins and outs of speechwriting from Richard Greb, an expert in that challenging art and also a past president of IWOC.

Richard Greb will discuss some of the basics of speechwriting as exemplified by his experiences in the field. Greb says, "Speechwriting has been called 'The Silent Profession.' Its practitioners are ghosts, skilled in crafting words to be spoken, and also in suppressing their egos in favor of the style and sensibilities of their clients. In the best of circumstances the job comes with access that allows the writer merely to structure the speaker's thoughts; in other cases, the writer's questions and guidance—always within the speaker's limits—draw out those thoughts to define the speech's messages. And always, while

the writer provides specific words, the responsibility for the ideas is the speaker's."

That thought-provoking comment is an indication that you're going to get a lot from this program. So whether you're a novice itching to add speechwrit-

Speechwriting has been called "The Silent Profession." Its practitioners are ghosts.

ing to your skill-set or a seasoned pro, you won't want to miss it.

Greb has been an independent writer since 1989, when he left the world of journalism in which he had worked for the Lerner Newspapers, Associated Press, the Chicago Tribune and Reuters. He has written speeches and presentations for executives at Fortune 100 companies and small entrepreneurial enterprises. He has worked with clients at McDonald's, Whirlpool, Allstate, the AMA, the Massachusetts Bankers Association and the YMCA of the United States, and was responsible for five years for executive communications at Argonne

National Laboratory. A past president of IWOC, the Chicago Suburban Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America and the Chicago Speechwriters Forum. Greb also teaches writing as an adjunct professor at Columbia College Chicago.

Networking with snacks and beverages begins at 5 p.m. and the meeting at 6. Nonmembers are cordially invited. The meeting is free for IWOC members and \$15 for nonmembers. Plan to stay for a buy-your-own dinner at a nearby restaurant after the meeting. Remember: the location is National-Louis University, 122 South Michigan, Room 5008. This is now our permanent room. National-Louis U. is across the street from the Art Institute. See you there! 🍷



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r.rueff@writenowinc.com

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Web Site: www.iwoc.org

Joan Kinman, webmaster
webmaster@iwoc.org

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Editor:

Joan Kinman

Contributors:

Dave Epstein, Roger Rueff, Beverly Simon

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN/ROGER RUEFF

Resolved!

It's the start of a new year, so naturally I'm thinking in terms of resolutions. I don't have a long history of making them, actually—at least not the kind one fashions once a year. When I was young, I saw doing so as a sign of personal weakness. It seemed to me that if something was important enough to be stopped or started or begun or finished, one should possess the fortitude to stop or start or begin or finish that thing when the need first showed itself, regardless of the season. Either that or admit to the character flaw and stop complaining.

Immaturity wears a thousand masks, and one of them is that of a judge looking outward only, sentencing the behavior of others that he's not yet equipped to understand. It's the same immaturity that mocks seasonal family celebrations and finds itself bored in the presence of adults. But time has a way of sandblasting that mask. Its features become less sharp, its brow less furrowed, its eyes more open and circumpect, its mouth less frown-ridden—more amused at the wearer himself.

Resolved... I must try to be less poetic in 2009.

Nowadays, I do make New Years resolutions and hope for the best—a hope woven from the strands of an invisible prayer that life will provide me the means to do so... and that no great tragedy will intervene to impede my progress.

Resolved... I will definitely try to be less poetic in 2009. Seriously.

Some of mine are the standard variety—eat less, exercise more, and stop screwing with the space-time continuum. Others are a bit more personal—start that novel, finish that Unified Field theory, quit hacking the Defense Department computers. And give names to all the voices in my head.

Things like that.

Just for grins this morning, though, I decided to try something new—a novel approach to finding the resolutions that I might not otherwise think of... the things I need to work on in life that I need a little prodding to find. The idea strikes me as original. Whether or not it's workable only a year will tell.

So here I sit with two paperclips full of fortune cookie fortunes... the only remaining artifacts of many a Chinese meal. Some I acquired at restaurants in the city; others came stuffed in brown paper bags, sprinkled atop containers full of pork fried rice, roast duck, and egg drop soup. Why I keep them is a mystery even to me. I only know that it seems wrong to throw them out. Each time I crack open a fortune cookie, I feel as if some great, benevolent being is handing down a personal message. To throw it out after only one read would be tantamount to wiping my feet on the Dead Sea scrolls.

Regardless, I have the fortunes, and today I will put them to use. The plan is to pick a few at random and use each one to fashion a resolution that I can make for the coming year.

Here goes.

"You have firm convictions. Stand strong behind



them." This year, I resolve to stand strongly behind my convictions. So far, so good.

"An influential figure will make mention of you in a positive light." Um... well... okay. This year, I resolve to accept praise (like that's a problem).

"Rarely do great beauty and virtue dwell together as they do in you." Really... I mean... oh gosh... I'm blushing. Ordinarily, I'd demur, but I just resolved not to.

"All the problems you have will pass quickly away." That's happy news. Not sure what to do with it, though, except maybe resolve to let them do so. But come to think of it, why wouldn't I? Unless they're problems that I don't see as problems and to which I, therefore, retain a blind attachment. In which case, I should resolve to renounce my attachment to things that might be causing me problems, whether or not I see them as such. (A nice bit of logic there.)

"The mysterious side of you is most alluring." Let's see. Being alluring is a good thing; therefore, I resolve to be more mysterious in the coming year. And yes, I could reveal how it will manifest, but doing so would violate the resolution.

"You are serious about your emotional relationships but tend to be more reserved with your feelings." And your point is?

"Others admire your assertiveness." Okay. Be more assertive. Sounds like fun.

Continued on page 4.

The Nitty-Gritty of the Training Marketplace

BY CYNTHIA MIKAL

Thanks to David Epstein for great programs all year! In November, we heard from Howard Prager and Darrell Katz as they talked to us about the training marketplace and writing for learning.

Howard Prager is a director in corporate education at the Lake Forest Graduate School of Management. In his current position, he works with senior management in Fortune 500 companies to sell, design, and deliver educational programs.

Darrell Katz is an account manager, also from Lake Forest Graduate School of Management. He recently joined the Lake Forest Corporate Education team.

Training and development, corporate learning, and executive development all require the creation of written materials. Together, Prager and Katz shared with us what the corporate education industry looks like and where that may impact us as professional writers. They took us on an investigative journey of this industry looking at the who, what, where, why, and how. It is their opinion conditions are favorable for training to be outsourced to independent professional writers in our current economy. (Remember, though, they gave this prognosis in early November.)

The speakers stressed that writers may have to dig to find opportunities and familiarize themselves with the field. There are journals that are specific to this industry that could be a source for articles. And there are groups and societies for corporate trainers, specifically the American Society for Training and

Development (ASTD).

There is a specific lingo in this field. Trainers may be called “corporate trainers” or “workplace performance practitioners,” different names for the same thing. There are also performance consultants who work to improve workplace performance. Instructional technologists work with the way technology, e-learning, webinars, job aids, etc., are used in learning and what works best for different types of learning. Right now, in business there is a growing theme of accountability in business and in training.

Most Fortune 500 companies have their own corporate universities as well as corporate learning conferences. Firms with 500-plus employees usually have in-house trainers, who may report to Human Resources, Operations, the Chief Financial Officer, or directly to the Chief Executive Officer.

Someone in the audience asked why e-learning has not replaced regular teaching. Our speakers noted that e-learning is growing, partially due to savings when the company needs to reach many and distant employees for training. However, it is often hard to get feedback without face-to-face contact. Also, about 80 percent of learning occurs during informal learning, such as being in a classroom with other people and exchanging ideas.

Another area of non-traditional learning that is growing is M-learning, which is mobile-learning done via cell phones or I-pods. M-learning is growing especially within drug companies and others that need to get out small bits

of initial and time-sensitive information.

The adult-learning team includes an instructional designer who specializes in creating the training format, the mechanics of training, and the manuals for student and instructor. There are also a subject matter expert for the topic and a trainer. If there is a communications problem, a professional writer may be called in to put it all together. Katz has seen firsthand that using all of these people builds a much better training product.

Another area that Katz discussed was return on investment (ROI), and specifically return on learning investment (ROLI). He believes that it is a much overlooked area and that writers could be a big help in documenting ROI.

A big name in ROI is Jack Phillips. The ROI Institute is the leading resource on research, training, and networking for practitioners of the Phillips ROI Methodology TM. Another name: Robert Brinkerhoff, who developed the Success Case Method to enhance training value and impact.

The changing economy may create opportunities for freelance writers to get in on the creation of instructional design documents. To get into this area, an understanding of the principles of instructional design is a must.

Katz has had good experiences working with professional writers, and he sees a need for writers in this industry. Prager mentioned that “behemoth industries” have HR, IT, Operations, Finance, Sales, and Marketing departments, all of which

require training and trainers. Both speakers recommended cold calling and networking in local associations such as CISPI, CODN, and CCASTD. Chicago has the second largest number of associations in the country, and you can go to meetings to network without joining. Also, the government uses trainers, and this might be an area to check. A second language is always an asset.

Another source is HRillinois, a Yahoo group and blog site. There are about 500 HR professionals in the Chicago area who use this site to look for different kinds of help, including writers. You can post yourself on this site, but you need to advise the moderator of that. Also, the American Management Association is a local association with lots of information.

Someone asked if writers with more technical expertise command higher fees. Our speakers were not sure but felt that was probably the case.

Other tips: Look for new mandates that require training. Also you are better off as a direct contractor, not as a subcontractor. International financial report structure (IFRS) – a method of uniform reporting for international accounting – is huge and new for the U.S. It will affect every public company in the U.S. Katz thinks is a very viable area for writers.

Overall, the speakers were very positive about the availability of jobs for freelance writers in the training market and very encouraging. (They remarked that the training field was a \$12B industry two years ago.) We all appreciated their information. 📌

Like a Fresh Coat of Paint on a Revered Institution

This is yet another review in an irregular series devoted to books and Internet sites that are popularly classified as reference source material.

By Richard L. Eastline

Spunk & Bite / Arthur Plotnik / 209 pp. plus introduction / Random House Reference, 2007 / \$12.95 (standard format paperback) / ISBN 978-0-375-72227-1

This is what happens when the legendary grammar guardians, Strunk & White, meet up with Arthur Plotnik. What you get, though, is not really a contemporary retelling of their age-old wisdom. The author of *The Elements of Editing* and *The Elements of Expression* instead chooses to recast the recommendations for good writing, not as an affront to the ubiquitous rules of the past but rather as a guide for creative expression.

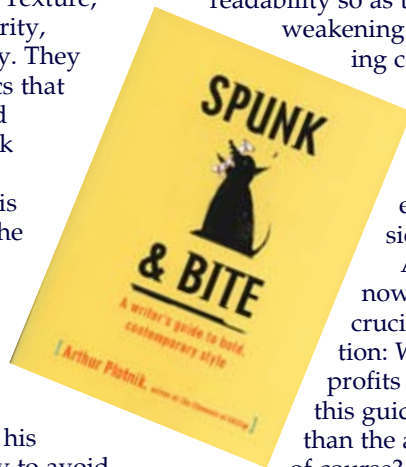
Plotnik's perception of the long-lived *Elements of Style* (now 50 years since E.B. White updated William Strunk's handbook) is that it favors discipline in writing at the expense of establishing a writer's distinctive voice. He doesn't argue against the practicality of standards and, in fact, praises the Strunk & White success in helping writers avoid disorder while navigating through the maze of our language structure. But, he opts for the loophole of allowing "compensating merit" that White admits can be obtained at the cost of a violation of the rules. This discussion defines a point of departure he has taken as he enthusiastically applies a fresh coat of paint to the S&W institution.

In *Spunk & Bite*, Plotnik engages today's defining traits of boldness and risk and incorporates them into the art of expressing thoughts in a more lively, more colorful style. How? For starters, consider some

of these primary section titles: Freshness, Texture, Force, Form, Clarity, Contemporaneity. They are characteristics that apply to the kind of writing Plotnik espouses—communication that is invigorating to the reader, gathering attention and stimulating responses. When he does depart from Strunk & White, his objective is solely to avoid "dead" writing. If that dictum calls for bending the rules or twisting the usual definition of a word, so be it. But, in no way is he condoning sloppiness or total rebellion; his stance is one that is firmly placed in logical choices and the appreciation of well-practiced standards.

With a helping of quoted style examples from Bill Bryson, Maureen Dowd, and others who have earned Plotnik's admiration, this guide also gains from the addition of several dozen quiz-like exercises to test your own input. Overall, there are some thirty brief chapters that bolster the author's objectives to promote more expressive prose. Words are key to his argument, of course, but he doesn't shun the values or dangers inherent in punctuation's contribution. Don't look for an overall discourse on that aspect, however. He limits his observations and sampling to forms that

contribute clarification in readability so as to avoid weakening or instilling confusion in an otherwise apt expression. And, now, the crucial question: Who profits from this guide—other than the author, of course? The pat answer is "everyone," but a more practical recommendation for acquisition would be writers whose prose must sell products or services, or persuade acceptance of ideas and views. Yet, even those who write conventional articles can profit by adopting enhanced imagery as well as injecting an appreciated jolt in expression to appear from time to time in freshening lengthy exposition. Plotnik's conclusion is that writing is distinguished by its ambiance, an environment that's created by the language used. Taken in a broad sense, it's a matter of locution—the distinctive way of saying something. *Spunk & Bite* is not a compilation of rules, but it does present workable options to help in achieving a livelier writing style. In essence, it posts the vital direction signs, leaving it up to the user to choose how far to travel. ♪



President's Column

Continued from page 2.

"You will soon get something because of your special charm." Well, it's about damn time!

"You will be rewarded for being a good listener." Yeah, I know... blah-blah-blah.

"Be prepared to receive something special." Trust me, I'm ready. Bring it on.

"Someone is looking out for you." I knew it! I resolve to find out who it is and get a restraining order.

"Keep your friends on the ground even though they flatter you." But it's not flattery if beauty and virtue really do dwell together in me, right? And what about my special charm?... Oh, all right. I resolve to keep them on the ground. (Spoilsport!)

"Act on new ideas you are generating." That's what I'm doing here, so okay—I declare it resolved.

"Make use of your finest talents." Excellent advice. It's on the list.

So there you go. Fourteen resolutions—a recipe for success. I'll stand firm behind my convictions and accept praise when it comes—as it surely will, given my beauty, virtue, and charm. I'll retain an air of mystery as my problems pass quickly away, and I won't let on to others how I feel about doing so. I'll be assertive and charming and listen when I have to as if I care. I'll clear a place in the living room for the special thing coming my way and keep an eye out for whoever might be looking out for me... and maybe return the favor. I'll act on new ideas as they hit me make use of my finest talents to see them through.

Simple, eh? And all thanks to fortune cookie fortunes. (Maybe next year I'll take my cues from traffic signs.)

Let 2009 begin! ♪

What's Going On?



What a gift! Pat and Cliff Terry at the holiday party.

Is this a sweet moment or what? Dave Epstein and Catherine Rategan smooch it up.



Santa seems to have left his L.L. Bean satchel at home, but Jim Kepler doles out a gift to a delighted Katie Valentino anyway.

Guest Don Talend and Amy Bernstein flash their pearly whites for the camera.



IWOC Welcomes Returning Members Karleen McAllister & Ellen Fonoroff

Happy Birthday to Roger Rueff on December 13 and Ed Cooper on January 8.



Talk about procrastination! Jennifer Oatfield and Bob Hashioka threw caution to the winds and finally tied the knot after 29 years.

Calendar

January 13

IWOC Monthly Meeting. "Putting Words in their Mouths: The Art and Ethics of Speechwriting." Presenter Rich Greb is a past president of IWOC and a veteran speechwriter and writing professor. Start the new year right by turning out for this sure-to-be terrific program. Tuesday, November 11th at National-Louis University, Room 5008, 122 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Program 6 p.m. Networking 5 p.m. Nonmembers, \$15; IWOC members free. Buy-your-own dinner follows. Nonmembers cordially invited. For more information, call 847-855-6670 or visit www.iwoc.org.

The monthly food and networking get-togethers listed below meet at the same time and place each month unless otherwise noted, but call ahead in case of cancellation. The groups welcome nonmembers. If there's no group in your area, why not start one? Contact webmaster@iwoc.org.

January 22 (4th Thursday)

IWOOP Monthly Lunch. Join near-west suburbanites for a noon lunch at Poor Phil's, 139 S. Marion St., Oak Park. For more info, call Barb Dillard at 312/642-3065. Before you show up, check to see if we're meeting this month. This lunch is monthly only if there are enough people who can attend.

February 5 (1st Thursday)

IWORP Monthly Breakfast. Join the Rogers Park IWOC contingent for breakfast at 9 AM at the A&T Grill, 7036 N. Clark St., Chicago. For more info, call Esther Manewith at 773/274-6215.