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# Voice Mail

## Typewritten Responses

*The following fax message and letter are in response to the article, "Are You the Write Type?" by Stephen Gladis (July 1993).*

Gladis's article offers food for thought about the relationship between personality and communication styles, but its claim that it provides a way to use the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator instrument to help writers do their best work is exaggerated. A personality profile may offer "a place to start in working with writers," but is it the best place to start?

As a writer who has designed and facilitated writing workshops for other professionals and who has written everything from operating-room procedures to public-relations materials, I believe that the article presents a weak concept and seriously flawed evidence. Gladis's point that "not every writer will neatly fit the four profiles" is valid. One might ask what the point is of making the connection at all.

Personality-profile data may improve job selection so as to streamline training and increase retention rates. But using MBTI-instrument data to assess the training needs of writers is a bit like driving nails with a wrench. That may work, but why not use a hammer? Comparing a worker's writing with the requirements of the job is a more efficient and effective way to assess writing skills.

Gladis's evidence suffers from the frailty he attributes to his analytical writer: forcefully presenting assertions that overshadow facts. For example, Gladis's assertion that writing samples are the "same memo, different writing types" is wrong. The writers in the example have different objectives and

have, therefore, written different memos. The correspondent tries to persuade supervisors to support a data-gathering project. The technical writer asks that supervisors distribute, collect, and synthesize data from an attached questionnaire. The creative writer invites supervisors to a meeting. The analytical writer asks for feedback.

Though models can offer keys to solving practical problems, some problems don't require models, only mindful responses. We don't need personality inventories to tell us why business



documents often fail to achieve what their writers hope to achieve. We need to assess only how effectively a writer's documents reflect his or her intended objectives and respond to readers' needs. Then we can begin to improve writing skills through training and other interventions.

— **R. Douglas Eaton**  
*Liverpool, New York*

Though Gladis's article instructs managers to help people use their preferred writing styles, managers seldom have enough staff to be able to match writing assignments to the staff's styles or personality types. If they do, great! If they don't, managers should mentor people to "write right" for the readers' preferred personality types and styles, not the writers'. Writing coaches shouldn't sponsor their own

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## Voice Mail

or writers' idiosyncrasies.

For example, if you're a thinking-type writer who puts details in a logical order, your document may not get read by sensing/feeling-type readers. If you're a sensing/feeling-type writer who shows concern for people, thinking-type readers may think you're soft.

If a document is going to people of different types, the writer should first take care of the readers who are "doers," by providing a summary of points and conclusions. Headlines can provide quick access for doers as well as an outline for analytical readers.

Because each of us is all of the types to some degree, writers should try to meet the needs of all types in their writing, emphasizing the primary and secondary styles of the specific audience.

Remember: Write right for the readers, or you won't be read.

— **Glen R. Shull**  
*Marathon Oil  
Findlay, Ohio*

## SMEs as Trainers

In the article "Ask an Expert" (July 1993), the authors, Steve Trautman and Kate Klein, make some good points about developing subject matter experts to be technical trainers. But the article assumes that SMEs view training as a sideline at which, with "some communication skills and a little coaching," they can become effective.

Trautman and Klein fail to see that SMEs can be much more than occasional trainers. High-tech industries have known for years that to provide the necessary training for advanced technologies, it is essential to develop trainers within those technologies who typically aren't part of the human resources department, such as engineering-services trainers. As SMEs, they provide the technical and training expertise necessary for engineering to advance, by training field-service engineers and technical-support people.

Through our involvement with the American Society for Training and Development and our reading, we've found that engineering-services trainers are an invisible breed. Many high-tech industries have them, but no one

sees them. Very few of ASTD's programs address engineering training, maybe because few engineering-services trainers are ASTD members. Could it be that they see little benefit in joining?

Instead of continuing to think of SME trainers as people with minimal training skills who can help out in a pinch, maybe it's time to focus on improving the SME trainers already out there so they can achieve the respect as professional trainers that they deserve.

— **Pamela B. Matt**  
**Eric R. Howell**  
*Health Images  
Atlanta, Georgia*

## Credit Where Credit Is Due

I was concerned when I read the piece, "Enhance Your Sense of Self-Mirth," by Terry Braverman ("In Practice," July 1993). It seems that there is a great deal of C.W. Metcalf in the article in almost direct quotes, but no credit is given for the ideas or material. The phrases may be common knowledge, but, to date, I've heard them only in Metcalf's work.

Our in-house program, *Stress Busters*, uses Metcalf's video, "Humor, Risk, and Change" as a keystone; he is credited. And we've found humor to be a powerful tool for reducing stress and increasing creativity.

— **James L. Ramsey**  
*Padi Human Resources  
Santa Ana, California*

## Twenty-Five Years of Research

My colleagues and I read with interest the article, "When Discounting Gets in the Way," by W. Timothy Weaver (July 1993). Weaver is a friend of my firm, Synectics, and of the firm's founder, George Prince.

Though we feel this wasn't the intent, readers might assume that several concepts mentioned in the article were developed by the author—such as the discount/revenge cycle, the discounting behaviors listed, the role of facilitator in averting discounting behaviors, the video-

taped exercise, and building on the positive aspects of ideas.

Those concepts as they are described in the article are incorporated into the Synectics body of knowledge, which has been accumulated through years of research.

We will be happy to provide copies of the original published material, "Synectics: Twenty-Five Years of Research Into Creativity and Group Process," written by Prince and published in 1982. We can be reached at 617/868-6530.

— **Terry K. Gilliam**

*Synectics, 20 University Road  
Cambridge, MA 02138*

## Where There's Smoke, There's Fire

If I'd seen the cover of your April 1993 issue, I probably wouldn't have subscribed in July.

Regarding the letter in "Voice Mail" (August 1993) from Thomas Compo complimenting the magazine on the



depiction of a tobacco smoker on the cover, why should we promote "understanding, respect, and tolerance" for 50 million Americans who aggravate, impose upon, and imperil the health and lives of nonsmokers?

The facts are plain and simple: Smoking kills. How can anyone defend that type of "diversity?" Maybe we should start accommodating people who drive under the influence of alcohol. They're certainly a diverse group.

And shame on T&D for allowing the inclusion of a smoker on the cover. As a professional publication, you have a social responsibility to readers. Indeed, a disappointment.

— **Denise Larkin**  
*affiliation withheld*

**Editor's note:** The depiction of a pipe smoker on our April 1993 cover is

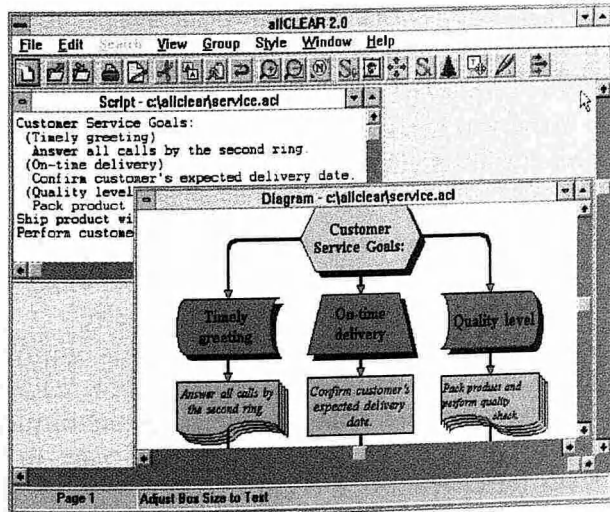
not related to the use of tobacco, nor do we consider smoking an issue of diversity. The man with the pipe represents the "old school," in less diverse workplaces of the past. The pipe is a symbol of outmoded views, not an endorsement of smoking.

### Correction

Michael Esposito's address was printed incorrectly in T&D's September issue. Esposito is an attorney with ADT Security Systems at 300 Interpace Parkway, Parsippany, NJ 07054. Esposito wrote "Making Reasonable Accommodations Under ADA" in September's "In Practice" section. T&D regrets the error.

"Voice Mail" is compiled and edited by **Haidee Allerton**. "Voice Mail" welcomes your views. Send your letters and comments to "Voice Mail," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043; fax them to Allerton at 703/683-9203; or call them in on the "Voice Mail" line, 703/683-9590.

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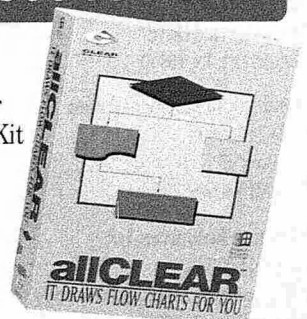
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