

TRANSCRIPT

PODCAST #9: MAKE NOTE WRITING A PART OF YOUR BUSINESS BUILDING STRATEGY

VOICE-OVER: Here is this week's Raising The Bar podcast for Business To Business Magazine with Business Development Coach Robin Hensley.

ROBIN: Technology may be changing the world but the world still runs on relationships. One very effective way to keep your own world of business relationships running is by keeping in touch through the simple act of writing a note.

Hello. I'm Robin Hensley and this week's edition of your Raising The Bar podcast will tackle the art of note writing and how you can use a note writing strategy to further advance your goals.

Note writing has been an important part of success throughout history. When reviewing the achievers of the past, isn't the secret to who they really were often contained in the notes they wrote? The fact that these notes still exist today, that they were saved tells us how important notes can be.

If you are skeptical about how writing a note can make an impact in today's ultra-high speed business world, then listen to what Florence Isaacs says about it in her wonderful little book, "Business Notes: Writing Personal Notes That Build Professional Relationships". Isaacs tells us that, while exploring innovative applications for notes, she found some surprising correlations between note writing and success. It seems that the more impressive the job titles and the more successful the rainmakers, the more likely those individuals were to value and utilize note writing as a means for wooing new clients, cultivating customer loyalty and motivating employees. She found that notes helped build and maintain a web of relationships both inside and outside the person's organization. A remarkable return on investment, wouldn't you say?

As usual, I can hear your objections. There's the time factor, of course. That's a given. But your real objection? Is it that the whole idea of writing anything is more frightening than how much time it will take? Yeah, I thought so. German writer Thomas Mann perfectly captured the essence of why you don't need to worry about that. He said, "A writer is a person for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people." Since it is more likely that you are the "other people" he talks about, then writing should come a lot easier for you. And, you have an added advantage. There are any number of books you can use to help you craft just the right message. One caveat, though. While it is tempting to copy the wording of messages you will find in these

books, your message must suit the situation and the relationship. A canned message defeats the purpose of note writing and may in fact have the opposite effect. At the same time, a short, plain-language canned message in the form of a hand-written note that is sent along with your company brochure can produce surprising results. Florence Isaacs tells the story of a business owner who received a substantial and completely unexpected first-time order for his fairly common product from a customer he did not know. Curious about how he got the business, he asked, “What made you choose us?” The customer replied that when he called and asked for information, everyone else just sent a brochure but this company sent a brochure *and* a hand-written note. The words that made the sale? The note simply said, “Dear So and So, Many thanks for your inquiry. I’m sure we can meet your needs. Sincerely, X”. Closing with “sincerely” might be considered a cliché, but in this case the sentiment *is* authentically sincere.

Why did such a modest effort produce such rewarding results? Perhaps it is for the same reason there is such a profound interest in the manners and formalities of the 19th century novel right now. In an age where everything changes at light speed, the personal touch is so rare that it stands out.

“But Robin, email is so much quicker and easier than taking the time to write something out by hand. Plus, I have to keep paper and stamps and get the notes in the mail. Why isn’t email a good option?” The answer is two-fold. First, a hand-written note slows the whirl of business down long enough for you to say that this issue, this meeting, this event, this interview, this sale is important and that this client, customer, interviewer or acquaintance, the recipient of this note, is important. Second, a hand-written note is tangible. Email is ephemeral. It comes in, is read and then disappears back into the ethers. Hand-written notes can be savored and revisited. They may even be posted for others to see. I know of a real estate closing attorney that keeps a basket of thank-you notes she has received on a table outside her conference room where they can be easily seen as her clients pass by. This casual display sets an expectation that the parties involved are about to have a very good experience.

Are you convinced yet that note writing is worth your time? While you think that over, let’s turn our attention to the circumstances that might lend themselves to a note and then how to approach note-writing so it will become easy or at least easier to craft your message.

Someone you have worked with wins an award, you spot an article that would be of interest to a client, perhaps it’s a customer that you haven’t heard from in quite some time. These are just a few examples of events that might trigger a note. But what do you say? The secret to good note writing is finding your focus. Florence Isaacs suggests that there are five steps to focusing your efforts.

1. Who are you writing to? The language and even the stationery you will use depend on the person you are writing. Who is this person and what is his or her relationship to you? What is the event or occasion this note is meant to recognize?
2. How well do you know this person? Writing to someone you just met is often more of a challenge than writing to someone you know well. It also determines whether your note will be more formal or casual in its style.
3. Why are you writing? What is the purpose of your note? Again, your purpose will determine its style and content.
4. How do you feel about the person or event that is at the heart of the note? Your feelings are important. Expressing them well can make your note memorable. And,
5. What do you want to say? Whether it's congratulations, gratitude, sympathy, encouragement, admiration or something else, once you know what you want to express, your message will flow from that. This is the time when you are most vulnerable to copying a message from one of the many note-writing resources available. Again, it is your voice and your personality that are important in honestly conveying your message.

Isaacs suggests that there are five devices you can use in crafting your message. Consider using one or more of these in your note.

1. Make your message specific. Include details that tie the reader back to the event or situation wherever you can. For example, if you are thanking someone for his help, then say what that help was. Instead of a generic, "Thank you for your help", say "Thank you for your help today at the meeting. Your participation made it a remarkable experience for everyone."
2. Mention the person's hobbies and interests. You may be saying, "What if I don't know the person well enough to be familiar with their hobbies and interests?" Start by paying attention to clues the other person may give you by noticing what he has in his office like books on sports or desktop items that may give you a hint. Notice what information you may pick up in casual conversation so that you can, when writing your note, mention her passion for gardening or spy thrillers. For example, if you are confirming that person's participation in a conference, you might say, "The conference is set for September 12th. See you there. P.S. Hope the nine-hour flight gives you plenty of time to catch up on that new thriller you've been itching to read."
3. Send clippings. I love this suggestion. It has so many possibilities and adds an extra dimension to the tangible benefits of the note itself. Some obvious clippings include those on interests you know the person has like an article on wines with a note that references that. But what if you tore out of the local paper an announcement that your client just got a promotion and sent it along to her with a note across the page that

- says, “I know you will be running the place soon.” How much more impact that message has. You’ll find more ideas like that in Isaacs’ book.
4. Use quotes and statistics. You don’t have to rely solely on your own abilities to turn a phrase. Others may have captured the essence of what you want to say better than you could. You still get credit for including their brilliance in your message, however. Google the word “quotations” and you will find dozens of quotation sites. Simply enter a topic you want to search and choose the one that best fits your needs. For example, your congratulatory note to a colleague on his new career could lead with a quote about fortune favoring the bold. And finally,
 5. Consider all-purpose lines. Your notes need not always be original works of literary art. Sometimes a simple, “Thinking of you”, or “Wishing you the best of everything” will communicate your feelings better than more words could. Add enthusiasm by starting a sentence with “How” as in “How thoughtful of you”, or “How generous you are”. The word “what” is also a great starter as in “What great news” or “What a great job you did on that brief.”

No matter what the purpose of your note, pay attention to the details.

- Make sure your notes use proper grammar, are neat and every word is correctly spelled. Notes with words crossed through look careless and rushed.
- Write conversationally, avoiding stiff or stilted language that may appear insincere or disingenuous.
- Use humor sparingly and carefully. What’s funny to you may not be so to the person receiving your note. And lastly,
- Avoid using jargon, words or terms that may mean something to you but nothing to your reader.

One closing thought on note writing. Your schedule may be jammed. Your time may be limited but if you don’t take enough time, your notes will say that you are just writing the note to serve your own purposes; that the other person is not the center of your attention, that serving yourself if what really matters. If you can’t or won’t take the time to do it right, then don’t do it at all.

Well, that’s our program for today. If you want more on note-writing with sample texts for many common business situations, pick up a copy of Florence Isaacs’ terrific little book, “Business Notes: Writing Personal Notes That Build Professional Relationships.”

Until next time, I’m Robin Hensley, encouraging you to make note-writing a part of your business building strategy.



VOICE-OVER: You have been listening to a Raising The Bar program on note writing with Business Development Coach Robin Hensley. For a full transcript of this program, stop by the Business To Business Magazine website at btobmagazine.com or raisingthebar.com.

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