



The 3 steps for writing persuasive internal emails

It starts with tapping the reader's WIIFM.

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Generative AI may help you automate draft copy, edit what you've written or tweak the language to the personas you ask it to, but there's still no one who understands internal stakeholders like communicators (for the time being).

The ability to write persuasively still falls squarely on your judgment, discretion and knowledge of the cultural nuances that help your workforce engage and thrive.

Earlier this year, writing coach and author Jack E. Appleman joined Ragan to explain his three steps of persuasive writing.

Here's what we learned:

1. Tap the reader's 'What's in it for Me?' (WIIFM)

An evergreen acronym among journalists, WIIFM prompts you to think about everything you write through an audience-first lens.

Appleman began with an example of sending an internal email to convince a team to learn a new course-booking system. The email might begin:

We've introduced a new course-booking system. An online training module is now available.

"The average employee says, 'Forget about it, leave me alone. I'm not learning any new system, I have no time,'" he said. "Why? Because you've given the average employee no time to learn it."

Regrouping from an audience and goal-minded approach, however, allows you to pull out the team member WIIFMs: to save time and simplify the course-booking process.

Knowing that, you could revise the opening to read:

"To save you time and simplify the process for booking courses, we've introduced a new system. An online module is now available."

2. Show, don't tell

When driving down the highway and seeing a billboard that reads, "Best Ice Cream in Ohio!" Appleman is skeptical because it's just saying so.

He offered another example showing how the concept of 'show, don't tell' applies to internal comms by asking if the following message shows that input is welcome:

In preparation for the YX integration, we're rebranding the Information Security site to benefit users and create a positive impression for the Enterprise Information Security team.

The new site will launch on Sept. 15. Attached is the banner mockup. If you want to offer feedback, please submit by Sept. 1.

Revised to show, not tell, this could read:

We want your insights! In preparation for the YX integration, we're rebranding the Information Security site Sept. 15 to benefit users and create a positive impression for the Enterprise Information Security team.

Your input would be valuable to us, so please see the attached banner mock-up and reply with your suggestions by Sept. 1.

"We're leading with 'we want your insights,'" Appleman said, "and then we reiterate it by saying 'your input would be valuable' to show the employees that their input is welcome."

3. Start persuading in the subject line

Let's face it—readers are impatient. Take your first opportunity to grab their attention in the subject line.

If your company is offering a free meditation app to employees, an ordinary subject line could read:

Free XD meditation app available

"A better way to do it," Appleman said, "is to start persuading":

Stay calm and focus with the XD meditation app