The Credit Professional

April 2014 **Volume 23**

Contents

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Take the Fear Out of Public Speaking

By Linda Bridgeford, CCCE/MPCE

Does the mere thought of giving a talk take you back to grade school days, slouching in your desk and hoping the teacher doesn't see and call on you?

We all have knowledge that we use easily and are comfortable sharing informally with co-workers, family members, friends and fellow volunteers. But give a formal presentation to co-workers? Conduct an education session at a CPI District or International Conference? Present a credit education program at the local library? This is, we think, way beyond our capabilities.

So how do we overcome this irrational but real fear? The key is preparation. As a member of Toastmasters, I have found that my confidence grows as I move through the process of preparing for a speaking engagement.

It is a three-part process. Don't worry. I'll walk you through it. First, you must develop an outline, which you will use as your guide at the podium. Second, you will need to rehearse your speech until you become comfortable with your delivery. And third, you will want to arrive early for your speaking engagement to familiarize yourself with the venue and members of your audience.

Choose a Topic

The first step in developing an outline is to determine a topic. Stay in your comfort zone by choosing something with which you are familiar. If you work in collections, you don't want to talk about new government regulations on home mortgages.

Let me give you an example. You work in the mortgage department of a bank and your boss asks you to do a presentation on reverse mortgages at a local AARP chapter meeting. You feel confident in your knowledge of this subject and say yes. You now have your speech topic—reverse mortgages.

Now, before you take the next step in developing your outline, it is a good idea to learn more about your audience. In our example, you can get this information from the AARP chapter president, when you contact him or her to set a date for your presentation. It would be useful to know the age range of the members; percentage who are homeowners; and the number of widows and widowers. If you ask in what areas of the city the members live, you can probably get an idea of their income level. This information could be useful if income level has a bearing on choosing or not choosing a reverse mortgage.

Knowing something about your audience will help you

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determine the information you want to include in your talk. At the same time, it will increase your comfort zone because you will be able to identify with them. They are no longer a group of strangers but people who are like your customers at the bank, your parents, your grandparents or even like you.

Determine Your Theme

It is now time to determine the theme of your speech. Essentially, the theme states the direction you are going to take with your subject. In our example, your theme could be: “Reverse mortgages are a great choice.” Or “Reverse mortgages are a poor choice.” Or “Reverse mortgages can be the right choice for some but the wrong choice for others.”

You choose the third option. You want to give your audience the pros and cons of reverse mortgages so that they can make their own decision on whether or not a reverse mortgage is a good option for them. You state your theme: Is a reverse mortgage a good option for you?

Work on the Details

A speech has three parts—an opening, a middle and a closing. In preparing a speech, I like to start with the middle part of my outline. This contains the heart of your message. When you have finished organizing it, you will find it is easy to create an attention-getting speech opening and a solid closing statement.

Although you have chosen a speech topic with which you are knowledgeable, it is a good idea to do some additional research on it. You may find something you have overlooked but, equally important, you can find information from reliable, independent sources, such as the FDIC and the FTC, that back up the points you are making. Citing such sources adds credibility to your message.

When citing a source, you do not need to give chapter and verse. You can simply say “the FDIC recommends” or “the FTC warns”. It is easy to find this supporting information online. If you do not have Internet access, your local librarian can help you.

After you finish your research, organize the key points of your speech in a logical manner. Good speech organization is essential if your audience is to follow and understand your message. In our example, you should list each reverse mortgage pro and con. Then, under each pro and con, list the key points you want to make. Be thorough. You don’t want to forget any part of your message.

When creating your outline, give some thought to using stories to illustrate some of your points. You don’t want to overdo this but telling a personal experience story is a good way to keep your audience’s attention or get it back if you sense they are drifting away. A story can also make your speech seem more like a conversation than a lecture. Make a note in your outline (i.e. tell Mr. & Mrs. Jones’ story) as a reminder.

Create a Powerful Opening

When you have finished organizing the body of your speech, you are ready to turn your attention to the opening. You want a very powerful opening that will grab your audience’s attention and spark their interest in hearing what you have to say.

For example, you could raise a startling or thought-provoking question; make a challenging statement; recite a relevant quotation; or tell a story related to your topic. And you need to do this in the first 30 seconds of your speech.

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You might, for example, open your speech with this question: “Have you ever regretted a financial decision you made?” Most of us have, whether the amount of money involved was large or small. You can then proceed to talk about how having all the facts can help them avoid such regrets.

Here is an example of how you could open your reverse mortgage talk by citing a quotation: “Just the facts, ma’am.” That’s what Dragnet’s Sergeant Joe Friday wanted. And that’s what you should want about reverse mortgages. Just the facts. All the facts.

This quote, most likely, will be recognized by the members of your AARP audience. And it tells them that you are going to do just that—give them the facts. No fluff. No sales pitch. Just the facts they need to make the right decision when considering a reverse mortgage.

Take time to write your speech opening. In fact, you probably should write two or three openings. Then rehearse them before family members or friends to determine which is the most powerful in grabbing their attention.

Develop a Solid Closing

Your closing should summarize the main points of your speech and refer back to your opening statement. It should also provide your audience with some further food for thought.

Here are possible closings that refer back to each of the above speech openings:

“If you take the time to measure your situation against these pros and cons of reverse mortgages, you will be in a good position to make a decision you won’t regret.”

or

“Sergeant Joe Friday cracked every case by getting just the facts. And now you have the facts to solve the mystery of whether or not a reverse mortgage is a logical step for you to take.”

Delivering Your Speech

When you have completed your speech outline, you are ready to begin work on delivering your speech. You may be thinking, “Wait. Don’t I have to write my speech first?”

No, you don’t. Reading a written speech places a barrier between you and your audience. When your eyes are focused downward, you lose eye contact with your audience and you also risk losing your audience. Most of us are not like actors, who have the skill to put emotion into the words they are reading from a script. Instead, our voice can easily become a monotone as we read page after page, which may result in our audience’s attention drifting away.

When we talk with people in everyday conversation, we are accustomed to looking them in the eye. We can sense when they are getting bored or when they don’t understand what we are trying to explain. And we instinctively adjust our conversation to retrieve their attention or address their puzzlement. By relying on our speech outline, we can use these same conversational skills when giving a speech

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and build a rapport with the audience.

Your speech outline will be your guide when you deliver your presentation and it will help you stay on track. Place the outline on the podium in front of you, so that you can easily glance at it. Print it in a typeface size that is large enough for you to read easily at arm's length. You may want to put your key points in boldface or highlight a note to remind yourself of a related story you want to tell or a pertinent example you want to share.

Preparing Your Delivery

You don't have to write your speech but you do need to devote time to thinking about how to say what you want to convey. It is important to select the right words and sentence structure to communicate your ideas clearly and accurately.

In general, you want to use a conversational style. Avoid jargon and words that would not be easily understood in everyday conversations. But do use vivid words that strike up images in your listeners' minds. Here's an example from a talk on reverse mortgages: "When comparison shopping for a reverse mortgage, look for those that provide insurance and other protections for you."

In this example, "comparison shopping" is a vivid word that brings up images of looking at and considering various options before making a decision. And "provide insurance and other protections for you" brings up images of being safe and secure.

Rehearse Your Speech

Speech rehearsal is a two-part process. First, you must focus on the information you want to deliver. Second, you must practice your delivery. Initially, you will want to work alone, in privacy.

Stand up, hold your outline and begin giving your speech. If you find you are skipping points you want to make, spell them out in your outline to jog your memory while you are speaking. Practice your delivery until you feel confident that you are covering the points you want to make.

It is also important that you time your speech. If it is too long for the time allotted to you, then you may need to shorten it. If you find you are only using half the time allotted, you may want to add some additional material or include some visual aids.

When you are comfortable with your speech content, give your speech again but direct your focus on vocal variety. You want to develop a lively, exciting voice that will attract and hold your listeners' attention. Your speaking voice should be pleasant, natural, forceful, expressive and easily heard. You also want to use volume, pitch, rate and appropriate pauses to add meaning and interest to your message.

When you are comfortable with your content and your vocal delivery, turn your attention to your body language. Stance, gestures, body movements, facial expressions and eye contact help to clarify the meaning of your words and emphasize what you feel is most important in your presentation. It is best to practice this in front of a mirror. You want to make certain that your movements, gestures and facial expressions all appear natural and spontaneous.

The final practice step is to deliver your speech in front of a live audience. Ask family members, a couple of friends or some co-workers to be your audience. This will help you to be more comfortable at the podium.

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Using Visual Aids

Visual aids can be a valuable tool for a speaker. The most popular ones used today are computer-based, although flip charts, overhead transparencies, whiteboards, LCD panels, handouts and props can also be effective. If you plan to use visuals, either bring whatever equipment you need with you or make certain your host will have it available for your use. Arrive early to set up the equipment and make certain it is working properly.

The benefits of visual aids are:

- They increase audience understanding. Ours is a visual age. Most people learn through their eyes, not their ears.
- They save time. Information presented visually is received faster than a verbal message.
- They enhance attention. People remember an average of 10 percent of a spoken word a week after it is presented, while they remember two-thirds of what they both see and hear.
- They promote attentiveness. People think much faster than you speak, so their minds tend to wander during a speech. Visual aids keep them focused by adding variety and interest to your speech.
- They help control nervousness. Displaying your visual aid gives you some physical activity that lets your body process nervous energy without distracting the audience.

Deciding on what to use for visual aids depends on several factors: the information you wish to convey; the size of the audience; the meeting room; the equipment available to you; the time available to prepare visuals; and the amount of money you can afford to spend.

If you are using visuals, make sure they are visible. A good rule of thumb for print is one-half-inch for every 10 feet between the visual and the back row of the audience. Make sure they are high enough so all can see and avoid standing in front of them. Also, keep your visuals simple.

Other Options to Consider

If you are having qualms about writing a speech, there are also some professionally created education programs that have already done much of the above preparation work for you. These include the "Money Smart" program from the FDIC; "NetSmartz" from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children; and "Take Charge of Your Life" from the Credit Education Resources Foundation. Another used and recommended by CPI First Vice President Rhonda McKinney, MPCE/CSM, is "Practical Money Skills for Life".

Keep in mind that you will need to take time to familiarize yourself with the information in whichever program you choose to use. You also may want to reinforce the points made by including some examples from your own experience. Make note of these in the margins of the outline or script you will be using, so that you don't overlook them. Using a personal experience can help drive a point home to your audience.

And, of course, you will need to practice your delivery and your use of the program's visual aids.

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You Are the Guest

As a guest speaker, you should feel comfortable asking your host to provide you with items you need for your presentation. These include a podium (it can be a tabletop version); a microphone, so that you don't have to shout to be heard; a screen, projector and extension cord; and any other things you need.

Arrange with your host to arrive early. This will give you the opportunity to make certain everything you requested is there; set up any tools or aids you have brought with you; familiarize yourself with your surroundings; and greet audience members as they arrive. This will help you to calm your nerves and feel comfortable.

Now you know how to overcome your fear of giving a speech. So go out there and do it!

The information in this article is based on information from Toastmasters International's Communication and Leadership Program.

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Credit Professionals International

2014 Conference

June 12-14, 2014

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Hosted by CPI District 7&9

Business Education Networking

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(photo courtesy of Albuquerque Convention & Visitors Bureau)

How To Make Differences Less Difficult

By Susan Bross, AFC®

Financial Counselor and Money Coach

With permission to reprint from the Association for Financial Counseling and Planning Education 3rd Quarter 2013 newsletter, The Standard

You know that old saying, "Opposites attract"? That can be annoyingly true when it comes to couples and money styles. I've come to expect that when a couple comes to see me that they have different, if not diametrically opposed, money styles. This makes for interesting conversation but can be challenging in the long-term, unless there is a method in place to resolve the differences. Some of the various solutions that I've seen include:

1. One person handles the money and the other either gets an "allowance" or spends without consciousness of the impact until a comment is made.
2. The couple splits the bills and each doesn't really know what the other is spending.
3. There is an amount of money that each puts into the joint account and any additional amounts are put in as needed.
4. The bills are split 50/50.
5. Each pays their own bills, and then there is reconciliation at some point in the month or quarter.
6. There is a template of agreements in place based on an overview of the joint expenses and each contributes a pro rata share of the joint expenses on a monthly or per paycheck basis.

The first solution that I mentioned above can work well if there are agreements in place about the expectations for the non-bill-paying spouse/partner as to spending limits and limits are based on realistic numbers for all the items that this money is to cover. It can misfire when the expectations are unrealistic and inflexible.

The second option can work if the bills are equitable and the couple has a habit of meeting to check on the reasonableness of the arrangement. It can stop working when there isn't transparency and one partner starts to build a resentment that the other may have more discretionary money to spend.

The third option can work when it is based on a thorough

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overview of all the joint expenses, monthly and irregular, and agreement on which expenses are considered joint.

The fourth option can be quite fair for couples when they make approximately the same amount of money. It becomes less tenable when there are differences in the income: one partner is paying more of the take-home pay to joint expenses than the other.

The fifth option can work well if the reconciliations are regular and there's an agreement in place about not only which expenses are joint, but also how much either person can spend on an unplanned expense without getting the agreement of the other. Otherwise, the reconciliations can feel like impending doom and a partner can feel blindsided.

The sixth option is my favorite, and one that I work out with my clients. When there are agreements in place about how the money is to work and be spent, and each partner behaves with the agreements in mind, then their money styles don't cause road bumps because an agreed-to template is set.

Making an Agreement

The kind of agreements that I'm talking about can be small and large. For instance, when there is a style difference about gift giving, there may need to be an agreement in place about the dollar amounts that both agree to spend on gifts for relatives. That may seem like a small agreement, but can save disagreements all year if that particular style difference is in place. The more common agreements that I suggest are:

- Who pays the bills?
- When and how are bills to be paid (how close to the due date)?
- When are the couple's financial meetings (a routine day and time) where the purpose is to review the spending and plan for the next month in a no blame/ shame/judgment zone?
- How much can either spend on an unplanned item before getting the agreement of the other?
- What amount of money does each have to spend monthly that they don't have to account for?
- How much should be set aside for annual vacations, home improvements, and things like hobbies or other significant discretionary spending?

These are the more common agreements, but there can be any number of them. A guideline is that if you're tripping over the same thing in your money lives, it is time to find an agreement that deals with that issue. But what if you can't agree on something? Do you leave it and come back to it? Do you leave it unresolved? Do you do what you want to do and ignore the repercussions?

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Many of the couples that I work with have unresolved issues that have arisen from money style differences that have surfaced over and over again. I've found it's better to be happy than right, so just assume both individuals are coming from places that they believe to be "right."

To make sure that both people are coming from the same place, have one partner tell the other what position they hear being taken, and the other partner tells them what they heard. It isn't uncommon for two people to be accidentally in disagreement because of a communications glitch.

Another tool is to have your clients take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. On one side one person writes their position, and on the other side the other person writes down their position. Take a pen or pencil and put it in the center of the line and ask the couple, "If you were to describe the position in the middle, what would it be?"

Once you have one answer, see if you can't keep thinking of other positions that would be between the two positions. When your clients have at least three, see if there isn't one of them that the two can agree on. The process of making the positions visible and talking about middle positions takes the energy out of style differences and engages both in the solution. I believe that every couple has the opportunity to have a strong money partnership. You may always have differences, but they don't need to be difficulties.

Susan Bross, AFC®, has been a money counselor and coach since 1992. She is a resident of Eugene Oregon with her rescue dog Pepper, and the author of "7 Keys to Take Charge, Take Action and Live a Struggle Free Money Life", available to download for free at www.brossmoney.com.

Where To Find All the Answers

By Cindy Westenhofer, MPCE

When I was young and just starting out in the "real world", I had a job in the credit department of a large high-end department store. I worked in several different areas, as needed. One of the departments I worked in was bill adjustments. As you can imagine, you need to know a lot about finding information to fix misapplied payments and charges. One day I went to Ruby, the department manager, to ask her how to locate some specific information I needed. She told me something I have never forgotten. "To make yourself indispensable, you do not need to know everything. You just need to know where to **FIND** all the answers."

I'm glad I took Ruby's words to heart and made them a guiding rule in my life. It has enabled me to help many people that I otherwise might have turned away with an "I don't know" response.

I'm certain that, as a member of Credit Professionals International, you also get questions from friends, family and acquaintances on credit-related matters that are outside your area of expertise. I work in collections. I'm not likely to have the answers to questions about establishing credit, repairing credit, mortgages, investments, insurance or other credit-related areas. But I do know where to find the answers. I turn to my long list of sources, each an expert in one or more specific areas, which I have created over the years.

Building Your List of Sources

Where do you and I find these sources? Joining professional organizations is one avenue. This is one reason that I am a member of Credit Professionals International (CPI). I've made some very smart friends from all over the globe and I can contact them when I'm searching for an answer.

Another is education. I have taken classes, attended CPI conferences and participated in seminars. Some of what I learn is from the great speakers at the meetings. But, often I learn just as much from talking with the other attendees. I can truly say that, at every conference or seminar I have attended, I have learned something.

Today, we have an immense resource called the internet. We can find out about most anything on the internet. And much of this available information is valid. (I know, it's hard to believe but not everything on the internet is true). Finding that valid information, however, can sometimes be a challenge—like looking for a needle in a haystack.

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I'm going to give you a jumpstart in building your internet resource list by giving you information on websites where you, as a credit professional, will find the valid answers you need. Take time to visit these websites and become familiar with the information they have available.

In addition, if you have found some valuable internet resources, you can share your "finds" with fellow CPI members through the "Bookmark This!" column, which appears in each issue of *The Credit Connection* newsletters. Send the Corporate Office the website address and tell your fellow CPI members why it is a good resource. Here are my "picks" of internet resources for credit professionals.

Credit Professionals International
www.creditprofessionals.org
Sponsored by CPI and the Credit Education Resources Foundation, this site has some good credit education information for the general public but much more is available to CPI members. I am the webmaster but I am not the only author of information for this site. Much of the website material is authored and developed by other CPI members and the CPI corporate office. The current and back issues of this magazine are also available here, for your easy reference.

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
www.fdic.gov
and
http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/mscbi/mscbi.html

We all know about the FDIC but did you know that on this website you can get information regarding: banking, community affairs, consumer financial privacy, loans, mortgages, financial education, literacy, identity theft and fraud.

The Money Smart financial education program is an important part of the FDIC site and has some great credit education information available. It includes instructors' guides that we CPI members can download and use to present Money Smart classes in our communities. Handout materials are also available.

In addition, the site features Money Smart Computer-Based Instruction (CBI), an easy-to-use tool consumers can use to learn more about basic personal financial management. The CBI can complement formal classes by providing learning assignments that users can complete at their own pace.

The CBI features a game-based learning design and separate learning tracks for adults and young adults. The adult learning track features the eleven modules in the instructor-led Money Smart curriculum for adults. The young adult learning track (for ages 13 and older) features the eight modules in the Money Smart for Young Adults curriculum.

Each module can generally be completed within 30 minutes. Successful completion of a module will earn the user a certificate of completion for the module.

Money Smart has tracks that are geared toward youth, adults, and older adults. You can order Money Smart brochures and activity books in both English and Spanish for free.

Federal Trade Commission
www.ftc.gov
http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/
http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/feature-0022-financial-educators

We all recognize this organization's name. However,

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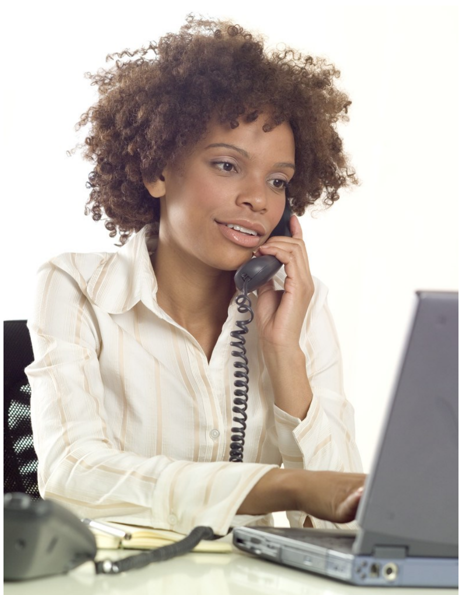
you may not know that, in the consumer section of this website, you can get information on obtaining a free credit report, getting on a "do not call" list, reporting identity theft, and on buying and owning a car. You will also find information on credit and loans, home loans, loan foreclosure prevention, and much more.



This website's consumer section also has information to help you or someone you know avoid being scammed by con-artists who prey on people in the market for a job, an investment, or a business to run in their off-hours or as an encore career.

This website also has a section—Money Matters!—for financial educators. It is a great resource for all of us CPI members to use. All of the consumer information from the FTC is free and in the public domain. That means you can print it, copy it, post it, or link to it for free. Share these resources with students, friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors. Share tips, use your social networking skills, or order free materials to hand out at events or conferences.

US Department of Treasury
www.treasury.gov

I know you know about this one, too, but did you also know that, on this website, you can get current information about housing finance reform, military personnel resource information, information on savings bonds and securities, grants, loans, and financial assistance.

Community Development Financial Institutions Fund—Department of US Treasury
http://www.cdfifund.gov

Through monetary awards and the allocation of tax credits, the CDFI Fund helps promote access to capital and local economic growth in urban and rural low-income communities across the nation. Through its various programs, the CDFI Fund enables locally based organizations to further goals such as: economic development (job creation, business development, and commercial real estate development); affordable housing (housing development and homeownership); and community development financial services (provision of basic banking services to underserved communities and financial literacy training).

Financial Literacy & Education Commission
http://www.mymoney.gov

MyMoney.gov is the U.S. government's website dedicated to teaching all Americans the basics about financial education. Whether you are buying a home, balancing your checkbook, or investing in your 401(k), the resources on MyMoney.gov can help you maximize your financial decisions. Throughout the site, you will find important information from more than 20 federal agencies and bureaus designed to help you make smart financial choices.

My Money Five
http://www.mymoney.gov/mymoneyfive/Pages/mymoneyfive.aspx

Making the most of your money starts with five building blocks for managing and growing your money—The My Money Five. Keep these five principles in mind as you make day-to-day decisions and plan your financial goals.
The Five Principles are:

EARN—Make the most of what you earn by understanding your pay and benefits.

SAVE & INVEST—It is never too early to start saving for future goals such as a house or retirement, even by saving small amounts.

PROTECT—Taking precautions about your financial situation, accumulate emergency savings, and have the right insurance.

SPEND—Be sure you are getting a good value, especially with big purchases, by shopping around and comparing prices and products.

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BORROW—Borrowing money can enable some essential purchases and builds credit, but interest costs can be expensive. And, if you borrow too much, you may have a large debt to be repaid.

Financial Literacy & Education Commission
http://answers.usa.gov

One part of this site offers **Money Math: Lessons for Life.** This is a four-lesson curriculum supplement for middle school math classes, teaching grade 7-9 math concepts using real-life examples from personal finance. The 86-page book is a teacher's guide with lesson plans, reproducible activity pages, and teaching tips.

Free to teachers, **Money Math: Lessons for Life** was developed by the Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis in accordance with national school mathematics standards. The lessons were tested in Missouri schools and received rave reviews. Teachers need not be experts in personal finance to use Money Math in the classroom; questions and answers are clearly provided in the book.

There are a number of other credit education opportunities on this site as well.

Federal Student Aid—An Office of the US Department of Education
http://studentaid.ed.gov

The office of Federal Student Aid provides publications, fact sheets, online tools, and other resources to help you prepare and pay for college or career school. These resources are grouped by the following topics:

Information on College Preparation and the Federal Student Aid Programs
Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA℠) InformationLoan Information
Consumer Protection

These are a few of the government websites available to you. There are also many other websites that have a lot of good credit and financial information. Here are two:

www.bettermoneyhabits.com is a site that is sponsored by Bank of America in partnership with Khan Academy. It contains some really good videos on budgeting, saving and credit, credit scores, bankruptcy, credit cards, payday loans, credit reports, and more.

http://www.nefe.org is sponsored by The National Endowment for Financial Education. **Financial Workshop Kits** are available on this site and are designed to help you effectively teach money management skills to those you serve in your community. Through this site, you have access to workshops, tools, and other resources that can be used separately or together to empower people to make the best financial decisions for their values and unique circumstances.

The workshop kits are customizable and organized by topic area. They include PowerPoint presentations, scripts, handouts, and other resources you might find helpful. Additionally, they provide answers to frequently asked questions about how to effectively reach your specific audience.

This site is also a one-stop shop for gaining access to NEFE's other consumer-based and practitioner-based programs and resources. They've compiled the most relevant sites and tools and listed them in one place. You can piece together content from various tools to create a customized learning experience for your audience.

In addition, this site gives you links to other helpful online financial education information and resources from several credible sources.

These websites will not give you all the answers to all the questions you may be asked in your role as a credit professional. But they are a good place to start.

About the author:

Cindy Westenhofer, MPCE, has been a member of CPI since 1993. She has worked in the credit industry over 30 years. She has held many offices in CPI including Local & District President, Webmaster, and currently International Second Vice President.

Five Steps To Planning and Executing Successful Meetings

By Mary Horner

If you had to identify, in one word, the reason why the human race has not achieved, and never will achieve, its full potential, that word would be "meetings." — Dave Barry

"A meeting is an event in which minutes are kept and hours are lost."
Anonymous

If an invitation to a meeting makes you want to schedule an appointment for that root canal you've been putting off, you are not alone. A few months ago, I heard a story about a department whose staff members passed the time during meetings by playing a game called Meeting Bingo. The division manager who called the meetings had several pet phrases he would use during every meeting, and as soon as he had used all of them on the predetermined "list," the first employee who could work the word "Bingo" into the conversation would win.

I sat in a more recent meeting that was scheduled to last approximately two hours. The manager who had invited me promised it would be devoted to one important topic, and he finally got around to the topic when we had less than 15 minutes left of the allotted time. When the meeting ran long, I had to reschedule my afternoon plans and was frustrated because he wasted my time covering a large amount of information that didn't concern me.

Millions of meetings are held every day in America, and those that deteriorate into office games, time wasters and silly competitions are about as effective as trying to learn to swim by reading a book. They don't work. Many employers consider unfocused meetings as one of the biggest workplace time wasters and the primary reason for decreased productivity and morale. Much of this wasted time is due to poor planning, no clear-cut goals and bad communication.

Regardless of whether you are meeting with staff, clients

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or other members of your professional or social community, learning to be a skilled meeting facilitator can increase productivity in the workplace. Although we may never know exactly how much time is wasted due to unproductive meetings, following these steps can ensure meetings are an efficient use of time and energy.

Do We Really Need a Meeting?

Ask yourself this important question first to determine if a meeting is necessary. If the information can be disseminated through an office email just as effectively, then send the email and schedule a follow-up meeting if you need to explain your ideas or answer questions. If your office has an online discussion board, invite comments from everyone who would normally attend the meeting. Let colleagues help each other understand the ideas you present by letting the discussion play out in a way that keeps everyone empowered, so the "attendees" can help each other the same way they would in a traditional meeting.

When you receive comments, you know everyone has read it and understands the information, or where you need to clarify and explain your points. This format may also allow some of the more introverted members of the team to open up and share. A change in meeting format may bring out new stars on your team by bringing to light ideas that may not have been shared in a traditional face-to-face meeting.

If, however, you need a formal meeting, follow these five steps to improve your meeting:

1. Give Meetings Value

Determine the issues or information the attendees should expect to learn or gain from your meeting with a take-away statement. In other words, what will they be able to "take away" from the table? Putting your takeaway statement in writing or having clear goals, helps focus the information and keeps you on track. Ask yourself the reason for scheduling this meeting, or what participants will learn or understand from attending your meeting.

Example: "Everyone will have a working understanding of the new accounting system."

Example: "Second quarter market analysis review and fourth quarter market forecast will help set sales goals for the following year."

Example: "Develop input for new employee manual."

Example: "Attendees are expected to learn the new system of credit ratings."

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Giving your meeting value and purpose will ensure that attendees do not waste time on issues or projects that do not impact them. And they will thank you for respecting their time.

2. Create an agenda

More than half the meetings in America do not have prepared agendas. A meeting I called with a former department chair said mine was the most organized meeting he had ever attended. One of the main reasons this meeting was so organized was that I had several problems to solve, so I didn't want to get off track because I was desperate to get answers in a short amount of time. The meeting was a necessary means to an end, not a meeting for the sake of having a meeting (and possibly donuts). I had clear-cut goals spelled out in the agenda, which I followed to ensure I focused on the problems I needed to solve.

If you aren't familiar with agenda formats, you can find free sample templates online.

Agendas can help you achieve two goals. 1) Serve as an outline or guideline, and 2) Create notes to summarize the meeting. Both are solid reasons to develop agendas.

First, using an agenda as an outline to stay on track keeps the meeting focus clear. The second reason is that by getting in the habit of taking a few minutes after each meeting to create a summary, you can see immediately what you accomplished and what you didn't. Teaching has helped me look at every goal-oriented communication experience in a new light. I now understand the value of measuring results or determining whether or not objectives were met. With a little practice, meeting facilitators can do the same by comparing the agenda or goal statement with final outcomes and/or feedback.

3. Speak up/participate

To make the most of your next meeting, use effective communication skills to maintain a balance between accepting new ideas while staying on topic. Encouraging participation by brainstorming and discussion isn't always easy while trying to adhere to a strict agenda. This means preventing any one person from being allowed to dominate the conversation, harass or ridicule attendees, or guide the conversation off the designated path.

As a facilitator, be prepared to voice a dissenting viewpoint in order to protect the meeting from falling into the Groupthink trap. Groupthink occurs when some members go along with anything the managers or other popular members of the group say or suggest, because they don't want to upset the apple cart or be seen as anything but a team player. By welcoming ideas from everyone, the group is most likely to solve problems and meet the goals of the group.

Encourage participation from everyone. Do not assume that silence implies agreement. While you don't want to put anyone on the spot who may be embarrassed by not having an answer to a particular problem, you can word the questions or comments in such a way to help bring out new perspectives. By asking "Sarah" if the marketing department would have a different take on that problem, she might be less likely to be embarrassed if she

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doesn't have something important to add. But she may have a new perspective that would not have been shared unless called upon.

In addition, let attendees know when an idea or project has had enough discussion, and it is time to make a decision and move on. When the discussion has played out, summarize the information and move on. Tell the group, for instance, that there are two feasible options on the table, and given the current corporate budget or support, "Option A" makes more sense. When a manager takes responsibility for moving the group toward its goal, everyone in attendance feels the sense of accomplishment.

4. Criticism/Critique

Criticizing an idea, proposal or suggestion takes little time or thought, but can severely limit the group's success and cohesiveness. When critiquing the ideas of others, keep the critique about the work, not about the people. Progress stalls when someone says, "Jim's ideas never work. Don't forget the software problem he caused last year." Use a name when you have positive feedback, use the idea when you have a negative comment.

One popular fallacy of reasoning is called the "Appeal to Tradition." This reasoning occurs when someone suggests a new perspective or process and is met with the following response: "We tried that back in 2007 and it didn't work, so we shouldn't even consider it." Before responding to that type of comment in a negative manner, wait several seconds to think it through. There may be new variables in the equation that weren't in place when you first tried it. When a meeting facilitator is too shortsighted to see the value in new ideas, which in turn, encourage other new ideas that may bring more profit to the company, then no one will offer new ideas for fear of rejection, ridicule and embarrassment. When negativity is allowed to flow unchecked, others may hold back for fear of being harshly criticized.

When it's essential to rein in ideas or offer a critical response, use the sandwich method of criticism by surrounding each criticism with two positive statements. "I'm impressed by the way you think outside the box, but in this case, we are limited by the number of employees available for the project. Please continue to bring fresh ideas to our meetings because what we're doing now needs some improvement." Let attendees know that no idea is out-of-bounds, because one unusual idea that may not work in this situation could possibly lead to another idea that will.

Blocking the ideas of others, remaining silent, or taking the group off its task with unrelated topics will have a negative effect on your group. Impeding progress may cause others to wonder if you don't have anything better to do than waste time.

5. Adjourn on Time

Setting an end time forces meeting facilitators to cover topics as efficiently as possible, and stop when time is up. If the entire agenda isn't covered, carry over nonessential agenda items to a future date.

Attendees will be thankful that they didn't have to change their plans because the meeting that

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was supposed to end at 12:30 didn't end until 1:45 p.m.

To Summarize

Almost everyone has been to meetings where attendees ask themselves silently, "Why am I here?" "What is he or she talking about?" and "Did we really need to have a meeting about this?" Effective communication skills can help ensure meetings are productive. Prevent attendees from daydreaming, texting or playing silly games by having an agenda, a goal, and using effective communication to encourage participation. By following these guidelines, everyone can benefit from your next meeting.

Ten Quick Tips for Meeting Leaders:

1. Prepare an agenda
2. Invite only necessary participants
3. Make everyone feel welcome
4. Remain impartial
5. Guide the discussion to stay on topic
6. Recognize everyone who has a comment
7. Clarify questions if necessary
8. Keep the discussion positive
9. Respect everyone's opinion
10. Adjourn on time

Mary Horner is the author of "Strengthen Your Nonfiction Writing." She teaches communications at St. Louis Community College and has written hundreds of articles for magazines, newspapers and newsletters.

New Mortgage Rules You Should Know About

by Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation

New federal rules to protect consumers from risky mortgages and help borrowers better manage a home loan went into effect in January 2014.

Issued by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), the new rules implement provisions of the 2010 Dodd-Frank financial reform law. They address concerns about the mortgage lending process that resulted in some borrowers facing payment problems and home foreclosures in the recent financial crisis. In particular, the new rules are meant to ensure that consumers are not encouraged by a lender or loan broker to take a mortgage that they don't have the ability to repay. Other provisions in the rules will help consumers do a better job of protecting themselves.

"The CFPB's mortgage-related rulemakings will set the stage for the mortgage-lending process in the future," said Jonathan Miller, Deputy Director in the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation's (FDIC) Division of Depositor and Consumer Protection.

Here is a look at the new rules, plus practical tips for mortgage shoppers and borrowers.

Loan Originator Compensation

One rule governs the compensation of loan originators—including loan officers and mortgage brokers—to promote responsible behavior by these professionals.

"The compensation rule is intended to prevent loan originators from steering consumers toward unnecessarily expensive loans because the originator would get paid more for doing so," said Glenn Gimble, a Senior Policy Analyst at the FDIC. "For instance, the lender cannot pay a broker or loan officer more just because the loan has a high interest rate or the consumer agrees to buy a product, such as title insurance, from one of the lender's affiliates."

Financial institutions and other organizations also will be required to ensure that their

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loan originators are licensed or registered under existing state or federal laws. For loan originators who are not required to be licensed and are *not* licensed, employers must obtain criminal background checks from a law enforcement agency, get a credit report, and check for other information about possible misconduct (such as civil lawsuits involving fraud). Employers also must provide periodic training to such loan originators to make sure they understand the legal protections and requirements that apply to loans they originate.

The loan originator compensation rule also includes a prohibition on financing credit insurance in connection with any residential mortgage loan, as well as a requirement that the loan originator's name and unique "identifier" be provided on certain loan documents.

"The new rule will help ensure that consumers are not steered into costly or inappropriate mortgage loans, but consumers also have a responsibility to learn about the different kinds of mortgages and shop around," said Sherry Betancourt, a Senior Attorney in the FDIC's Legal Division. "Comparing the mortgages offered by various lenders and asking questions can help you get the best deal for your needs."

Escrow Requirements

An "escrow" account is commonly set up when a borrower gets a mortgage. And it is funded by money from the loan payment. The mortgage servicer—the company that collects a borrower's mortgage payments and otherwise helps manage a lender's home loans—will use money in the account to pay for items such as real estate taxes and homeowner (hazard) insurance.

Under the CFPB rule, certain lenders must establish an escrow account for a borrower of a "higher-priced mortgage loan" (one that exceeds a specified Annual Percentage Rate or "APR") for at least five years, up from one year under previous regulations.

"The new escrow rule is intended to make sure that borrowers can meet their ongoing mortgage-related expenses, including taxes and insurance," said Gimble.

The rule applies to higher-priced mortgage loans secured by a first lien on a principal dwelling (i.e., these are not home-equity type "second" mortgages or loans secured by vacation or other second homes). After five years, the borrower could request that the escrow account be cancelled under certain circumstances, though most borrowers typically retain escrows for the life of the loan.

"Even if you're not required to use an escrow account, it is almost always a good idea to have one," Gimble said. "For many consumers, there are benefits to knowing that their property taxes, and perhaps also their homeowners' insurance, will be paid for over the course of a year instead of in big annual or semi-annual payments."

Ability to Repay

New underwriting standards have been added that, for most mortgages, generally require lenders to make a "reasonable and good-faith determination" that an applicant has a "reasonable ability to repay the loan." This rule outlines several factors that lenders must

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consider before approving a mortgage, such as the consumer's income or assets, employment, and other ongoing debt obligations such as child-support payments. Loan applicants also will have to supply financial information and lenders will have to verify it.

The new underwriting standards are designed to protect consumers from certain risky loan features that allow borrowers to take out mortgages they cannot afford. These loans include those with payments that start low but go up significantly in the future, perhaps to levels beyond what the borrower can afford. Examples are loans that can have periods when the borrower only pays the interest due or less than the interest due. The latter can result in "negative amortization," where the amount you owe actually increases over time.

"Ask a lender how it will assess your ability to repay, so that you will have an idea of how the lender may evaluate your application, and think carefully about how much debt you can comfortably take on," said Cassandra Duhaney, a Senior Policy Analyst at the FDIC. "Knowing how your ability to repay will be measured may also help you understand what steps you could take to strengthen your application, such as by saving up more money or improving your credit score."

Rules for Mortgage Servicers

The CFPB's mortgage servicing rules are intended, in part, to give borrowers more information from their mortgage servicer, especially if they are having problems making loan payments. Among other things, consumers with adjustable-rate mortgages will receive earlier advance notice of changes in their loan payments when the interest rate changes. And certain loan servicers will be required to provide borrowers who are behind on their payments with a written notice of their options for avoiding foreclosure, if appropriate.

It is important that borrowers watch for communications from their mortgage servicer in order to remain informed about important dates or response deadlines associated with their loan. Also, for borrowers having trouble paying their mortgage, the CFPB provides information at www.consumerfinance.gov/mortgagehelp.

High-Cost Mortgages and Homeownership Counseling

A different rule applies to what are called "high-cost mortgages," which are loans with high "points" and other fees, a high APR, or certain prepayment penalties. (Points are one type of fee paid at closing by the borrower to the mortgage lender. Each point equals one percent of the loan amount.)

Because these loans are typically offered to consumers with relatively low credit scores, lenders tend to view these applicants as riskier candidates for a loan. To protect consumers before they agree to this type of high-cost mortgage, the new rule will require the lender to disclose certain cost information.

Additionally, high-cost mortgages cannot contain certain loan features that are considered abusive, such as prepayment penalties. A borrower also must receive

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homeownership counseling before receiving a high-cost mortgage. Some loans that are not considered to have the same risk of abuse—such as loans originated by a government housing finance agency—are not covered by the rule.

One provision of the new rule that is unrelated to high-cost mortgages will require homeownership counseling for first-time homebuyers who are considering a loan that allows for negative amortization. And the rule mandates that every applicant for a mortgage receive a list of homeownership counseling organizations within three days of applying for a mortgage loan.

"When you are applying for a mortgage loan and your lender provides a list of homeownership counseling organizations, consider this an opportunity to learn about the home-buying process from an informed, objective source. This new disclosure is one of the important consumer protections in the Dodd-Frank Act," Duhaney said. "In fact, home ownership counseling is something that many consumers may want to consider *before* they apply for a mortgage loan or shop for a home."

The CFPB has created a new search tool on its website that makes it easy for consumers to find a housing counseling agency in their local area. It can be accessed at: www.consumerfinance.gov/find-a-housing-counselor/

About the Author

The information in this article was provided by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

Is Certification for You?

By Linda Simbeck, CFE/MPCE/BSACS

I'm often asked, "Why should I become a 'certified' Credit Professional?"

My instant response is, "To validate your expertise in your profession."

You have a lot of knowledge and skill invested in the credit industry but who knows that? What do your customers, employer and others know about your educational background, work expertise, leadership skills and involvement in professional organizations?

The certification designation after your name, on your letterhead and the certificate displayed on your wall tells others that you are not just someone with a job. You are a person who has invested in education; is experienced and knowledgeable in your field; adheres to professional standards; and is committed to your profession.

What is Certification?

Certification is a means of verifying, through a third party, your knowledge, educational background, work experience, published works, speaking engagements and involvement in professional organizations.

There are many types of certification programs but the one that is recognized throughout the credit industry is the one offered by Credit Professionals International (CPI). It is open to both CPI members and non-members.

Why is Certification Important to You?

Certification can help:

- Showcase your expertise
- Open doors to advancement opportunities
- Highlight your accomplishments
- Give you a competitive advantage over job candidates without certification
- Stimulate you to take an active role in your profession
- Encourage you to keep up with continuing education in your career field.

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Who Is Eligible for Certification?

Anyone who works in the credit industry is eligible to apply for certification in the program offered by Credit Professionals International. It includes, but is not limited to, the fields of:

- Collections
- Credit Counseling
- Banking
- Mortgage Industry
- Credit Management

How Does the Certification Program Work?

CPI offers four levels of certification:

- Professional Credit Associate (PCA)
- Professional Credit Specialist (PCS)
- Professional Credit Executive (PCE)
- Master Professional Credit Executive (MPCE)

If you are certified at a lower level, you can apply to upgrade your certification when you meet the criteria for a higher level. All certified professionals must recertify every five years. A small fee is charged for processing each certification.

When you are approved for certification, you will receive a certificate that you should frame and hang in your office. You should also note your certification level (PCA, PCS, PCE, MPCE) with your name on your business and professional correspondence. And be certain to post your certification on your social media pages.

How to Apply for Certification?

To begin the process, visit www.creditprofessionals.org/certification, click on the "read more" button and download or print the application. Also download or print the certification form, which will help you organize your documentation.

Complete your personal information on page one. At this stage, leave the "certification level applied for" section open. After you have completed the rest of the form, you will know which level to select.

The next two pages, dubbed the "personal data form", list seven categories in which you may earn points toward certification.

At first glance, they seem daunting. But don't let that deter you from applying. In the long run, being awarded a certification for which you qualify is well worth the effort. I'll walk you through it.

The first three categories cover work experience and formal education. They are easy to navigate, since the information you need to provide is readily available.

1. **Work Experience**—This section covers employment in the credit industry. For example, working as a receptionist or scheduler in a doctor's office would not qualify toward certification. But handling billing, collections or insurance in that office would. The only things you need to list here are employer(s), job title(s) and the dates employed.
2. **Undergraduate Degrees/ Course Work**—You simply need to list your associate and bachelor's degrees, as well as non-degree undergraduate classes you have taken. You will need to

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attach a copy of your transcript for non-degree classes or a copy of your diploma to verify your degree.

3. **Graduate Degree/Course Work**—Here you should list your master's degree or doctorate, as well as non-degree undergraduate classes you have taken. Don't forget to attach a copy of your transcript for non-degree classes or a copy of your diploma to verify your degree.

Sections four and five of the form cover education courses from providers who may or may not have given you—or kept a record of—your participation. Therefore, it may require more time and effort on your part to gather the proof of your participation. After you receive your certification, be certain to keep a file of information on these types of courses you complete in the future. This will decrease the time you need to devote to submitting an application for re-certification or for an upgrade.

4. **Education Courses Pertinent to Credit and/or Business**—This section covers education courses you completed that were sponsored by professional or trade associations, business organizations, government agencies and voluntary non-profit agencies. This section also pertains to continuing education courses sponsored by non-degree granting institutions, independent seminars and in-house training by an employer. To verify your attendance, you can send a photocopy of the program brochure (or agenda) or a copy of your certificate of completion.
5. **Education Programs and Courses Related to Credit and Conducted by a Credit Association**—This section covers attendance at workshops, seminars and conferences sponsored by CPI or other associations at local, state, district, national or international levels. To verify your participation, you will need to attach the program brochure or a synopsis of each item submitted.

Sections six and seven should be easy for you to complete.

6. **Participation in CPI and Other Credit Associations**—List here elected and/or appointed positions you have held in CPI or in other credit associations.
7. **Instructor/Speaker/Author on credit related topics**—List your speaking engagements on credit-related topics at schools, community groups, in-house education or at a college or university. You will need to attach a program brochure or synopsis for each item submitted. **And/or** list credit-related articles you wrote and had published in a local, regional, national or international publication. You will need to attach a copy of the article(s).

Allow yourself ample time to gather, sort and organize the documentation you need for sections four through seven. If you are missing needed program brochures, agendas or certificates of completion, you will need to contact the organizations involved to obtain them. Your employer may be able to help you, since they often keep a list of each employee's continuing education.

When sorting your documentation, use the application form for sections four through seven as an

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outline guide. After sorting by category, organize your material in chronological order, with the most recent on top. Create a summary sheet for each section.

The separate cover sheets for sections four and five should list: the sponsoring organization; the title or subject of the course or program; the number of hours; and the number of units. (*Example:* section four, category A—You attended a six-hour program, earning 10 units. If you attended two six-hour programs, you would earn 20 units. *Example:* section five, category C—You attended a district workshop, seminar or conference, earning 25 units.)

The cover sheet for section six documentation should list each office held (including the level—local/state/district/international), the year of office and the points earned.

The cover sheet for section seven should list the topic/title of each presentation/training program you conducted; the date of the presentation; the number of hours involved; and the units/points earned. You can earn two units for each hour of instruction, with a maximum of 40 units per year.

The section seven cover sheet should also list the articles you authored, the name of the publication, date of publication, and the number of points earned. You can earn five points for an article in a local/regional publication and ten points for one in a national/international publication.

Now get out your calculator and total up all your points. Then go back to the first page of the application form and check the certification level for which you qualify, based on the number of points you earned.

The second-to-last step is to turn to page 4, read the statement, sign and date.

The final steps are to make certain your documentation is organized according to the application; make a copy of the documentation for your file; write a check or use the PayPal option on the website to pay your fee; and mail the application, required documentation to:

Credit Professionals Int'l.
10726 Manchester Road,
Suite 210
St Louis, MO 63122.

If you have any questions about certification or the application process, please call 314-821-9393 or email: creditpro@creditprofessional.org.

Other Resources:

www.creditprofessionals.org/certification, Professional Credit Certification—The Key to Your Future, and Professional Credit Certification Brochure

Peterson, Deb. What is Professional Certification? Does the Job You Want Require a Professional Certification? About.com Continuing Education

Linda Simbeck, MPCE, CFE, BASCS, has been a member of CPI since 2003, when she attended the International Conference in San Antonio Tx.

In addition to being a Master Professional Credit Executive, Linda is a Certified Fraud Examiner and a Bank Secrecy Act Compliance Specialist.

When Linda retired in 2012, after 27 years of service with the San Antonio Federal Credit Union, she held the position of Vice President, Director of Loss Prevention.

Linda has been married to her best friend and husband, Jim, since 1972. They have one daughter, Linda Ann, and two grandchildren—Morgan, age 5, and Thatcher, age 4—who make their "hearts smile".

Linda believes if you have served someone today, you are successful.

Seven Common Credibility Blind Spots And How They Can Derail Your Image

By Cara Hale Alter

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Beware your credibility blind spots. These bad behaviors are unintentional, yet they can derail your image. What's more, you might be completely unaware of just how irritating and distracting these behaviors are to others.

The good news is that once you identify your blind spots, you can take steps to eliminate them. And in a high-speed, hypercompetitive business world, the time to do that is now.

Today your credentials may get you in the door. Yet to really succeed, you've got to look credible when it matters most: in face-to-face interactions. Whether you're meeting one-on-one or presenting to a packed audience, your credibility is immediately being assessed.

So how can you uncover your credibility blind spots? The surest way is to capture yourself on video in a typical business setting. (Smartphones make that easier than ever.)

While there are numerous behaviors to look for, seven blind spots are most common:

One: Using Speech Fillers

Speech fillers are superfluous sounds or words, like "Um" and "You know." Today, such fillers are pervasive in our culture, including the business world. A smart young technology CEO recently said to his team: "So, I actually sort of passionately believe that we have an opportunity to, uh, you know, sort of really take this platform to a new level. So we just kind of, uh, need to jump in, you know, with full force." He wanted to fire up his people, but his fillers extinguished his passion.

Tip: Embrace the tactical pause. Instead of interjecting fillers, simply pause while your mind searches for the next word.

Two: Making Extraneous Movements

Extraneous movements—such as jiggling your knee, bobbing your head or shifting your weight—weaken your personal power. You might say: "I can't help myself. I just can't be still." The truth is, excessive fidgeting is a self-comforting behavior. Stillness sends a message that you're calm and confident.

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Credit Education Resources
FOUNDATION

Serving CPI members through:

Scholarships for continuing education

Grants to support local association consumer credit education programs

Funds to publish *The Credit Professional* magazine

Recognition of CPI members, via the Helen B. Sawyers HERO Award, for outstanding dedication and achievement to CPI, the credit industry, and consumer education

AND

Serving consumers through:

Sponsorship of credit education programs for consumers

Creation and distribution of *Take Charge of Your Life*, a credit education program created by CPI members for consumers

Financial support of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, including NetSmartz®, an Internet safety program.

The Credit Education Resources Foundation is a 501{c} {3} tax-exempt, not-for-profit organization. It raises funds through an annual International Walk-A-Thon and other fundraising events. Donations, which are tax deductible, can be sent to Credit Education Resources Foundation, 10726 Manchester Rd., Ste. 210, St. Louis MO 63122.

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Tip: Test your ability to literally have a level head. Fold a thick pair of socks and balance it on your head. Try talking for several minutes without losing the socks.

Three: Self-commenting

When you feel self-conscious, it's easy to overreact to your every mistake. If you trip over a word, you might apologize ("Sorry!"), make a joke ("No more coffee for me!") or resort to nonverbal reflexes, like shaking your head or shrugging your shoulders. The problem with that "self-commenting" is your external preoccupation with your internal criticism. Mistakes happen; simply correct them and move on.

Tip: Fictionary is a game where players compose fake definitions of obscure words. Play it with your friends or family as a fun way to learn to ignore your inner critic.

Four: Misplacing Upward Vocal Inflections

You have probably worked with someone who speaks in "uptalk": using upward inflections that sound like question marks at the end of sentences. That vocal pattern is wide-spread—and contagious. Be vigilant in not picking it up.

Tip: Read an article aloud with strong downward inflections. Begin each sentence at middle to high pitch and cascade downward at the end of each phrase.

Five: Making Yourself Smaller

If you're like most people, when you feel intimidated, you make yourself smaller to avoid being an easy target. You might place your feet closer together, tuck your arms to your sides, dip your chin or pull back on your volume. Any or all of these behaviors say "I feel threatened."

Tip: Practice optimal standing posture throughout the day, not just in important situations, to make it habitual. Balance your weight over your feet, lengthen your spine and elongate your neck.

Six: Masking Your Face and Hands

Masking behaviors can creep up when you feel uneasy or on the spot. They take many different forms, including crossing your arms, clasping your hands, playing with your clothes or jewelry, or even having a power face—cutting off any animation of your face or hands.

Tip: The more comfortable you feel, the more animated you are with your face and hands. Open your posture and engage your gestures at the start of each conversation. Practice that at company gatherings or networking events, where you have the opportunity to talk to a lot of people in a short period of time.

Seven: Dropping Eye Contact

You don't see professional athletes dropping their eyes to the ground during play. In business settings, when you drop eye contact, you drop out of the game. Keep your eyes on the horizon and give your listeners the same respect you expect from them—your full attention. It's all right to move your eyes to the side momentarily to gather your thoughts. Otherwise, if your mouth is moving, your eyes should be on your listeners.

Tip: Train yourself to keep your eyes up while thinking and talking. One practice exercise: stick blank sticky notes across a large wall in your home or office. Ask yourself questions and hold your eyes on a sticky note while answering. Let your sentence structure be your cue to move from note to note.

Cara Hale Alter is president of SpeechSkills, a San Francisco-based communication training company, and author of ***The Credibility Code: How to Project Confidence and Competence When It Matters Most*** *(Meritus, 2012).*
For more information, visit www.thecredibilitycode.com

Planning for Retirement: Where to Begin

By Paul E. Watko, PRP

When individuals think about planning for retirement or saving for retirement, it can be considered difficult or a big task to take on. For me, trying to get my thoughts together and putting an article like this one together is a bit of the same scenario.

Individuals with Employer Sponsored Plans

The first thing you start to think about is; "Where do I start?" or "What are my options?"

I would say the immediate place to look for any individual to start saving for retirement is at their workplace. If an individual is given the opportunity to save for retirement through an employer sponsored plan, it should be the first line of offense. An employer can provide a couple of different plans to its employees, with those options being either a 401(k) or even a SIMPLE IRA.

When looking at the differences or reasons why an employer would pick either a SIMPLE over a 401(k) plan, it is truly a business decision. Even though this decision by the employer is out of the employee's hands, the main reason would be there are lower costs associated with the administration of a SIMPLE plan, than a 401(k), but there is still a possibility that the overall expense of the administration and matching to employees could be quite similar.

Now this is an article about planning for retirement, so given the background on employer sponsored plans, what is the benefit to the employee or the individual saver? For the two plan options, if your company provides a SIMPLE IRA plan, the employee can defer up to $12,000 into his or her account for 2014, with either the employer providing a 2 percent match to all employees of the company, or 100% of the employee's deferral amount up to 3 percent. Individuals over the age of 50 are eligible for a "catch-up" provision that allows them to save an additional $2,500 above the annual limit.

The 401(k) plan differs from the SIMPLE mainly seen as the deferred compensation is higher on an annual basis. An employee has the capability of

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deferring up to $17,500 of his or her gross income, with the same "catch-up" provision for individuals over the age of 50, but also at a higher annual limit of $5,500. As we can see, the individual with a 401(k) plan can contribute an additional $5,000 annually, and, when over the age of 50, a total of $8,500 more per year, than an individual with a SIMPLE plan.

One thing you might have noticed is that I did not mention any information pertaining to the company match in a 401(k) plan above, because it is not mandatory for the employer to match their employees' contributions.

But as you can imagine, when a company does choose to provide a match to their employees it is another advantage to the participants of the plan. The average company match in 401(k) plans is 2.5 percent, as mentioned in the "54th Annual Survey of Profit Sharing and 401(k) Plans," published by Plan Sponsor Council of America in 2011.

Speaking on my experiences as an advisor, not only with individuals, but working with companies that provide a 401(k) to their employees, the utilization of a company's 401(k) plan is lacking. But also being an individual that works for a company that provides a 401k, in which I participate, I could be doing more. Every individual has different scenarios in their life and must look to see what is comfortable for that individual to be saving. If your company provides a match at 50 percent, up to 6 percent of income, than I say try to contribute your needed 6 percent to obtain the full match on your deferral. Individuals that choose to get the full match for their companies have a thought process, one being, "I am giving away free money, if I do not maximize my match", others say, "It is an automatic return to my investment of X percent, just for getting those dollars in the plan."

Individuals Without Employer Sponsored Plans

In America, not every person has the opportunity to work for a company that provides a retirement plan but, in America, every individual does have opportunities to save for themselves. Here are many options available to save income that is received throughout the year.

Americans can save through putting away money into a savings account or setting up an individual retirement account (IRA), either a Traditional or Roth. Individuals that are also self-employed have opportunities of saving income through the year. These are a few options at the disposal of Americans to be saving for retirement and I will start by giving details below.

The first option at hand for individuals that do not work with a company that provides a retirement plan or are self-employed are the individual retirement accounts (IRAs). There are a few different types as I mentioned, but all have the same objective of saving for retirement. IRAs are truly and solely seen as retirement saving vehicles. Unlike your savings account at your bank, there are tax advantages to these accounts. These tax advantages come in different manners, but also are very similar to the tax advantages of using an employer sponsored retirement plan.

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When individuals defer compensation into a 401k or SIMPLE plan, they are taking from income which they are receiving, for example, on a bi-weekly basis, and deferring the income tax they would be paying until they use those dollars in retirement. Not only is the money they are deferring going into their account tax-free, but the growth of those assets are tax-deferred, as well. So, when an individual starts taking income from his or her retirement accounts, with these "qualified" assets inside, it is at that time that they will start to pay income tax on those assets.

As I mentioned, if you are saving money in a traditional savings account at your bank, you have the right to those assets at any given time. The reason here is, because you have already paid taxes on that money, and if there is interest that you are receiving from those dollars, it is also being taxed. So with the sole objective of tax-deferred income savings retirement accounts, there is one stipulation. In retirement plans and IRAs, if an individual would like to take those assets and utilize them before the age of 59½, then there is a penalty tax of 10 percent on top of the income tax due by that individual. What I like to say about this penalty tax is that it is the government making Americans aware that these tax-advantageous accounts are for the American people's retirement and not for the use of helping in a tough time or buying that new car. It helps that individuals think twice

about taking retirement dollars before they are actually needed for retirement.

So, what is the amount individuals can save in IRAs? And what are some of the differences between these types of accounts available to them, if they are not able to use an employer sponsored plan?

For an individual with a Traditional IRA, they have the capabilities to save $5,500 annually and then take the amount that they did save and deduct that amount from their income for the year when completing their taxes. Traditional IRAs, also have a "catch-up" provision, allowing individuals over the age of 50 to contribute an additional $1,000 to their IRA.

Now for individuals that are self-employed, there is an IRA that gives them more flexibility and larger limits to saving for retirement. When individuals are self-employed, they must worry about taxes just like we all do, but they must do so on overall income made.

When an individual works for a company, the company also pays for a portion of the taxes owed on the income that individual makes, there is an employer side and employee side. For a self-employed person, there is not an employer to cover the employer side—the employee is also the employer. So, if you are self-employed or a 1099 employee of a company, also known as a consultant, then you must be aware of your tax liability on a quarterly basis, so when it is time to complete your taxes, it is not a shock to what is at hand.

With this information at hand, the government has given self-employed individuals an IRA, known as, a Simplified Employee Pension. If you are eligible to participate in a SEP IRA, you can deduct the lesser of a maximum contribution of $52,000 or 25% of your net income. The appeal here is the funding flexibility, so if income is high, a larger contribution can be made and if there is a tough year, the contribution can be scaled back.

Tax advantages that have been discussed with all the aforementioned savings vehicles—have it be the Traditional IRA, SEP IRA, or even the employer-sponsored plans of a 401k and SIMPLE IRA—have been pre-taxed or tax-deductible assets. These are beneficial to the individual in that tax year, as they can lower the income tax that is owed on their gross income.

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There is another IRA that does not have the benefit during the calendar tax year but can be overall tax advantageous for the individual during their whole life time. The Roth IRA, which is a vehicle similar to the Traditional IRA on contribution limits, where an individual can save $5,500 before the age of 50 and thereafter have the “catch-up” contribution $1,000 for 2014.

Now the Roth IRA has eligibility constraints based on the filing status of the individual. If you are married and filing jointly, the household can have an income up to $181,000 for 2014, but once over $191,000, they are ineligible for a Roth IRA. In between these limits, there is a phase out program. If the individual is single, the income limits are even lower, to where the individual making under $114,000, is eligible for full contribution, but once over $129,000, that individual is ineligible for a Roth IRA.

Knowing these stipulations should not deter an individual from looking at this option. As I said, the Roth can be quite tax advantageous for years to come. Even though the individual is unable to deduct or lower their taxable income for that year, the contribution grows tax-deferred and, when received during retirement, it is also income tax-free distributed. The reason here is, because the individual lost the benefit of putting tax-free money away at the contribution time, he or she is receiving the tax-free income at the later date.

To circle back to the employer sponsored plans, not all—but some—employer-sponsored 401k plans do provide their participants with making Roth 401k contributions that do not have income limitations. Also, the contribution limits for Roth 401k deferrals are still at the higher limits vs. the individual limits.

Saving for Retirement, “Outside the Box”

As you can see, we have gone over the more traditional savings vehicles available to individuals. This last retirement savings vehicle is an approach that is consider a little more outside the box.

Cash Value Life Insurance is more known for providing to heirs of the investor, but who said it could not be used for the investor/insured as well? Cash Value Life Insurance can have some of the same benefits of a Roth IRA but does not have income limits. When an individual gets underwritten for life insurance and utilizes the same tax-deferred growth inside the insurance contract on the premiums they pay, not only are they receiving the insurance amount to their heirs, income tax free, but they can take distributions from the insurance contract on a tax-free basis, thus having the same Roth IRA advantages, without income limits but also, if designed properly, larger contributions than Roth 401k contributions. When all is said and done, the investor might be covering a liability during younger years with the life insurance proceeds, but able to take the invested dollars in the contract and turn them into tax-deferred, tax-free income in the later years of their life, such as during retirement.

Looking back through all the information at hand, it might have been tough for me to get the ball rolling and to get my thoughts together, but once I

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started, the information really came quite easily. So to wrap up the article, here are my thoughts to all retirement savers. First, take the time to start early. The benefit of time to retirement savings is huge. when assets can grow tax-deferred and compound growth over 30 years, it is much more than over 10 years.

Second, make sure you take advantage of any match you receive from your employer.

Third, take the time to review your plan, not every savings opportunity is available to all and not every savings vehicle/ strategy is right for all. Take that time to look at what you, as an individual, can do for yourself and stick with the plan. As we have seen through the recent years, there can be trials and tribulations, but to persevere is the individual choice we can all make.

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He works with closely-held businesses and their owners, as well as individuals and families, to identify and prioritize financial objectives and to develop and implement strategic financial plans.

In 2008, Paul started specializing in providing retirement plan consulting and advisory services to Plan Sponsors with Defined Contribution. Mack Financial, being a completely independent financial services firm, offers a range of retirement plan and investment management consulting services to retirement plan sponsors and their committees. Paul also consults participants directly, conducting investment education for participants in both group and one-on-one settings, explaining the importance of saving in their 401(k) plan.

In 2004, Paul graduated from Indiana University with a B.A. in Economics. He holds the PLANSPONSOR Retirement Professional designation, received from PLANSPONSOR magazine in 2006, in addition to Series 7 and 66 securities licenses.

Born, raised, and currently living in Indianapolis, Indiana, with his wife and three young children, he is active in the community. Paul is a parishioner of St. Pius X Catholic Church and is involved with the Catholic Professional Business Club. He also is treasure of The Indianapolis Alumni Chapter of Sigma Chi, and a member of The Penrod Society.

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Wage War On Wordy Writing

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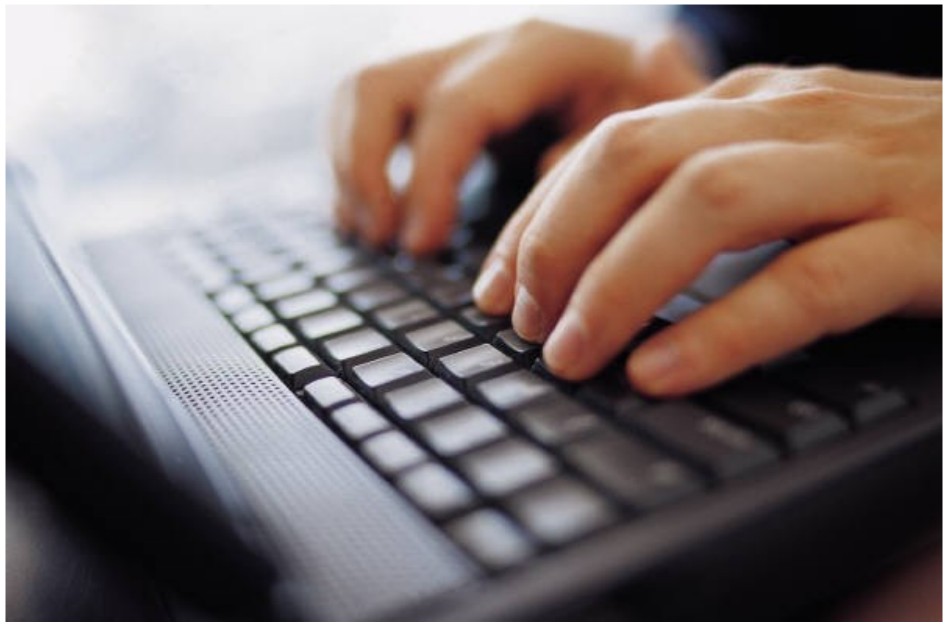

Are word counts the bane of your existence? Do you struggle to prune your sentences to the bare minimum number of words, balancing the urge to purge with the need to convey meaning and support data and nuance?

Rest assured that you are not the only writer who struggles with wordiness. In fact, it is a nearly universal concern. The American writer Mark Twain was intimately familiar with the dangers of wordy writing. His advice? “Substitute *damn* every time you’re inclined to write *very*,” he said, adding that “your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be.”

You may not be inclined to take Twain’s tongue-in-cheek advice, but you can pare unnecessary words and phrases from each piece you write. Simply familiarize yourself with these guidelines and then practice putting them to use.

Keep It Short

The first rule of thumb for concise composition is this: Use short words, short sentences and short paragraphs. Experts suggest keeping sentence length to 17 words on average—by definition, that means you should include some sentences that are longer and some that are shorter to add variety and create rhythm. *Bonus:* Short sentences also draw in your audience, creating an impression of easy reading that appeals to time-crunched readers.

One easy way to trim your writing is to search for and eliminate passive verbs. Writing in an active rather than a passive voice creates not only a more vibrant and appealing document but also a shorter one. *Reason:* In the active voice, the subject performs the action. The sentence “I prepared the report” is active—with a word count of four. The passive sentence: “The report was prepared by me,” on the other hand, consists of six words—that’s a 50 percent increase.

Of course, it is easy to dismiss such corrections as minor. However, in a document of any length, even minor changes add up. Multiplied over the length of a complete memo or report, the passive voice adds unacceptable bulk.

Reduce Redundancies

Just as the passive voice adds unnecessary words, redundant phrases increase your word count without adding value or clarity to your writing. Redundancies occur when one word contains part of an idea expressed in another word. For example, you might write to a customer “We will return your deposit back to you…” In that case, *return* means *to send, put or carry back.* So in the phrase “return back,” the word *back* is redundant.

Note: Some writers use redundancies in a misguided attempt to add emphasis.

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Redundancies merely mark the writer as either careless or inexperienced. So steer clear of the following redundancies commonly found in business writing. A better word or phrase follows in parentheses.

- Basic fundamentals *(fundamentals* ***or*** *basics)*
- Close proximity *(proximity* ***or*** *nearby)*
- Consensus of opinion *(consensus)*
- Cooperate together (*cooperate* ***or*** *work together*)
- End result (*result*)
- First began (*began*)
- Future prospects (*prospects*)
- Many in number (*many*)
- New innovation (*innovation* ***or*** *improvement*)
- Other alternative (*alternative*)

Another common wordy misstep is combining a verb with a noun when a verb alone would convey your meaning more clearly and concisely. For example, why write "convey the full meaning of" when you could simply write "convey fully"? Here are three examples with more concise rewrites. *Instead of writing:*

- "Provide an accurate measurement." Say "measure accurately."
- "Gave them a reminder." use "reminded them."
- Made initial contact with." Write "first contacted."

Warning: Watch for abbreviated redundancies too. You don't need to write, for example, "PIN number."

Search and Tighten

Here's a quick strategy you can use to tighten your prose. Use your computer's word-search function to identify needless qualifiers—words that, as Mark Twain suggested, add bulk but little value to your writing. *Here is a list of the top culprits:*

Very
Really
Rather
Seldom
Sometimes
Somewhat
Partial

And since you have already called up your computer's word-search function, use it to highlight another short but unnecessary word: *and*. If your search turns up instances where the word *and* links two nouns, verbs or modifiers, question whether you need both. *Here are some examples:*

- Background and experience
- Grow and expand
- Each and every

Another word to search for: *of*. When used to introduce a descriptive clause, the word *of* is useful, even necessary. For example, consider the phrase: *the description of the new manager.* If you were to rework that phrase to eliminate *of*, you would write *the new manager's description*—but that meaning is ambiguous. Are you referring to a description of something else that the new manager has offered? In that case, the word *of* is necessary to preserve clarity.

Red Flags

The words *which, who* and *that* also raise red flags, signaling opportunities to weed wordy phrases. *Here are examples of each:*

- The final report, **which** was circulated on Monday, Contained several errors. *Better:* Monday's report contained several errors.
- People **who** expect to attend the conference should register online. *Better:* Conference attendees should register online.
- Any team **that** is eligible to enter the competition needs to sign up by Friday. *Better:* Eligible teams should sign up for the competition by Friday.

Another red flag: expletive constructions, more commonly

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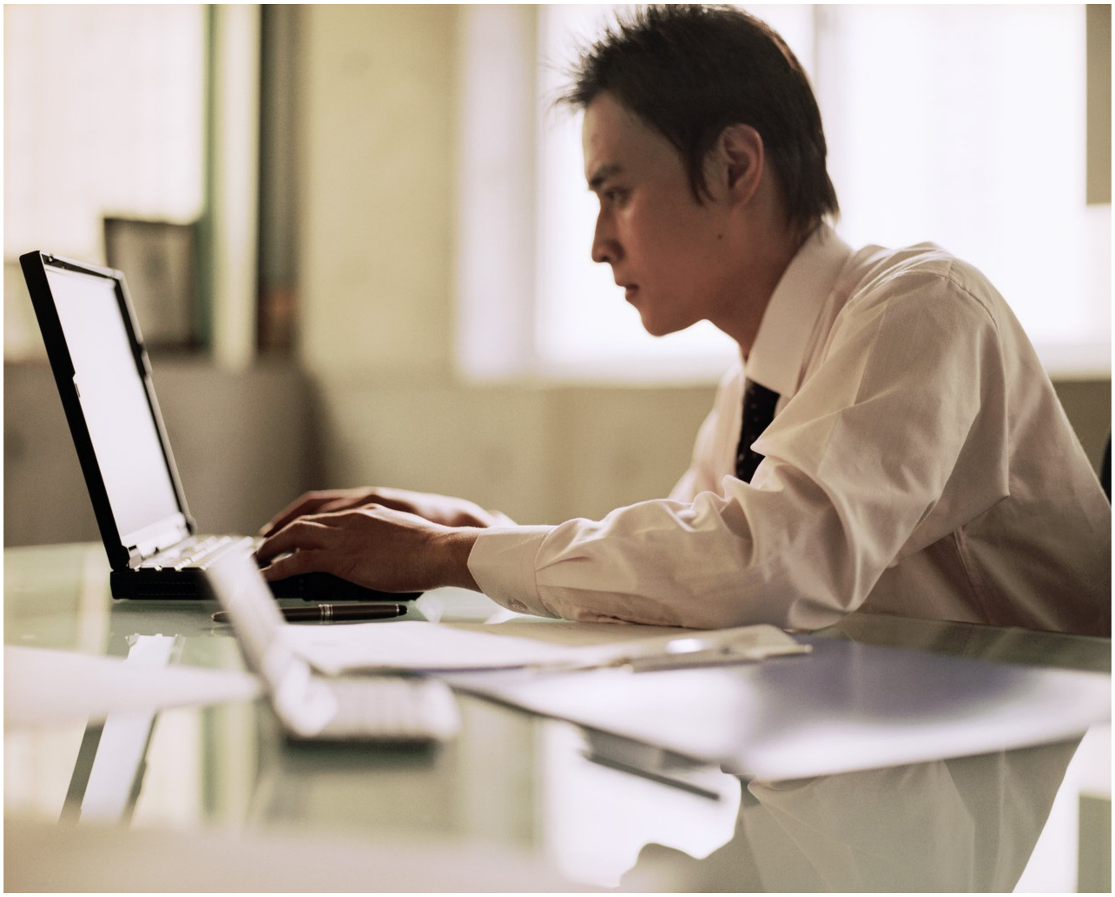

known as *there is/are* or *it is* phrases.

Their inclusion indicates an undisciplined approach to sentence composition. Fortunately, editing them out is easy. *Here are two examples:*

- There are several benefits to performing careful editing. *Rewrite:* Careful editing presents several benefits.
- It is easy to trim word counts on important documents after you master a few simple rules. *Rewrite:* Trimming word counts on important documents is easy after you master a few simple rules.

Familiarize yourself with the following list of "filler" words—overly descriptive determiners and modifiers. They may seem to add to the meaning of the sentence, but the truth is that they clutter the sentence instead. *Eliminate unnecessary words such as the following:*

- Actually
- Basically
- Definitely
- Generally
- Individual
- Particular
- Specific

Here is an example: Our degree of success in marketing this product *actually* depends on our choice of media rather than our budget.

A quick rewrite of that sentence, deleting only the word *actually*, doesn't change its meaning. In fact, removing that unnecessary modifier clarifies the sentence.

Final Editing

Suppose you have created a document, such as a request for a sales proposal, and you did so paying careful attention to the rules outlined above. Unfortunately, when you check the word count, you find that you have written over several hundred words more than the format allows.

Don't despair—a careful edit in the final stages of the document allows you the opportunity not only to trim your word count but also to clarify your meaning throughout the piece.

Before you hit "print" or "send," read through the document again, with red pencil or computer mouse in hand. Challenge yourself to eliminate 20 words from each paragraph as you read it. Doing so will increase the document's readability—an outcome that every reader will thank you for.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

We are happy to welcome these new members,
who have joined Credit Professionals International within the past 12 months

District 5

Goshen, IN

Amber Bailey
First State Bank-Goshen

Christopher Kingsley
LaCasa, Inc.

Ann Arbor, MI

Jason MacDougall
Behler Young Company

David Keosaian
Financial Planner

Karoline Salmeto
Fendt Builder's Supply, Inc.

District 7&9

Hutchinson, KS

Michelle Inskeep
Peoples Bank & Trust

Direct Members

Geraldine Entienza, PCS
Brightstar Logistics, Ptc. Ltd.
Singapore

Gwendolyn Hawkins, PCE
CPFCU
Chicago, IL

Carol Massey
Bedford, TX

CERTIFICATION NEWS

The Following CPI Members
Achieved Certification, Recertification or a Certification Upgrade
April 2013—March 2014

District 10	**Brenda Hunter, PCE**	**Pendleton CPI**
Direct	**Geraldine Entienza, PCS**	**Singapore**
Direct	**Gwendolyn Hawkins, PCE**	**Chicago, IL**

CREDIT PROFESSIONALS INTERNATIONAL

Mission:
To support the members of Credit Professionals International by providing opportunities for networking, career development and community involvement.

Vision:
Our vision is to be an innovative, member-driven association, making positive contributions within the credit industry.