



Cindy Zimmermann

Notable Communication

Every pen lover believes that the pen is mightier than the sword, although sword fanciers may disagree. But the joy a pen lover derives from a pen is only the beginning. Communications specialist Cindy Zimmermann says, "Use those beloved pens to connect, share and touch lives in ways you probably know but may have forgotten." Zimmermann sees her job as "encouraging people to connect." In her seminars, she helps her audience rediscover and develop the power of the handwritten word.

In her corporate presentations, Zimmermann builds on existing communication channels. "Handwritten notes will never usurp e-mails in corporate communication," she says, "but rather are a vital tool to add to the repertoire. A handwritten note can enhance any type of communication already in place."

Zimmermann details three excuses often used for not sending handwritten notes. First is insecurity about penmanship. "Embrace your penmanship style, whatever it is," she advises. "Think of your penmanship as part of your personal style," she says, adding, "The person will be so thrilled to receive your note, penmanship won't matter."

The second reason cited is insecurity about grammar and spelling. She suggests thinking of someone to whom you would love to send a note—for example, a special teacher who had an impact on your life, or someone who acted as a role model. Again, she assures participants that the value of a heartfelt sentiment far outweighs any possible technical flaws in spelling or grammar.

The third excuse is that it's too complicated to send a handwritten note—it requires pen, stationery, stamps and mailing versus typing and clicking "send" on a computer. Preparation is key here, she advises. "Have stamps, cards and addresses on hand and you'll be ready to go—no excuse." Using new products, such as a different ink color or stationery that you enjoy, sometimes has a stimulating effect. One fun product uses the Internet to assist in your

handwritten communication. At <www.photostamps.com> and other websites, you can create actual postage stamps using your own photo or artwork.

Once you've eliminated your excuses, you're ready to start writing. If words initially fail you, she suggests "warming up" with the factual information first. Address your envelope, add your return address. Begin your note with the date. "The date is important because it preserves a place in time," Zimmermann says. Begin, "Dear..." By now, your hand has warmed up, the ink is flowing, your hand is moving across the page and filling in the blank space. The movement has stirred "sense memories" in your brain and made it easier to begin.

Still don't know what to say? Zimmermann advises, "It's okay to say 'I don't know what to say' if it comes from your heart. Your desire to connect with the recipient comes through even if words fail you." She suggests some phrases to help get you started: I don't know where to begin..., I've been thinking about you..., I don't know what to say..., You were so thoughtful, kind and generous..., Thank you so very much for..., When I look at the..., When I think about your thoughtfulness..., Your success is an inspiration to... .

Zimmermann suggests communicating with all five senses whenever possible by adding unique little extras to your handwritten notes. A sprig of rosemary has become something of a personal signature for her. "Rosemary is a

symbol of remembrance of friendship,” she says. The herb is abundant at her sunny Arizona home and introduces a fragrant green note to her correspondence, particularly when sent somewhere on the chilly East Coast in the middle of winter. Other suggestions include: enclose newspaper clippings, photos, tokens; say it with a quote; write a memory about the person; draw a silly picture; write in lists—I wish you warm days, good books, and calm seas...; use your special closing. Her grandmother’s “signature” closing was “love, love, love.”

In short, “A handwritten note is the least expensive yet most powerful gift you can give,” says Zimmermann. “And important notes often become keepsakes that are sometimes even framed to view again and again.”

Still unconvinced about the power of the handwritten note? Zimmermann suggests getting out a handwritten note you’ve saved, transcribing the same words into an e-mail, then printing it. Hold the two specimens side by side and, regardless of the words, it’s easy to see that the handwritten note appears warmer and more genuine than the e-mail. And does a stack of e-mails tied up with a ribbon have even a fraction of the personality contained in a stack of handwritten correspondence? “E-mails are so easily deleted, but we tend to hang on to the notes and cards we receive,” she says. “Handwriting contains an energy not found in e-mails. No number of font changes can convey the energy of a pen put to paper, choosing when to end the line versus word wrap, choosing the slant on the page versus the evenly spaced typed text.”

To those who believe saving

e-mails is an easier way to keep and file correspondence, Zimmermann suggests doing as she does with her notes. She photocopies her notes to create and keep a sort of personal journal of correspondence.

To further inspire participants in her seminars, each receives a take-away tin of inspirational chocolate “thought prompts.” The lid on the tin of custom-made M&Ms reads, “Chocolate... inspiration at its finest! Who might you delight with a note today?” Users randomly pick a chocolate, then make a human connection with an unexpected note to a customer, co-worker, friend or family member. Zimmermann’s thought prompts include: Thank you, Good food, Elderly, Good friend, Child, Hope, Generous, Grace, I’m sorry, Great time! and Family. “For someone to know that you are thinking of them is the greatest gift,” says Zimmermann. “Handwritten notes are dear to my heart and dear to other people’s hearts.”

With a click of a mouse, your message may arrive almost instantaneously anywhere in the world. But does it have the impact of a handwritten note? Consider the difference between eating fast food and dining in a fine restaurant, or even sitting down to a meal at home, surrounded by friends or family, feasting on all your favorite foods. Each situation will feed your stomach. But which one feeds your *soul*? «

Contributing Editor Cheryl Roberts now resides in Texas after spending the past two years in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. For more information about Cindy Zimmermann and her seminars, visit <writinginstyle.org> or e-mail <cindyzimmermann@cox.net>.




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