

POWER OF THE PEN



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Handwriting can send your message with style and authority

In a sea of e-mails and text and instant messages, a handwritten note can cut through the clutter. Maybe it's the fact that someone took the time to sit down and put his or her thoughts on paper. Maybe it's the fact that it harkens to a simpler, less harried time.

Whatever the reason, for business or personal use, if you want to make a good impression, sometimes it helps to shut off the computer and do things the old-fashioned way.

Forrester Research, a technology and market research company, estimates there are more than 135 million e-mail users in the United States. The *Wall Street Journal* recently stated that in 2004, 55 million cell phone users in the country sent an average of 203 text messages each.

Proponents of handwritten notes encourage people to take a moment to step away from the keyboard and pick up a pen. They say handwritten communication can seal the deal on a job, express your unique personality and help children focus in school.

Scottsdale resident Cindy Zimmermann is a consultant who stresses to businesses the value of good communication skills. She recently organized a workshop to emphasize the importance of handwriting.

She says handwritten correspondence gets the writer past spam filters and the sometimes cold, impersonal image of big corporations.

“If you’re going on even an entry-level job interview take the time to follow up with a handwritten note, even if your handwriting isn’t the best and even if you can’t use four-syllable words,” Zimmermann said. “Just showing that initiative makes a difference. If someone takes the time to write a note...I’ve had many employers tell me it’s a way they make a decision about hiring.”

It’s also a statement of style.

A handwritten note makes the sender stand out from the crowd. It’s also a show of status to whip out a fancy fountain pen to write those notes.

“When people put a fountain pen in their hand, they have a feeling,” said David Brous, director sales and marketing at Sheaffer USA, which makes fine writing instruments. “When they write, they kind of correlate how they feel, to what goes on the paper. ...Fine writing allows you to present in a much better, more appealing fashion. If you’re going to send somebody a thank-you note, they’d much prefer to get something nicely handwritten than an e-mail.”

Putting pen to paper is also a tangible way to demonstrate the thought you put into your words.

Elyse Heob, a 17-year-old student at Scottsdale Desert Mountain High School, was taking the time to learn calligraphy at a recent event at Ancala Country Club.

“I think it looks pretty. It’s really elegant,” Heob said. “It looks like you put more effort into what you’re writing and you really care, instead of just typing something up.”

Heob said handwriting is also a benefit in schoolwork.

“When writing an essay or something, I have to write it out,” Heob said. “Otherwise, I can’t focus. It’s like you’re going too fast (using a computer).”

Shea Stanfield, a counselor at Desert Canyon Middle School in Scottsdale, takes that idea a step further.

Stanfield said she believes the focus necessary for writing, particularly the detail involved with calligraphy, could help curb attention-deficit disorder. Before she was a counselor, she taught art. She said writing helped focus her students.

“That’s why I taught calligraphy as therapy,” Stanfield said. “We would sit down in the first 10 minutes of the day and journal. That would get them mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually into school.

Stanfield said that, even now, she doesn’t let a hall pass leave her office without writing it in the fancy characters of calligraphy.

At Scribble2Script, Megan Eldridge and Margaret Pierson teach children the basic skills needed to master that art. Both are occupational therapists and start their consultations with an assessment of what skills the children need to learn to write better.

“We feel like handwriting is a reflection of you on paper, especially in elementary school,” Eldridge said. “They post everything on the wall. When you have the worst handwriting, that’s not so fun.”