

GIVING YOUR BUSINESS LETTERS A 'KICK-BUTT' CLOSE

By Doug C. Grant

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So you write this terrific Imcom. (An Imcom is any important business communication such as a letter, memo, proposal or report.)

It sings. It sells. And it flops!

What happened? You dribbled away your close. You whispered instead of shouting. You hung nice instead of tough. It never pays.

So, today, let's learn how to 'kick-butt' when you close an Imcom to your boss or anyone else up the command chain.

WHAT ACTION DO YOU WANT YOUR TARGET TO TAKE?

Forgive me. This seems almost too elementary to mention. But I'm convinced that 90% of the people who write an Imcom don't give this question much serious thought.

It's a question you should ask yourself before writing the first word of your Imcom. What EXACTLY do you want the target to do? Call you? Bounce your idea further up the command chain? Give you the go-ahead on a project?

Don't assume the target will know what you want. I learned this years ago when writing sales copy. I would tell the prospect to fill out the reply card or order form. I would tell him to use the postage-free reply envelope. But so help me, if I didn't mention putting the envelope in the mail...response dropped.

The only thing I can figure is that we are not routine thinkers. So you have to be the target's routine thinker if you want a timely response.

BE DIRECT, BE FORCEFUL AND SUGGEST URGENCY

Most people don't close effectively because they're afraid of offending someone. Trust me. This is not a problem.

Let's say you are writing a proposal for your boss to get approval for a new research program. You've gone through all the why's and where's. It's time for a kick-butt close.

Obviously, the action you want is a go-ahead approval and you want it NOW! You don't want your fantastic idea sitting in someone's 'Whenever' box for five months.

Still, the target is your boss so you want to be a little tactful. Here is how you might write your close:

"By starting immediately on this project, I estimate we can have positive results to show the Executive Board at their next meeting in June. I have an open schedule tomorrow afternoon and could meet with you to discuss details. If you are available, have Alice call me about a time that would be convenient for you."

Notice how cleverly you have constructed your close. You have inserted a note of urgency without being demanding. You have also lifted the burden of response from the target and placed it on someone else. This could be a secretary or assistant.

The easier you make it for a target to respond, the quicker you'll get that reply.

You could also take the necessity of responding completely off the target's shoulder by volunteering to do the follow-up.

"I'll call you tomorrow morning, after you've had an opportunity to read through my proposal. We can then set up a time to discuss details."

Notice that you haven't even suggested that your proposal might not be accepted. From a psychological standpoint, this makes the refusal, if there is one, more difficult. Overcoming a positive with a negative generally takes extra effort.

Writing a close for Imcoms going to associates or subordinates, requires a bit different approach. I'll cover that type of close in future Imcom coaching articles.

Just remember, no matter who you are talking to, spell out exactly what action you want taken. And try to insert a note of urgency. Faint heart never won a fair response. (Or, something like that.)

Doug C. Grant, Dean of Distinctive Business Writing, is the author of 'HOW TO MOVE FROM CUBICLE TO CORNER OFFICE WITH THE SECRETS OF POWER WRITING. Free 50 page preview is available at:

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