



Welcome to Issue #1 (sort of)

This is the 113th edition of *free-range thinking*, but the first in electronic form, so I wanted to take a moment up front to welcome you to the new format and to encourage your feedback.

As in the past, we plan on offering you a blend of case studies, recommended reading, and other tips to improve your communications, but with more concision and a greater variety of topics each month. (Read: more bite-size but just as tasty.)

So please let us know what you think: send your comments to andy@agoodmanonline.com, and we'll try to make sure that *free-range thinking* remains as good in pixels as it was in print!

An Annual Report You'll Actually Want to Read

When a freshly delivered stack of mail arrives on my desk each day, few items travel more quickly to the bottom of my wastebasket than annual reports. Self-congratulatory, dull, and invariably crammed with long lists of names and tiny rows of numbers (and aren't *those* fun to read), annual reports do little more than remind recipients that some organizations must have money to burn on fancy paper stock and four-color fabulousness.

And then there's the 2008 annual report from Friends of the Children. A mentoring organization that works with America's most at-risk kids, Friends has turned its entire '08 publication into a report on the progress of just one fourteen year-old child, Jeff Williams. On the cover (pictured here), the organization's name is nowhere to be seen. It reads simply, "2008 Annual Report - Jeff Williams."

True to its cover, the report takes you through Jeff's year. And true to annual reports, Friends is still blowing its own

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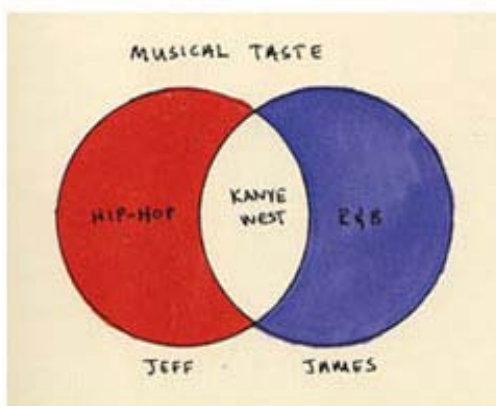
The Quickest Fix for
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horn, but the graphics throughout gently mock the form without undercutting the content. One graphic (pictured here) uses a Venn diagram to depict the shared musical taste between Jeff and his mentor, James. Another uses a bar chart to show that Jeff caught (and released) a total of four trout in 2008, up dramatically from zero in 2007.



The idea of an annual report based on one child's progress came from Friends' agency, Wieden+Kennedy, which numbers ESPN, Coca-Cola, and Nike among its clients. Friends has printed 6,000 copies of the '08 report and is sending copies primarily to potential donors and supporters. "It's an

introduction," says Judy Stavisky, the nonprofit's National Executive Director. "We wanted to give a sense of how we wrap our arms around these kids, and we thought this was the best way to do it." When you read the report, I think you'll be inclined to agree.

See for yourself at www.friendsofthechildren.org, where you can download a PDF from the home page.

Free Help for Writing Press Releases

Nonprofiters seeking step-by-step guidance for writing effective news releases can now find help online thanks to a new web site created by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The Knight News Release Workshop, www.newsreleaseworkshop.org deconstructs model news releases, compares well and poorly written headlines, and offers tips on drafting effective quotes.

The site can also help release writers from defaulting to jargon, a common pitfall for nonprofits that deal with complex issues. A checklist helps writers polish their drafts, and the site also encourages using Flesch Scores, a computerized tool to maximize a release's readability.

"It's important that nonprofits explain the

good work they do in plain and effective language," Marc Fest, Knight Foundation's vice president for communications, said. "In an era of increasing demand for transparency in the nonprofit sector, this site will help organizations tell their stories effectively."



(And if that sounds like a quote taken directly from Knight's press release, that's because it is.)

The Quickest Fix for Broken Meetings

According to a study conducted by the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Southern California, there are 6 reasons why most meetings fail. Here are five of them:



- Lack of sufficient notice (i.e., not enough time to prepare).
- People who do not need to be there are still required to attend; others who should be there are mistakenly not invited or are absent.
- Lack of control, either by attendees, who have no real impact on the decision-making process, by the meeting leader, or both.
- Political pressure, i.e., attendees are forced to express views which they don't endorse (or are reluctant to speak candidly).
- Hidden agendas.

The #1 reason why most meetings fail - according not only to the Annenberg study but also to most of the literature I've reviewed - *is the absence of a well-prepared agenda*. An agenda is much more than just a list of topics that will be covered. Properly constructed, it will help set attendees' expectations for what will be accomplished, provide a reliable road map from start to finish, and ensure that all participants understand the roles they are to play along the way.

This month, we will introduce a new online course at The Goodman Center that offers step-by-step instruction for preparing an agenda and running a successful meeting. "Meetings: Less Pain, More Gain" is a two-hour class that can transform the kinds of meetings your organization conducts. Classes will run from 9-10a Pacific (12n-1p Eastern) on January 21st and 22nd and cost \$250 per student. (Discounts are available for organizations that register five or more students.) To learn more and register online, visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

January Online Classes at The Goodman Center

Start the New Year by learning more

(and traveling less) thanks to three online courses open for registration now at The Goodman Center:



the goodman center
where do-gooders learn to do better

Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter (2 hrs.)

How do you reach people in this age of Too Much Information? Learn how to identify "The Four Connecting Points" between you and your audience and ensure every form of outreach scores on all four.

January 14th and 15th, 9-10a Pacific each day (12n-1p Eastern), \$250

Meetings: Less Pain, More Gain (2 hrs.)

Want to improve organizational effectiveness and raise morale? Improve your meetings. And the fastest way to better meetings is by learning how to prepare the right kind of agenda.

January 21st and 22nd, 9-10a Pacific each day (12n-1p Eastern), \$250

Design: Deciding on Design (3 hrs.)

Even if you aren't directly responsible for buying design, you may have to evaluate and approve designed materials before your audience sees them. Learn what to look for (and what to say no to) in this fast and informative overview of graphic design.

January 23rd, January 30th, and February 6th, 9-10a Pacific each day (12n-1p Eastern), \$375

To find out more and register online for these and other classes, visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

About Us

free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Lori Matsumoto. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about Andy's work, please visit www.agoodmanonline.com.

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