

Plain Language as Problem-Solver

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Applying plain language principles to resolve issues of differing drafting and presentation styles of reports

Outline

- The problem
- Planning the project
- The workshop for decision-makers
- Outcomes of the workshop
- The workshops for the report writers
- Lessons learned

The problem

- New merger of two firms with different styles
- Uncertainty as to new document templates
- Lack of communication and agreement between partners and senior managers
- Lack of clear guidelines for employees
- Costs of poor communication

Planning the project

- Meetings with the decision-makers in the main cities
- The key influencers
- Workshop for the partners & senior managers
- Eleventh hour appearance of the new templates

Workshop for decision-makers

- Preparation for the workshop – survey of client preferences
- Information on coaching staff
- Morning session – plain language principles & essentials of report writing
- Afternoon session – application of principles & development of new templates
- Slaughtering of sacred cows

Outcomes of the workshop

- Agreement on formats for two high-use reports and a proposal
- Explicit accountability of authors on page 1
- Bulleted, specific recommendations
- Banning of “cut and paste”
- Limits to amount of detail
- Appointment of format “owners”

Workshops for report writers

- Introduction: Principles of plain language
- New formats presented by “owners”
- Visible and positive support from partners and senior managers

Lessons learned

- Relevance of plain language to professionals in a competitive commercial environment
- Engagement of top decision-makers with issues faced by junior colleagues
- Significance of client survey in selling the need for plain language to the decision-makers
- Immediate savings in time and productivity



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