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Email BLUF

Bottom Line Up Front

BLUF is a military acronym for “*Bottom Line Up Front*”. The purpose is to place the most crucial piece of your communications at the start of any communication. Visualize that as being on a cell-phone with only 15 seconds of battery time remaining. Why use BLUF instead of the usual corporate fluff? Because it gets your message across faster and saves everyone time.

Reverse the situation and think about all the times you have patiently waited for someone to get to the point. Remember that whenever you start with the background (“once upon a time”) and take minutes to get to the point then busy people will just ignore you. By the time you get to the Very Important Point you have lost their attention. The same principle applies to email. Any time I need to read the History of the Universe simply to find out what the sender wants me to do – I am far less likely to take action.

How To Get Started

Use the mantra “it’s just business”. BLUF is not intended for personal email interactions or for writing poetry or fiction.

1. **Start Slowly.** Start with your peers and with your direct reports if you are a manager. Explain to everyone what you are doing and ask for their help. You will find very few people who do not want to reduce their volume of emails.
2. **Basic BLUF.** Every time you initiate an email decide what your key point is and put it up front. Like “Please FedEx the DVD to me for delivery tomorrow” or “You need to complete this training by April 1st”. Imagine your email is being read on a mobile device. What does the reader see on the initial screen when your email is opened? Your BLUF Very Important Point.
3. **Remove Fluff.** The best way to illustrate is by example: convert “*As you heard Sarah talk about in the All Hands call on December 12th, you’ll need to leverage and sell the breadth of the entire portfolio if you’re going to weather the current economic climate. To that end, the*”

Enablement team developed a set of study materials for each of our IT initiatives to make sure you're armed with the knowledge you need to succeed. I am asking that you take part in a baseline assessment to demonstrate your knowledge across our portfolio. The first part of program, Series 100, was released prior to the break and contains 8 study guides and assessments that you need to complete by January 16th."

into:

"You need to complete all 8 Series 100 training modules by January 16th".

4. **Remove The Comma.** A BLUF statement should not contain any commas. Your opening paragraph should have a minimal number of commas. A comma is used to separate different components of a thought or topic. My lawyer friends tell me that more legal problems are caused by the placement of a comma in a contract than the actual words.
5. **Radical BLUF.** Use the subject line to get your message across. Instead of "Series 100 Training Announcement" make the subject "ACTION: Complete Series 100 Training Modules By January 16th". As an analogy, imagine you had to use a text message or a tweet instead of an email.
6. **Helpful BLUF.** Try this trick. If you get (or write) an email with a series of questions or action items– number them. When responding place your comments in-line under the question and just summarize in the header of your email. "Comments included below. Agree on items #1 and #3, #2 was completed yesterday".

Here is my "BLUB – Bottom Line Up Back": Give it a try. Whilst you are at it please remove the "Reply All" button from your toolbar.

"I get mail, therefore I am."

Scott Adams, Cartoonist

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at www.masteringtechnicalsales.com.

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