



Write
Company
Plus

Dr. Kathleen A. Begley
The Write Woman
KBegley@writecompanyplus.com
610-429-1562

How to Promote Yourself Truthfully

By Dr. Kathleen Begley
Professional Speaker and Author

Note to Readers: *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley recently launched a new blog called "Meandering to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her one-paragraph musings on life, death, and how to floss your teeth without using your hands.*

Ten days ago, much of the nation was crazy glued to their television sets watching cable newscasters breathlessly narrate a so-called news story in the skies above Colorado. I speak, of course, of Balloon Boy, the phenomenon in which what looked like a giant-size aluminum-covered mushroom enroute to a ginormous outdoor grill soared for 500 miles near Fort Collins. Thought to be inside the homemade helium balloon was a six-year-old boy named Falcon Heene who, as it turned out, wasn't even out of his house. In fact, just about everything regarding the event turned out to be false, an attempt by the kid's father, Richard, to turn his family into reality TV stars. Keeping Up With the Kardashians meet Home with the Heenes.

The only thing with a ring of truth after the UFO-like vehicle floated gently to the ground was the kid vomiting in the middle of an interview the next day by the unsuspecting Diane Sawyer of ABC's Good Morning, America. Much to her credit, Sawyer suggested that the seemingly unconcerned parents take the green-ish child to the bathroom. Several days later, the police accused the father of perpetrating a hoax to the tune of \$2 million. The price tag was the approximate cost of calling in everyone from Chicken Little to the Federal Aviation Administration to try to get the child back to earth uninjured. Talk about publicity seekers.

Of course, in these competitive times, you may be among millions of people currently trying – like the Heenes -- to draw attention to you, your business, or your corporation. If you've lost your job, I dare say you've attempted to put your best foot forward on your resume, in cover letters, and during interviews. As a small business owner, you're likely to have created a website, print advertisements, and press releases to tout your quality. Those of you still holding onto corporate marketing jobs may have been involved in television commercials, annual reports, and twitter campaigns.

Now be honest. Haven't you on occasion considered exaggerating the value of yourself, your services, or your products to the point of truthiness, the word coined by satirist Stephen Colbert to mean anything but? You may want to rethink that strategy; it's lazy at best, immoral at worst. Here are some honest ways of attracting attention:

Get a reviewer. Having gone over hundreds of resumes during the past few decades, I find that most people tend to undersell rather than oversell themselves: reverse lying. If I were you, I'd ask a friend or relative familiar with your career from start to finish to make sure you've included accomplishments you may have forgotten. The top sales award, perhaps? The conference paper, maybe? The community involvement, possibly? If the achievement is true, use it.

Avoid wild claims. I know, I know, I know, numerous industries – such as wrinkle cream manufacturers – seem to get away with telling outright lies. But, if you read the fine print, you'll discover that most ads say only that customers reported seeing more youthful skin after several



Dr. Kathleen A. Begley
The Write Woman
KBegley@writecompanyplus.com
610-429-1562

months' application – not that their skin actually was more youthful. Can you say placebo effect? The only anti-aging products that I swear by are made by Mary Kay. I know they work because a good professional friend sells them. You're welcome, Valerie.

Respect the media. If you listen only to crazed political pundits, you'd swear that only dim-witted partisans become reporters and editors. So you may think you can fool them with grandiose statements. In reality, serious journalists are all about uncovering the truth in behalf of Everyman and Everywoman. In doing so, they often irritate influence peddlers and power brokers, which is why the original writers of the U.S. Constitution had the foresight to protect freedom of the press from everyone but Fox News. So tell the truth. You're stupid not to. Journalists often are better than detectives in ferreting out the facts from a pile of dung.

Dare to be funny. Humorous messages rarely get you into ethical problems. By definition, they're not supposed to be taken literally. Consider the Apple Computer television spots featuring an older PC user dressed in a traditional gray business suit and a younger Mac guy wearing more hip, casual attire. In no way are you supposed to believe that only curmudgeons use less expensive non-Apple platforms; plenty of penny-pinching college students do, too. You also are not influenced to think Mac users all end up dating actress Drew Barrymore, just because the pitch guy does.

Go bold. But not with your assertions. Save boldness for the way you package your messages. If you're sending financial reports on behalf of your company to Wall Street reporters, for instance, consider using a colored envelope that will stick out among a sea of traditional white ones. Simple ideas sometimes have great impact because everyone else passes them over.

Do a smell test. If something about your promotional material seems questionable even to your nose, how do you think it's going to strike outsiders? Make sure you support statements about huge profit spurts, for instance, with citations from a report from a recognized accounting firm. While you may think it's obvious that the sky is blue, critical readers may want to know the specific shade as well as your outside source.

Savor your honesty. In efforts to get jobs, clients, or promotions, I occasionally have gotten perilously close to lying. Oh heck, I've lied. Each and every time, even when I got away with it, I found dishonesty to be a heavy burden. To be blunt, it never felt right, and neither did I.

Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody.