

BOOK REVIEW

Becoming a compelling communicator for conservation: the essential reference for everyone who desires to make a difference.

William C. Dunn. 2014. On-Demand Publishing, Scotts Valley, California, USA. 69 pages (Soft cover). \$9.95. ISBN 14948858832

“...Grandpa was a man of few words. He had a way of not wanting to say any more than he thought would be heard...”

Kate Wolf, 1981
Eyes of a Painter

Bill Dunn, a friend and colleague for more than three decades, claims that the inspiration for this book originated during the first national meeting of The Wildlife Society in Albuquerque, New Mexico, back in 1994. Indeed, we sat through 45 minutes of a mostly droll and boring presentation one evening, following which we questioned the speaker's ability to convey a meaningful message, and wondered why we had wasted our time listening to him.

Although this book came to fruition many years later, it is the result of continuing frustrations with speakers and writers that “waste so much time” trying to get their messages across. As Kate Wolf implied long before that meeting in Albuquerque, saying more than will be heard wastes time for many people, including the speaker (or author) and audience (or readership). It is my hope that the guidance and admonitions included in this short book will result in vastly improved oral presentations in the future. As an editor, I also hope that authors will take advantage of Bill's suggestions, and present only necessary information and not include every possible detail in their contributions.

This little book consists of six chapters, each of which is devoted to enhancing one or more aspects of communications skills and making the speaker (or writer) more effective at delivering his or her message. As noted in the introduction, the book is not an exhaustive treatise but, instead, is a concise compilation of the essential lessons of communication, and written with the intent that the end result would be an enhanced ability to accomplish conservation. Chapter 2, Laying the Foundation, emphasizes the need to ensure that the message is clear, concise, and complete. In this chapter, Bill emphasizes that it is imperative that individuals be well prepared to deliver a message; if nothing else, he notes that audiences will appreciate the fact that you, as a speaker, value their time!

Chapter 3, The Written Word, contains sage advice that will help an author organize, analyze, and present scientific data with clarity and directness. Bill believes that students of natural science should prepare all papers assigned in their core courses using the framework of peer-reviewed articles, with the intended result that scientific writing would be second nature by the time those students become professionals. During graduate school, I received similar advice from the professor under whom I studied ornithology, advanced ornithology, and field research methods: write every paper you produce, whether a class assignment or

an original piece reporting results of your research, as if it is going to be submitted for peer review. That advice has served me well, and the advice conveyed by Bill in Chapter 3 will serve the readership well.

In Chapter 4, *The Spoken Word*, Dr. Dunn emphasizes that oral presentations must be informative, creative, compelling, and thought provoking. In this chapter, he addresses ways to structure an effective presentation, create clear and informative visual graphics, and how to speak so the message will be well received.

In Chapter 5, *Special Situations*, recommendations for addressing decision makers, and others for addressing public audiences are provided. The message delivered is that being succinct with the written word is the most productive strategy: it is better that an administrator asks for additional information than for less. With respect to public meetings, strong emphasis is placed on time management, completeness, and follow-up. The advice included in this chapter will make the communicator more effective, even if the subject at hand is not appreciated by the audience.

In the final chapter, Dr. Dunn concludes that the speaker or author has control over how the message is presented, and that doing it well at every opportunity—whether spoken or written—will benefit conservation. He ends with the hope that the lessons included will help increase support for nature and move conservation forward. I suspect that he is correct; I encourage those that have not given much thought to what they present and how they go about doing so to take advantage of Bill's more than thirty years of experience, and the advice presented. I wish this book had been written years ago!

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