

# Sue Mayor Medical Communications and Fruitful Conversations

## The need for writing development for leaders and communicators in the pharmaceutical industry



Writing is an essential business skill for leaders which has unique challenges in the pharmaceutical industry.

Leaders in the pharma industry need to translate complexity into clarity for their colleagues and for the industry's multitude of audiences and stakeholders. They often have to communicate remotely, dealing with rapid change and influencing virtual business teams and relationships.

*What makes any pharmaceutical leader's ideas worth following? At the heart of it is an ability to explain ideas in a compelling way for each audience, cutting through the complex science in order to focus on what is most important.*

Much is down to their ability to step into the perspective and position of their audience and then to use the words that generate an appropriate cognitive and emotional reaction. In communications psychology this is known as the fundamental skill of 'second positioning'.

Skilled writers and leaders do this all the time - they form connections with the readers and audiences they are addressing ensuring that what they then write and say is relevant, engaging and influential. This happens at every level of leadership and writing from national figures giving speeches to medical press articles, to peer-to-peer emails at work.

With this ability, communicators can start to lead – they can inspire and motivate their colleagues, they can persuade the media to give air time or page space to the industry's innovations and, with other audiences, they can build trust and understanding concerning the industry's intentions and contributions in healthcare.

However, operating in the highly technical pharma arena can have pitfalls for the unwary. First, science readily lends itself to – and in fact encourages – a detached view of things. This does not help us to show that we care. Second, clinging to scientific detail in the mistaken view that it is needed for scientific accuracy reduces or even destroys the chances of meaningful exchange between writer and reader.

This last point is important – our brains are 'wired' to process only limited amounts of information in a single span or sentence.

There are also times when those working in a complex and regulated industry find it easier to use words as a means to protect their uncertainties and insecurities rather than to clarify and inspire.

*It is here that we can offer significant opportunities for positive change - providing people with writing development in a leadership context.*

Our work provides people with both the strategic processes for writing in a scientific business environment and the reflective abilities to identify, challenge and guide the values being expressed.

**We have found that developing the skills and beliefs that underlie excellence in persuasive and informative medical writing also develops the industry and its people as top notch leaders and communicators.**