

Stanley: Communication is Key for Success in Business

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Ronald Reagan, our 40th President, was known as “The Great Communicator.” He earned this title because of his skill in communicating complex issues in easy to understand terms people could understand. He also projected an optimism that inspired people. He deeply cared if his audience connected with his message, so he would seek honest feedback from his staff on his speeches to see where he needed to improve. Each of us also has the ability to be a great communicator. We may not speak before Congress, but we speak in front of our customers, our coworkers, and family all the time. In addition, we communicate in writing in enormous volumes these days. Think about how many emails or texts you send on an average week. Author and Certified Speaking Professional Mandi Stanley notes, “The quality of your writing directly reflects the quality of your work.” I agree with her assertion, and it gives me pause to think about all of the emails I send each day and whether they reflect the quality of communication that they should.

I believe communication is a core skill for great leaders, so I was excited to meet with Mandi recently to learn more about her career and thoughts on being an effective communicator. Mandi grew up in Amory, Mississippi, and graduated summa cum laude from Mississippi State. After college, she moved to Dallas and worked as a technical proposal writer for a healthcare firm. It was in this job that Mandi began to hone her written communication skills and understand the importance of clear and effective writing in the marketplace. She then moved to Kansas City where she took a job with a seminar company. After working for a few months in her new job, she was asked by her employer to try out to be one of the seminar speakers. Her company saw her potential as a speaker and told her she could have the job if she could lose her Southern drawl. She was only 24, so she had to wait seven more months to begin speaking on the road because the rental car companies won't let you rent a car until you are 25. Mandi shared, “I am glad my boss was patient enough to wait until my birthday because this role launched my career as a speaker. However, I never lost my Southern accent!”

Mandi later worked as a contract presenter for the American Management Association, and she traveled the country teaching presentation and writing skills. Her husband's career led them to Memphis and ultimately back to Mississippi. In 2003, she launched her own speaking company, Mandi Stanley Seminars, which she continues today. Mandi's numerous clients include Duke Energy, McDonald's USA, Campbell's Soup, Rockefeller University, the National Football League as well as local clients including Southern Farm Bureau and EastGroup Properties. More than 75% of her clients are repeat customers, which is indicative of her effectiveness. While she often gets invited to teach on a variety of topics, she instead chooses to only accept invitations to teach on presentation and writing skills. I am impressed with the power of focus she has to avoid the temptation to drift into other areas. That focus has allowed her to be a true expert in her field. In 2003, she was designated a certified speaking professional by the National Speakers Association, which is a designation fewer than 9% of speakers worldwide obtain, and she was the first Mississippian to receive this honor. She is also currently launching a book, *The No-Panic Plan for Presenters* in which she shares invaluable lessons from her experiences as a speaker.

I asked her whether great speakers are born or made. Mandi emphasized that everyone can improve his or her communication skills, but it takes work! She noted that most people don't take their communication seriously enough. She noted, "Sloppy communication is a bad reflection on both the person and the organization." One of her most popular speaking topics is "Getting a Grip on Email." On her web site, she notes that business people spend about 22% of their time—or 11 workweeks a year—reading or writing emails. Some days I feel like I spend about 90% of my time on email. For presenters, she emphasizes the importance of the last three minutes of your talk. She notes, "The most memorable speakers know the importance of their closing words, and they make sure they end with purpose and passion."

It's exciting to me to have a native Mississippian back home to share her skills and talents. Mandi is a great ambassador for the state as she travels around the country to teach people how to be better communicators. Her passion and enthusiasm for her topic is contagious, and I am inspired to raise the bar in my own writing and speaking skills after spending time with her. I look forward to continuing to watch Mandi's success in the years to come.

Quick Facts:

Mandi Stanley, President of Mandi Stanley Seminars, LLC

First Job: "For three years in high school, I had a column "Teens About Town" in the Amory Advertiser. It was a great job. I was paid to write about who was hanging out at the local hot spots."

Recommend Readings: Eats, Shoots & Leaves (Lynne Truss); The Most Important Place on Earth (Robert Wolgemuth); and Radical (David Platt)

Proudest Moment: "Most recently is the release of my book, The No-Panic Plan for Presenters: An A-to-Z Checklist for Speaking Confidently and Compellingly Anywhere, Anytime, by Pecan Row Press. It's a resource to share the lessons I learned the hard way about being a professional presenter so people can learn from my mistakes instead of their own, and I was thrilled to accomplish that long-term goal."

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