



(U) It's OK to Have a Personality... Most of the Time!

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(U) Some veteran NSAers may recall that eleven years ago DIRNSA arranged for a series of business leaders to come to Fort Meade and talk to us all about leadership. I, for one, marched over to the Friedman Auditorium on three separate occasions to see what was on offer. Two of the talks, to be honest, have faded entirely from my memory, but one speech, by Englishman Barry Gibbons, a one-time CEO of Burger King, had a lasting impact. These many years later I can still remember clearly some of the things he said.

(U) One point he made was that if you want to appeal to the public, just being good at your job isn't enough; you also have to inject some personality into what you do. As I remember it, he reminisced about staying at a certain hotel. When he went into his room, there was a card on a table saying something like, "Hello, I'm Rosa, your maid. I am committed to keeping your room clean, etc. etc." Those kinds of notes are pretty common, so Gibbons didn't pay it much attention. But then he noticed a note on the floor (!?) that read, "Look under the bed." He got on his hands and knees and did as directed. Under the bed he saw a third note: "I clean under here, too! -- Rosa." Gibbons thought to himself, "I think I LIKE this woman Rosa!"

(U) The moral, of course, was that doing the job well is essential, but doing it with **personality** is what really sets one apart.

(U) What does this say about writing? Even if your writing is perfect in a grammatical sense, it may still come up short. If you are trying to get people to read something -- and let's face it, no one is **forcing** them to read it -- you really ought to inject your own personality into the text so it sounds as if it was written by a bona fide person, and not by a robot or a marble statue.

(U) Why is "personality" in writing (or in public speaking, for that matter) usually a good thing? People are social creatures by nature, and if they can hear a human voice in what they are reading or hearing, they find it easier to read, more enjoyable, and more memorable. It's simply better communications.

(U) Some people are nervous about communicating in their own voice in the workplace. They worry that they will be perceived as "unprofessional." I think that fear is baseless in most circumstances. Most high-level national leaders express themselves in their own unique voice... Does anyone accuse **them** of being unprofessional when they do? Harry S. Truman said, "The buck stops here." He did not say, "My function as President is to take responsibility for decisions that were not, or could not be, taken at a lower bureaucratic level." [REDACTED]

(U) Now certainly there are times when using your own voice isn't



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an option. For example, when you write a SIGINT report, you must write in a neutral voice. Why? Because you aren't writing in your own name; rather, you are speaking to outside customers officially on behalf of NSA. (SIGINT reports all say "From: DIRNSA" on them.) Likewise, official policy documents (such as USSIDs) are formal by nature and it would be inappropriate to inject your own personality into one (just the facts, ma'am).

(U) But there are many, many occasions when you **can** use your own voice. Sending an email to everyone in the directorate? Writing a proposal to the boss? Authoring an article for the office newsletter... or *SID today* ? Don't be a robot!

(U) If you do, there's a better chance that **just maybe** someone will remember what you said -- even eleven years later.

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