

COUNTRY ROADS

BY ARVID HUISMAN

Keeping it simple, sweetheart

Years ago I came across a little acronym that helps me almost daily: K.I.S.S. It stands for “Keep It Simple, Stupid.”

How much easier life would be if everyone just kept things simple. Someone, or some thing, always seems to come along and complicate things.



I remember a time years ago when I returned to the office to find a message to return a call. I learned that I was dealing with a hot shot salesman. He told me that my timing was “fortuitous” and asked that I allow him to “elucidate” the value of his

offer. I wanted to say, “Keep it simple, stupid.”

A few days later I told a friend about the phone call. He passed along a list of common phrases written both in the English you and I speak and in “bureaucratese.” The list was so good I held onto it.

You or I might say, for instance, “Turn out the lights when you leave.” The same statement in “bureaucratese” would be “All personnel must extinguish illumination before departing premises.”

Here is a pop quiz. See if you can figure out the following “bureaucratese” statements (answers follow:)

(a) Your writing of recent date at hand and contents duly noted. Kindly allow this to serve as reply thereto. Consideration of your proposal will be an agenda item of the executive committee this week. Be assured your letter will command attention of the committee members present.

(b) An evaluative study will be implemented to become the generative means by which we may articulate identifiable maximizing goals.

© The employment of sulfuric acid as a purgative for pipes clogged with residue is inconsistent with metallic permanence.

Figure them out? If not, here are the same statements in our language

(a) I have received and read your letter and I think your proposal has merit. I will discuss it with our executive committee and let you know our decision.

(b) We will try it and see what works.

© Sulfuric acid eats the heck out of pipes.

The United States does not have a copyright on bureaucratese. A notice to householders from a city in Australia read: “Refuse and rubbish shall not be collected from the site or receptacles thereon before the hour of 8 a.m. or after the hour of 6 p.m. any day. . . .” That would have been better understood if it read: “We will collect your garbage between 8 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.”

In an article in the California Law Review an essay by Richard C. Wydick gave writing advice to attorneys. “To grip and move your reader’s mind,” Wydick wrote, “use concrete words, not abstractions.”

He went on to give an example of how a modern environmental report may describe one of the Old Testament plagues on Egypt. First of all, the King James account of the plague: “As the Lord commanded... (Moses) lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river...and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. And the fish that were in the river died; and the river stank and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 7:20-21)

Now, Richard Wydick’s “bureaucratese” version of the incident: “In accordance with the directive theretofore received from higher authority, he caused the implement to come into contact with the water whereupon a polluting effect was perceived. The consequent toxification reduced the conditions necessary for the sustenance of the indigenous population of the aquatic vertebrates below the level of continued viability. Olfactory discomfort standards were substantially exceeded, and potability declined. Social, economic and political disorientation was experienced to an unprecedented degree.”

It’s scary when 17th century writing is easier to understand than contemporary language.

When someone tries to complicate your day, just remember “K.I.S.S.” Tell them, “Keep it simple, stupid.” (Or, in some cases, “Keep it simple, sweetheart.”)

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FROM THE EDITOR BY LAURA DRUMMY

Why county fairs matter

A few weeks ago, I was able to do one of my favorite job assignments, the county fair coverage. It may sound odd or even a little extreme that the fair is my favorite assignment out of everything I cover in Linn County, but why?



Why would I want to stand out under the baking sun, sweat dripping down my

back and face, to get a photo? Or sit in a hot, old, stinky barn all day to watch some kids get ribbons? Or why fight a crowd and be too close to strangers to get a photo of Jo Dee Messina? Or spend five long, consecutive days on the fairgrounds working and not at home with my family?

Well, because it matters.

The county fair offers more than just a chance to generate income or showcase well-known personalities and acts. It presents a unique occasion for the local community to come together, mingle, gain knowledge, and savor local cuisine and entertainment that spans across the 726 square miles of Linn County all in one location.

This year thousands flocked to Central City to see the fair attractions, but some were able to go through the barns and see each fair project, big or small. I have found over the years covering different county fairs there is always a story behind each fair project and countless hours making preparations for show day. Some may see the many different colors of ribbons and a banner as a nice keepsake, but it is something more for the fair exhibitor: it is the lessons of life.

It is not uncommon for young fair exhibitors to fully comprehend the valu-

able lessons they have learned during their time spent in 4-H or FFA until they have had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences later as an adult. However, many widely recognize that involvement in 4-H or FFA often results in the development of strong leadership skills, to become more well-rounded citizens, and knowledge, to become incredibly useful in both personal and professional lives, providing a foundation for success in life.

When I reflect on my time with fair projects and being involved in FFA, I agree.

When I was a senior in high school, I did a fair project and spent many hours and days with my dad preparing my agronomy exhibit. We would sit for hours back in our office going through the paperwork of how much P, N, K (phosphorus, nitrogen and potassium) we put on, the dates when the corn was planted, when it emerged, how many days until harvest, the variety and so many other details. One of my least favorite parts was the crop history. We would dig back three years to find all the accurate information. I thank God that my dad was organized with his Excel sheets.

We made binders that year and organized them with all the information about the field, with photos of the progression of the crop growing and used laminated sheets to make the info presentable. I was quite pleased with how it came out and proud of all the work my dad and I did.

The agronomy show was split into two days. The first day the judge would come to your field about two weeks before fair week and would walk rows and talk about the soil plant health and where improvements were needed. I was nervous and worried I would forget to tell

the judge something about our crop, or I would misidentify a part of the crop or just put my full foot into my mouth.

The second day was during fair week when we would “show” our crop in a 5-gallon bucket. The show would take many hours as, one by one, we would spend time with the judge recapping the field information and how the crop had grown since we last spoke.

By the end of the night, awards were handed out, and I remember getting a purple ribbon for my project. I felt accomplishment for the hard work I did and proudly displayed that award in our FFA booth. It was a nice feeling to be recognized for the hard work that went into the project, but I look back now and think the experiences allowed me to gain new skills that I carry with me today. I picked up the skills of learning how to organize, balance a financial budget, be involved in the operation, ask questions and gain communication.

When attending the Linn County Fair, I could see with each project across all different shows exhibited some sort of skills being picked up, like critical thinking, problem-solving, time management and communication, to help gain real-world, hands-on experiences in food, fiber and fuel. It didn’t matter if you came from rural or urban Linn County, but the exhibitor learned the lesson of real life.

I could see the skills from my camera lens as I took the champions and reserve champion photos. I could see it when I sat beside the parents watching their child talk to a judge about the project they had just started this year. I could see it in the Clover Kids’ excitement when showing the judge their animal. I

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