

Welcome to Leader's Circle. In this session of Leader's Circle, I want to show you some principles that have helped me learn how to write content that people actually want to read, click on, watch, and I hope these principles are universal. So some of you are going to be writing emails to parents, or you're going to be writing the church newsletter, or you're going to be writing the letter that goes with the tax receipts. Or maybe you're in charge of Instagram or the social media accounts, or perhaps you're titling things for YouTube or for any of your online profile, all of these principles will work and you can make application.

But I've learned some things along the way about what makes people click on content. So a little bit of my backstory, I just started writing online about eight years ago. And I studied this and learn very quickly that there are ways to build an audience and there are ways to get your content completely ignored. So I want to work through some of the principles maybe you'll recognize writing and hopefully when this is done, next time you get an email in your inbox, next time you see a social media post, you will look at it through a different content filter.

So I'm going to assume that when you post a message, wherever you're posting that, whether that's on YouTube, on Instagram, whether you're writing an email, whether you're writing a letter that goes with a tax receipt, you actually want people to read it. And for years, I wrote copy that nobody really read. And it was because I had the wrong viewpoint. And I got very excited about what I was writing about, but nobody's as excited about the organization that you lead as you are. So that's principle number one, is you got to identify your why.

Do you know the average person sees 5,000 advertisements in a day? Some estimates have 10,000 now. So they're getting bombarded by messages. Every time they look at their phone, every time they open their inbox, walking down the street, not only billboards, but you pick up a glass and it's got someone's logo on it. So people are being pitched thousands of times a day and you turn out to be just yet another pitch. So you got to figure out, to cut through the noise, how do you do it? And I would encourage you by starting with the question, why?

Why are you sending this communication? Why are you doing this post? Why are you actually titling a video on YouTube? Why are you sending this email? Why are you writing this letter? Why are you crafting this newsletter? Whatever it happens to be. And then the deeper level, when you really think, okay. What's under the why? It's like, what do you hope will happen as a result of people interacting with this piece of content? Now in marketing terms, they call that the call to action. So sometimes that's like, well, I want people to attend this event. Okay. That's your CTA, your call to action.

Sometimes it's like, I want people to be inspired. Okay. Sometimes it's like, I want to be informed or I want people to be aware or I want people to laugh. Or I want people to smile or I want people to be encouraged or I want people to pray, but you're not just posting content or writing an email because it's part of a quota. It's like, well, I got to do five posts a day, or I got to get this uploaded or else I get fired. Okay. You got to think, now, what do you want to have happen? So when the person that you're writing for accesses that content, what is the action step they will take?

And again, it can be as amorphous as I want them to be encouraged, or I want them to pray, not that praying is amorphous, but... Or I want them to attend or I want them to RSVP. But you want to identify that because if you begin with the end in mind, as Stephen Covey says, you'll probably do a much better job when you're crafting your content. So often when it comes to church or organizational communication, sometimes you want to inform. It's like, hey, this is happening. But yeah. Do you just want to inform them, or do you want them to do something about it? Do they need to RSVP? Do they need to attend? Do they need to mark it on their calendar?

Sometimes you want to invite. It's like, no, we are specifically inviting you to X, Y, Z. And sometimes you want to explain, hey, there's been a lot of talk about this or a lot of confusion, or we're moving through a very uncertain time. We want to give you some background so that we're all together on this. And often, with a lot of content, you just want to connect. You want to connect. You want to emotionally connect with people. You want to stay relationally connected. So just kind of clarify that, because it's amazing how many times when you don't think about that, you just sit down and say, "Okay. I got to send an email. Okay. I got to send a post." And you just kind of write it and you're not intentional about it.

So number one, identify why are you writing it? And what do you want people to do as a result of interacting with your content? Okay. Number two, and this huge, shift your screen view. I can't tell you. I subscribed, [inaudible 00:04:54] weird guy for a number of reasons, I subscribed to newsletters just to read how other people write. And there's some great ones. And there's some terrible ones, but you got to shift your screen view. Nine times out of 10 when people are posting content, they talk about themselves. We are having a sale, 50% off. We are having this event. Hey, our church is [inaudible 00:05:19]. Hey, I have a brand new video. You got to shift your screen view, okay?

This is not about you. If you get one big metaconcept as a result of this month's training, just know that this is not about you, okay? I say to my team all the time, and I tell myself all the time, nobody cares about me. Nobody cares about me. People don't care what I had for breakfast today. People don't care that I just published a new post. People don't care that I just uploaded a new video. People don't care about me. And I need to remember that. Now, a million and a half times a month, people will access the content I write, but I have to remind myself, nobody cares about me. And with all due respect, nobody cares about you.

And this is going to sound even worse. Nobody cares about your church, okay? Nobody cares about your organization. Nobody cares about this video. You're like, what? It's like, no. You know what people care about? And this is just human nature. I'm not saying this is right, I'm just saying it's true. You know what people care about? They care about themselves. They care about themselves. And you are running every time you interact with something, a piece of content, a video, a social media post, an email that you're either going to open or not open, here's the question you're asking subconsciously, what's in it for me? That's what you're asking, asking, right? Why am I going to go to the sale? What's in it for me?

Well, I need new a shirt and the shirts are 50% off and they have my color and my size and my style. Okay. That's it for me. See, that's what people care about. You don't actually care about the fact that the company is having a sale. You care about the fact that you need a shirt. So as a writer, I realized, because I used to spend like forever on church reports and annual reports and emails and that kind of stuff, and I'd be like, "Hey, we are doing this." And then one day I just realized nobody cares. Nobody cares. Obviously, people care about your church. They care about the mission and sure they care about you, but fundamentally, people care about themselves. So you got to shift your screen view.

What is it like when you're sitting on the other side of the screen, when you're on the other side of the phone and you're opening your phone and you're going to look at this, what is that person thinking? What is in it for them? So most of the content I produce is free. I do a lot of free blog posts, free to the listener podcasts, and all the time I'm thinking, how can I come alongside this leader? And how can I answer questions they're actually asking? How can I actually help them with a pain point that they're feeling in their life?

It could be as simple as, I'm not getting along with my staff. Or it could be, I'm not very confident with how I'm doing as a leader. Or it could be, I can't get enough people to come to my church. Or it could be, I'm worried about losing people. Or I don't know how to have an awkward conversation with the staff person about not performing. Okay. If I can get into their head, if I can get into their skin, if I can get into

the head of a parent who's like, "I don't know how to discipline my five-year-old. I just don't know how to do that." Okay. And I can come alongside them and help them solve their problem, well, now we're talking. So you got to shift your screen view.

Don't think about sitting there going, "Oh, I can't wait to get this out." Think about, what's it like to be on the other side of the screen receiving that email, and their question is, what's in it for me? I'm not saying this is good, okay? We live in a fallen world. I'm just saying, that's how people behave. And that is the filter that you use for everything. From what car am I going to buy? Does it fit my budget? Is it the color I like? Is it the size I need? Do I want an SUV? Do I want to pick up? Do I want a car? A sedan?

You're running it through that filter. How is it on fuel? What are the annual maintenance costs? How reliable it is? What all that is, what's in it for me? So when you're inviting someone to an event, a parenting event, what's in it for them? When you're inviting someone to the weekend service, what's in it for them? When you're posting something you want someone to like, what's in it for them? You got to ask that question.

Now again, I know that sounds crass, but that's just how people work. And the good news is you can use that for bad or you can use it for good. So you can come alongside them and you can help them with like, here's a thought that will really encourage you or lift you up, because maybe you're discouraged. So I'm going to help you get encouraged. Or maybe you don't know how to discipline your five-year-old, I'm going to give you a strategy that can really help. Or maybe you don't know how to have that difficult conversation, here's a few things that can guide you in the midst of that conversation.

So shift your screen view because nobody... Again, this is a little bit bold, but I'm an Enneagram eight. As I remind myself all the time, as somebody who sends emails to lots of leaders daily. Nobody cares about your stupid email. Nobody cares about them, but they do care about themselves. So you've got to think about that.

One filter to run your communication through. I co-opted this from Andy Stanley and Lane Jones's book called Communicating for Change, it's in the appendix. But there are five questions to ask whenever you're crafting a message of any kind, including weekend messages, but write down to an email that you're writing to people that you serve, what do I want them to know? Why do I want them to know it? What do I need them to do? And why do I need them to do it? And how do I make it memorable? So what do I need them to know? What's the key point? We have a parent night, Thursday night, or we have a video that's premiering Tuesday afternoon at three o'clock. We want you to watch it for the premiere.

Whatever that is, we want you to click on this and register, okay? So what do I need them to know? Why do I need them to know it? So that gets into the, what's in it for me? Why is this important? Oh, because it can make you a better parent. Oh, because you're going to be able to get together and you're going to be able to do this. Or, oh, because this can help you solve a problem you actually woke up with this morning, okay? So the why creates the urgency and the reason. Then what do I want them to do? RSVP. Okay. That's the call to action, the CTA. All right. I want them to talk to their neighbor, have one conversation with their three-year-old. I want them to cook a meal on their own, whatever that is, that's call to action.

Or this, why do I want them to do it? I want you to do it, and this is where you sell the benefit. Because when you do this, things will be a lot better at work. Because when you do this, you'll get so much clarity. Because when you do this, you will leave encouraged. Because when you do this, you're going to have a more harmonious home. You're going to love being home again, all right? Then how do I make it memorable? We'll get into some of the memorability in a moment, but that's good.

And what if you began to run every piece of communication through that filter, hope that helps you. Okay. Here's another thing that can happen. Say obvious things in non-obvious ways. You're not always going to have a unique message. Sometimes you need to say some pretty obvious things. Like, guess what? We're having church this weekend. Or guess what? We're doing this event that we do every year. Or guess what? We're doing this, right? So it's not always that you get to be super creative, but what's really helpful in getting people's attention is to say obvious things in non-obvious ways.

So I'm going to run you through. Imagine you're reading a blog post and you want to know about how to build trust on a team. Here are five ways to say it. So again, you're probably not going to say anything that hasn't been said before on building trust. Maybe you're that creative, good for you, but imagine you're scanning a blog post. You're still on your phone and you're like, "Oh, I want to build more trust on my team." What if the blog post has five headings and the headings are, be committed. Number two, build trust. Number three, cooperate. Number four, empower your team. And number five, contribute.

So if you look at that, being committed, build trust, cooperate, empower your team, contribute, you're already asleep. So you've already heard that a thousand times in a hundred other places, it's boring. It's not boring. Now, you can say the same thing with non-obvious headlines. So instead of saying, be committed, why don't you put it this way? Phrase it like, demonstrate radical commitment. It's like, okay. That's a little bit different. That packs more octane. Instead of saying, build trust, that's so vanilla, why don't you say, kill distrust.

It's like, there's an action word. And you may want to use something less violent, but there you go. There's something that got your attention. Number three, instead of saying cooperate, what if you said, challenge selfish behavior. Oh, okay. That's more memorable. Then instead of saying, empower your team, which you've heard a million times at a million seminars in beige rooms, okay. Why don't you say, build leaders, not doers? And then finally, instead of contribute, why don't you say, again, you may want to rephrase it, get off your butt?

You're like, so now you're reading, demonstrate radical commitment, kill distrust, challenge selfish behavior, build leaders, not doers and get off your butt. It's like, I don't think I know that. Okay. Now I have to read. You see? And so that's a way of getting people's attention. Now I want to share with you how to write a great opening. So I want you to think about the subject line, whether that's like a headline on an IGTV video, a YouTube video, whether it is a message title, an email subject line, I'm going to give you a little secret weapon. And if you ever read my material, you'll see, I almost never violate this rule.

Use the word you. Use it in the subject line. Use it in the opening line of the email. You can go through my blog [@careynieuwhof.com](http://careynieuwhof.com). Almost every post, this is formulaic but it works, starts with the word you in it. You may have noticed things are changing fast. Here's another one. Have you ever thought, I wonder what would happen if my best team member left? Or you're probably thinking, we're never going to get back to normal. Okay. See, those are just three random examples, but what do they have in common? They use the word you.

And so what you're trying to do is you're trying to let the reader or the viewer know, this is about you. And then if you can get into their head space and actually address a pain point that they're feeling, you've already got their attention, as opposed to go back to the shirt example, shirts 50% off, that's like, what? It's like you could either need a new summer shirt or you're probably searching for that perfect shirt, we've got it at 50% off. You see how that's a better headline? So what are you going to talk about? Then answer the [inaudible 00:15:06], what's in it for me?

So another way of looking at what's in it for me is, how do you keep your kids under control when they're home all weekend? Or how do you keep them under control when you can't do bedtime the way

you want to do bedtime. You see, you're getting into the world, it's getting very specific. Or in leadership, you might be wondering, when can we have in-person attendance again? Or will things ever go back to normal? You see, you're identifying their pain point, and the more you can understand their pain point, a little hint, their pain point is your pain point. So if you've struggled with it, chances are other people have struggled with it.

Ever been so mad that you didn't want to walk into an event with your spouse? I promise you, that's never happened to me. Okay. Perhaps once or twice, but you know why you don't want to walk into the room, because it's so awkward. Man, so many people have been there. So you want to ask a question. You want to find common ground. And sometimes you can tell a story after you've identified the need, then say, "Hey, I was at the gym the other day and I noticed that the vast majority of people never broke a sweat." All right? So you're talking about something very common that people have observed before.

Or everybody was sweating and I realized I wasn't. Okay. So you want to bring them into a world, tell a story, but that's a way of engaging people. Now, a couple of other things. So many leaders leave out the what are they supposed to do? The call to action, okay? You got to be clear and be direct. I hired a consultant years ago to help us with stewardship. And he said, "Carey." He says, "Here's my critique." Because he watched a bunch of my messages. He says, "You're awesome at inspiring, you're great at informing and you're terrible at asking." I'm like, "Oh wow! I paid for that advice?" I'm like, yeah. It was actually a very valuable lesson.

And he was a hundred percent right. Because what I would do is, "Hey, I'd love for you to pray about your giving." And he goes, "You know what you ask people to do? You ask them to pray. You didn't ask them to give." He says, "You need to say, I would love for you to give, or we need you to give, or so I'm challenging you to give." And when there is that direct call to action, so RSVP now or watch this video, that's clear, okay? So many leaders are just all fuzzy. And it's like, where is that?

Couple of other quick points before we wrap up. Number one, remember, most people are reading on their mobile devices or watching on their mobile devices. They're not sitting there with a 32 inch screen reading your long emails. So something that looks really short on a desktop when you're composing it, take a look at the draft on your phone, because what seemed to be just single line, now looks like a whole paragraph on your phone. So that's why shorter is probably better, unless you're really going long on purpose. And remember as well, that people don't read, they scan.

So lots of white space, headings, bold. And just try to make it visually pleasing, because what a lot of people will do is, when you think about a blog post or an email, they scan it. They're just looking. They're saying, "Okay. What have I got here? Okay. That looks interesting. Oh, I don't know about 0.2." Or, "What about 0.3?" Or, "How about these quotes?" And then they're like, "Okay. Now I'm going to read it." So they're scanning it.

And even when you're doing email composition, you want to be very careful with how long your email is, because we've all gotten those single space, super long paragraph emails. And what's the first thing in your mind? You're like, "I'm not reading that." It might only be 300 words, but it feels like 3000. So I don't think you should send long emails, but when you do, make sure you break them up with lots of white space and remember, most people are reading it on their phone.

Final word is, be consistent. People ask all the time if you're launching a podcast or you're writing content on the internet or you're posting on social, do I need to post every hour? Do I need to post once a day? It's like, here's the thing. Just be consistent. If you're going to publish a podcast, if you think you can do a weekly podcast, then do it every week. If you think you can only deliver monthly, then deliver monthly. If you're going to do an email newsletter, never ever call it an newsletter, title it based on what people's pain points are or their interests are.

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But maybe if you think you can write one good email a week, then send one good email. If you can email daily, email daily. If you can do it monthly, then do it monthly. That's fine, but just be consistent because you're making a promise to people. It's like, "Oh yeah. These guys post every three days." But just make a really good quality post using the principles that we talked about. So hope that's helpful. There are some very practical exercises that you can come back to again and again. And thanks so much for joining us for this month's training.