

Grammar Goddess Communication

Look Smart Sound Smart

How I Got Started In The Training Business

-by Susan Rooks, The Grammar Goddess

How did I get started in the training business? Partly pure dumb luck and partly three total strangers who helped me become the Grammar Goddess.

It was 1994. I was unemployed (for the first time ever), looking in the Sunday want ads, and I noticed a really big ad from an international seminar company looking to hire the best and brightest speakers to lead seminars around the country. Paid speaking work. Auditions would be held in two weeks, and applicants were told to prepare an eight-minute business-oriented presentation. And we would be taped.

But I wasn't a speaker. Well, not in my book, anyway. I had been volunteering at a local teen drug rehab for five years, counseling (and attempting to calm) irate parents, many of whom were outraged at having to be a part of something because their kids had been doing drugs and were in the rehab.

I was there two nights a week, and it was intense. I did stand and talk / coach / teach for about an hour each time, but . . . ?

Anyway, I was persuaded to audition. I prepared something lame, and showed up in Somerville, Mass., which is next to Boston, about an hour early because I wasn't sure where Somerville was.

Cue Stranger #1: The Interviewer



I was the only person in the waiting room, and eventually the interviewer came out and we talked for a bit. Chit-chatted. Schmoozed. He finally asked if I wanted to get my audition over with as no one else had shown up. YES! I did. I couldn't get it over fast enough. I was scared silly.

Afterwards, he and I talked a little more because whoever else was supposed to be there then didn't show. I finally went home, sure that it had been a supreme waste of my time and his.

Surprise! A company rep called a couple of weeks later to say they liked my audition (I still wonder what it cost her to say that, because I've seen the tape). But Stranger #1 had labeled me "friendly and coachable." Bless his heart! I guess they figured they could teach me the skills I would need.

The rep wanted to know whether I'd like to start teaching computer skills or budgeting, the topics they most needed presenters for. I understood what she didn't say; those were the ONLY topics available right then. I knew nothing about computers, and since I'd majored in accounting in college, budgeting sounded less scary – and I really wanted the job!

I paid dearly for that decision.



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Cue Stranger #2: The Angry Man

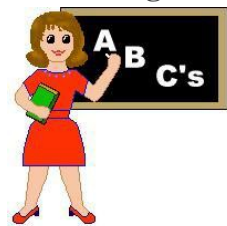


On the morning of my second day “teaching” budgeting somewhere in Pennsylvania, an attendee stood and loudly proclaimed that I was the WORST presenter he had ever heard or seen, that I knew nothing about the topic (I had just said something backwards because I was so nervous), and that he was going to demand his money back! He then stalked out to stunned silence.

I called the company, told my manager I would finish out the two-week assignment, but never again. I refused to teach budgeting, and I was sure I would be let go. But, surprise! The company agreed to let me learn other topics (my guardian angel was working overtime that week!).

They offered me grammar (another topic no one else wanted), and that proved to be the right topic – eventually.

Cue Stranger #3: My Savior, The English Teacher



While I was more interested in learning to teach grammar than budgeting, I wasn’t very good at it either, not at first. Few of us are brilliant in the early days, right? As they say, you don’t know what you don’t know – until you do.

But I enjoyed the work, I didn’t get yelled at, and I was feeling sure that I had made the right decision. Grammar was easy to teach!

So after about three months, when a nice woman came up to me at the end of the day, handed me her copy of the workbook, and mentioned that she had enjoyed my presentation, I was happy!

She also said I might benefit from a couple of ideas she had, and she hoped I’d have time to look at the workbook and see her suggestions.

But, of course I would! I beamed at her. What a lovely woman! I floated on air and appreciation. I got to my hotel room and eagerly opened the workbook.



The workbook dripped red ink. Bled all over the place. Only a few pages didn’t have red marks on them.

I was mortified! I had no idea I had made so many mistakes and obviously neither did my audiences for over three months. But she did. She was an English teacher, apparently a good one. And she was kind enough to sit through the whole day – I would not have been able to do that – and hand me her workbook, privately, with all her notes in RED ink, smiling all the way.



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I have blessed her every day since.

So how did I finally become the Grammar Goddess?

First, there were those three strangers who propelled me in a direction I never imagined, to a goal I never knew I had. I wish they could know how much they helped me even if that wasn't their intent.

Second, I finally had the right topic with the passion to do it correctly. I cared about the mistakes I made in the early months. I cared that I had given bad information. So I crawled all over the topic, rule by rule, page by page, until I knew the correct answers to just about anything a student could ask – at least in those seminars.

Third, there was my own need to excel. I refused to be less than the expert my students expected. That's still true to this day.

It still matters to me that business professionals – smart people – are confused about this foundation topic. And they're losing credibility as a result.

It still matters to me that they don't always know they've goofed.

It still matters to me that they don't always know whom to turn to for answers. So I will

keep on keepin' on, helping however I can.

I will continue to help all business professionals look and sound as smart as they are.

Is there something I can help you with?

