

points of view

Circumlocutions often obscure real meaning

BUSINESS PEOPLE sometimes dislike news people because we come straight to the point.

"Taxes are up." "The chief exec was forced out."

As you study the following 200 words of business prose, which many folks received in the recent mail, ask yourself: What are they actually doing to the price I pay?

"TO MICHIGAN Bell Customers in the Farmington zone:

"This notice is to inform you of certain changes in the rates for telephone service in the Farmington zone which may affect you.

"Each exchange or zone of the Michigan Bell Telephone Company is classified into one of several Rate Groups which determines the monthly rates for local telephone service. The Rate Group for each exchange or zone is based on the number of telephone access lines in the local service area of that exchange or zone.

"The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) has authorized the reclassification of an exchange or zone from one Rate Group to another, whenever the number of telephone access lines in the local service area increases beyond the established limits, and continues above those limits for a period of 12 months.

"The Farmington zone is now in Rate Group E. However, as the number of telephone access lines in the local service area has been above the limits of Rate Group E for the past 12 months, we are now requesting authority from the MPSC to reclassify the Farmington zone to Rate Group F."

After the reader has waded through these circumlocutions, the company doesn't come to the point — it merely hints:

"The table on the enclosed sheet shows the rates for Rate Groups E and F, along with the month increase, if any, applicable to the various classes of telephone service."

A Journalist's translation of this



Tim Richard

verbage: Most of our telephone bills are going up. Some will remain level. Nobody's getting a cut.

THE ALL-TIME mealy mouthed business news release was spotted and skewered by my crony Bob Lewis, now with the Booth-Newhouse Washington bureau. It came to mind a few months ago when he was in Detroit to speak to brother and sister news people at a Sigma Delta Chi meeting.

We were at the Kalamazoo Gazette when Lewis, then business editor, got a handout about a retirement of a relatively obscure employee at the Shakespeare Co. It waxed

eloquent about good ol' Sam's beloved nature for several paragraphs, at the conclusion of which it was revealed that a certain fishing reel manufacturing operation was being shifted to Arkansas.

Lewis' journalistic translation: 400 Shakespeare workers in Kalamazoo were losing their jobs.

FOOTNOTE: Last year I went shopping for a new spinning reel, the better to attract the wily trout, and felt I should "buy American." Fat chance. I visited five stores, including one that specialized in outdoor sporting goods and another that specialized only in fishing tackle.

No one sold an American-made reel. No one even sold a European-made reel. All the reels, even those with the Shakespeare brand name, were made in Japan and Taiwan.

What do you label that? Retrenchment? Broad-based restructuring? Repositioning of resources?

I'd say a lot of Yanks lost manufacturing jobs.

SO PUBLIC officials are shocked. If you are the ordinary, everyday taxpayer you probably aren't shocked yet because you haven't noticed.

What we're talking about here is that long-range bill you're going to get in the mail to clean up that cesspool that many still call a river. You know, the Rouge, a stream that for most living organisms is uninhabitable.

Public officials say the figures to clean up the Rouge are "mind-boggling." A recent study by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments says we will pay an estimated \$2 billion in the next 20 years.

The initial big step will be construction of what has been labeled "Supersewer." We'll pay a tidy \$54 million.

Some communities could pay as much as \$8 million a year to rid ourselves of what is nothing short of a public disgrace.

Wait a second, now. Hold on to your wallet. Sure the initial reaction to this kind of spending, especially when the government is involved, is mindboggling.

But avoid being deceived. Avoid being taken in by public officials



Steve Barnaby

who seem perplexed over this disaster.

Mindboggling is the fact this river was ever allowed to get in this kind of condition in the first place. Mindboggling is the fact that our local officials have sat back for decades and let our communities develop in such a way as to destroy a river.

You see, it's you and I who pollute the river everyday. Sure, industry does contribute. But you and I, the individual taxpayer, contribute the most. We've built our homes along the river and our raw sewage dumps into it every day.

Sure we didn't mean to do it. After all, we told ourselves, the river would always carry it away. And when the suburbs were sparsely in-

habited, pollution was a minor problem.

But now we have a river that kills fish, plants and animals. We have a river that can harm human beings because of the pollution it contains.

Now \$2 billion over 20 years spread across 50 communities in Wayne, Oakland and Washtenaw counties really isn't that much money. With the help of the federal and state governments, the payments would be a lot easier to make.

After all, cleaning up a polluted river in our community really is more important than overthrowing a government with which we disagree. Making a river clean enough to swim in is much more cost efficient than building a bridge that we really don't need.

We, as responsible taxpayers, really must pay more attention to what our government officials are doing. It's just not enough to make light of the fact that we don't think they do much.

Their actions of neglect can be just as harmful as any bill they might pass or ordinance they might enact.

Think about it the next time "mindboggling" comes to mind.

In this case, silence surely not golden



Rich Perlberg

Toth was the person to talk to but that he was in a meeting and unavailable. Each time a reporter left a message asking that he call. More than once, a reporter said that only one side of the story was being told, and we wanted to hear the Harper Woods' version. Not one call was returned.

Ditto for the police department where repeated calls got the same response: Only Chief Gary Ford

could answer questions. He was never available. He never returned calls.

Perhaps if these officials returned calls, they could explain why Toth said the press exaggerated the story while the police thought the incident so serious that Rogers was originally charged with inciting a riot. Maybe riots aren't big deals in Harper Woods.

TOTH HAD every right to reserve comment until he had a firm grip on what happened. Cranbrook officials did not respond to press queries until Tuesday afternoon. By then they had a lengthy statement about their version of events.

But Harper Woods was silent, which is mystifying. Cranbrook officials essentially accused the school

district of blatantly ignoring repeated racial slurs. Harper Woods officials say that's not the case, but their denial was two weeks in the coming.

If nothing else, an official could have said: We regret the incidents of last Friday night, but we do not believe our students were guilty of racial taunts. In fact, we wish to stress that our school openly welcomes any and all visitors. We will have a more complete statement after a complete investigation.

Instead they said nothing, which is unfortunate. Perhaps they were spending the last two weeks scouring the school for the full story. But their long silence will make some believe that they were busy preparing a whitewash.

That's not fair to anyone.

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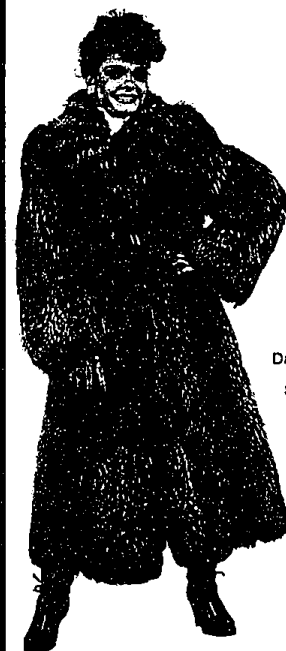
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