



# PUBLIC RELATIONS 101

## Proofreading

**N**o one is born with proofreading skills, but grooming these skills will certainly pay off in the long run no matter what you do. Whether you write cold call or direct mail letters, produce publications, or even write simple emails, be aware that a typo of any kind can spell trouble on the other side of the communication. Sometimes mistakes are made simply because we are not machines, but mere mortals. Don't let errors in any communication that leaves your office say the wrong thing about your company's professionalism or credibility.

Here are some proofreading tips:

- 1. Plan for proofreading.** It is not something you do only if you have the time. Accuracy, your reputation, and the credibility of your business or organization are at stake so make the time. On major printing projects, like Annual Reports, schedule two to three rounds of proofreading, so when you are ready to release the job to the printer it is clean. AAs (author's alterations) or corrections on the blue line (final printer's proof) can be costly and will eat up your budget quickly. For letters or other smaller pieces set aside up to an hour for proofreading.
- 2. Three times is a charm.** Go over the document or publication two to three times, proofreading for one thing at a time. Check for missing content as well as typos, grammar, and punctuation. Double
- check numbers and percentages to see if they add up. This is particularly important on pie charts and financial summaries.
- 3. Be alert.** Plan to proofread at the time of day that you are most alert. If you are a morning person, complete your writing the day before and proofread in the morning. Incorporate into your schedule time to put the project aside and then proofread with fresh eyes.
- 4. Recruit colleagues.** Proofreading your own work can be dangerous. Identify the detail-oriented people in your office and recruit them as additional proofreaders on important projects. I like using two additional proofreaders besides myself. Have the last person be someone who isn't familiar with the project. This person will be great for identifying content that may be confusing or isn't explained well.
- 5. Write for your audience.** In addition to proofreading for accuracy, make sure your word choice; writing style and tone are appropriate for the recipient or audience. You may have the same information that you need to distribute to your employees, your board members and your volunteers. Each piece needs to be tweaked for each particular group. Give them all the same thing and you risk alienating them and not reaching them with your message, making your communications piece a big waste of money and time.
- 6. Use your software.** You would be hard pressed to find software that doesn't have spell and grammar check. Use it first and then proofread again.

