

Risk Communication and Miscommunication: Case Studies in Science, Technology, Engineering, Government, and Community Organizations

Carolyn R. Boiarsky. 2016. Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado Press. [ISBN 978-1-60732-466-9. 140 pages, including index. US\$20.95 (soft cover).]



Boiarsky dissects communications surrounding environmental and other disasters in the US during the last few decades to show what went wrong (and sometimes right) within the companies and government agencies involved. In the process, she analyzes not only the content of emails and letters leading up to the

event in question but also the form and timing of the communication in question. Most of her examples are drawn from internal memos, emails and letters, but some relate to publicly provided information.

This book delves into the communications before the 1992 Chicago flood, the 2011 Mississippi flood, the 2003 *Columbia* space shuttle breakup, 2010 Deepwater *Horizon* oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the 2012 expansion of the Enbridge pipeline, and persuasive writing by two sides of the controversy over the continued extraction of coal. As Boiarsky acknowledges, not everyone will be familiar with the details of these events. She therefore provides a list of resources, organized by book chapter, that provide additional background on each issue.

While explaining the inappropriate decisions the writers of most of the book's sample texts made, Boiarsky also offers ideas on how those communications could have been improved, concluding with guidelines for effective PowerPoint presentations—a form of communication many of us deliver not infrequently. Most of us are not involved in projects as large and potentially dangerous as those in this book. Yet we can still learn from these examples how to better shape our own writing to avoid misunderstanding, place appropriate emphasis on key pieces of information, and make sure our message is heard clearly.

One complaint from this reviewer: The sample texts are included as relatively small images that are hard to

read. Larger images or inclusion of the samples' content within the text of the book—perhaps as sidebars—would have been helpful for following and evaluating Boiarsky's arguments.

As I write this, the US just elected its 45th president. Messaging—both overtly and implicitly—played an important role in the campaigns leading up to the election. We would do well to critically examine what our own writing communicates or implies and whether it places appropriate weight on the points we want to make. As communication professionals, we need to counter demagoguery with clear, concise, and audience-focused reasoning.

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Please Make This Look Nice: The Graphic Design Process

Peter Ahlberg. 2016. New York, NY: Skira Rizzoli. [ISBN 978-0-8478-4834-8. 272 pages, including index. US\$39.95 (softcover).]



Description from the Drawing Center website: "Equal parts design inspiration and manual, *Please Make This Look Nice* combines interviews, writings, case studies, and personal ephemera from celebrated designers into a solid primer for designers and design enthusiasts alike."

This book may or may not become a teaching tool, but this non-designer found it to be an engaging excursion through the current graphic design culture. My work is in documentation and procedures, with graphics work limited to screen shots and flow charts. Those are useful elements, but having a guided tour