

THE ENGLISH OF BUSINESS

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The English of business by Franklyn B. Snyder & Ronald S. Crane

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FRANKLYN B. SNYDER & RONALD S. CRANE

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OF
BUSINESS

BY
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AND
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THE ENGLISH OF BUSINESS

CHAPTER I.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH IN BUSINESS.

I. Why Worry About English?

1. The student who is looking forward to a business career is inclined to dislike anything that takes his attention from the profession he has chosen to master. Accordingly, when some one says to him, "You should learn more about English, it will help you in your work," he is likely to reply with a question: "Why should I worry about that? If I know my own business I'll get on all right, won't I?" And not infrequently he turns away from his adviser, confident that the study of English has little or no place in the training of a business man or woman.

2. Yet many people know that this skepticism concerning the importance of English in business is not shared by progressive men of affairs. Large firms are every day establishing classes in English for the benefit of their employeés; questions concerning correct usage come with astonishing regularity to teachers of English. It is plain that the gulf which once was thought to separate the business man and the teacher is rapidly narrowing. The teacher can learn much from his friend in business; the business man can learn some things from the schoolmaster.

3. When they have gone so far as to accept in a vague way this truth that good English has a place in successful business, some persons, however, make a mistake. They think that there is such a thing as "business English,"

entirely different from the literary English of the schools. They realize that the phraseology of a business letter differs in many respects from that, say, of Macaulay's *Essays*, and are inclined to make for themselves a new business rhetoric, and to feel, unconsciously perhaps, that the less they interest themselves in the old principles, the easier it will be to master the new.

4. In a limited way, of course, this is true. The ordinary student of English, unless he be a sort of "perpetual Freshman," has in mind the attainment of "style"; he is interested in the creation of beauty—to use words of perhaps too large significance. The typical business man has no such ideal. His purpose is, let us say, to sell automobiles. If by his writing he can realize this ambition, he is quite satisfied. He does not concern himself with æsthetics. And yet to think that the English he uses differs in any fundamental way from that of his friend who writes short stories, is to err. There is no more a "business English" than there is an "historical English" or a "geological English"; it is all one speech, one written language. What differences there are between the pages composed by story-teller, historian, geologist, and automobile salesman, arise only from the necessity of adapting one written language to the solution of different problems.

5. To return, however, to the main question: why is it that thoughtful people today realize that good English, in the large—and true—sense of the phrase, has an important relation to business? Why are firms and individuals each year paying more attention to the letters and other written matter they send out? Why should the young business man undertake to master the writing and speaking of English?

6. First of all, because the habitual use of good English, whether in speaking or writing, helps one to make a good impression upon other people. It is in a real sense a mark

of distinction. A business house is particular about the appearance of its letter paper; it should be equally concerned with what is written on that paper. The young man who is advised to be careful about his personal appearance, in order to make a favorable impression upon his associates or employers, should be equally careful about his use of the national tongue.

7. Today, as most people know, the bulk of all business is transacted by letter. A firm is known to its clients not only by the goods it sells, but by the letters it writes. It often makes its first appeal to a prospective customer by a letter. If the letter is carefully typed, on good paper, and is well composed, it makes a favorable initial impression. The high school graduate applying for a position writes a letter; if it is a good letter, he may receive a personal interview. The outcome of that interview will depend to a considerable extent upon the candidate's ability to express himself well in conversation. From this point of view, then, a command of English is highly desirable: it enables one to make a better impression, in writing or in speaking, than is possible when one is not master of his tongue or pen.

8. In the second place, a good command of English will enable a person to convey ideas to other people effectively; it will help him to do more business. The world of trade moves through the exchange of ideas. Smith has something to sell; Jones wants to buy. If Smith can show Jones that Smith's goods will satisfy his demand, he will get the business he wishes. Whether or not he succeeds will depend to a considerable extent on his ability to express himself in English.

9. This practical value of the command of a language has seldom been more clearly recognized than by Benjamin Franklin and Lincoln. Neither man had the opportunity to secure a formal education; each man yearned for power to