

Brand You: Work on Your Writing

Some people skim-read books, which is perfectly fine. I certainly admit that I do so a lot of the time, as well. But I was recently reading a Phillip Roth book called *American Pastoral*, and I absolutely slowed down to a crawl. And the reason I did was that it was so clear that every single word was chosen with such incredible precision. Yes, I *do* write for a living, and so maybe I shouldn't be making this particular rant. But I am blown away by the power of powerful and carefully crafted writing.

In the age of email, in the age of Twitter and tweeting and so on, we've gotten rid of a lot of our grammar, and we use really half-baked construction. And they say that that's particularly true of people who are a heck of a lot younger than I am. I don't deny that for a minute, nor do I deny that that's the way I make it through life in modern communication as well. But I *do* guarantee you—at least I suppose if you're over age 26 or 27—that the quality of written communication is still incredibly important. And most of our executives, or many of our executives, are in their 40s or their 50s, so it's particularly important if one is communicating with people like that.

There's very good news. I'm an engineer. I was trained as an engineer. When I got out of my engineering school—which incidentally was Cornell, and I say that because it was a terrific school that made me a much worse writer than when I arrived from high school—I couldn't put together an articulate paragraph. I do not confuse myself today with Phillip Roth, believe me. But I write a heck of a lot better than I did 20 or 30 years ago. And 99.7 percent of the reason, no surprise, is I do it a lot.

Writing *can* be worked on. Writing *should* be worked on. I'm not talking about a short email—albeit with a short email to your boss two levels up who's 53 years old, it may make a lot of difference. Work on your writing.

I believe—and you'll never convince me otherwise—it is a *timeless* and *powerful* skill.