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EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION  
AND WRITING

WEXNER HERITAGE PROGRAM  
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**Reflective Questions**

How would you describe your writing style?

What is the main kind of writing you do in your leadership?

What's a struggle for you in writing, if you feel at all challenged by it?

If you could write a book on any subject, what would it be and give us your title?

**Jewish Text Framing**

"Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets which were written on both sides; they were written on one side and the other. The tablets were God's work, and the writing was God's writing engraved on the tablets." Exodus 32:15-16

"You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Deuteronomy 6:9

"So it shall be on the day when you cross the Jordan to the land which the Lord your God gives you, that you shall set up for yourself large stones and coat them with lime and write on them all the words of this law, when you cross over, so that you may enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you." Deuteronomy 27:2-3

“It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete...” Deuteronomy 31:24

“And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.” Joshua 24:26

"Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book.'" Jeremiah 30:2

"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put My law within them and on their heart. I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Jeremiah 31:33

### **Text Questions**

- From these many verses, why do you think writing was regarded as such a sacred activity?
- How does writing create a text-based culture?
- How is writing used in Jewish law and rituals?

### **Leadership Learning**

*Identify a quote that resonates with you about writing and tell us why.*

“I love deadlines. I love the whooshing noise they make as they go by.” Douglas Adams

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” Maya Angelou

“What really knocks me out is a book that, when you’re all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it. That doesn't happen much, though.” J. D. Salinger

“There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.” Ernest Hemingway

“You have to write the book that wants to be written. And if the books will be too difficult for grown-ups, then you write it for children.” Madeleine L’Engle

“If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write.” Stephen King

“Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind.” Virginia Wolf

“We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospect.” Anais Nin

“One day I will find the right words, and they will be simple.” Jack Kerouac

### **Writing for Impact**

Skill-based observations from Jay Sullivan’s *Simply Said: Communication at Work and Beyond*:

### **Word Choice Matters**

“You can take three very specific steps that will allow you to write better. First, challenge every word you use and get rid of the clutter. Then, when you have only the words you need, make sure they are the best words you can use to convey your idea. This means using strong verbs. Finally, look at whether you have made clear who is accountable for the action in the sentence...Remember: the longer your document, the less likely it is to be read. Keep it short so that people read your ideas and act on them. That’s how you have impact.” (129)

### **Pronouns Matter**

“Because your writing should be focused less on yourself and more on the other person, there should be far more ‘you’s’ than ‘I’s’ in your writing, roughly two-to one. Remember: It’s all about the other person. If you review the document and find a lot of

sentences beginning with ‘I’ chances are you’re making the document more about yourself than about the audience.” (155)

### **Brevity Matters**

“Aim for a maximum of 17 words per sentence. Once a sentence exceeds that length, it becomes hard for our brains to process the information.” (155)

“Sometimes we have to share complex thought. In that case, write a long sentence. But two or three long sentences in a row become burdensome for the reader.” (157)

“Keep paragraphs to a quarter of the page at most; anything longer is visually intimidating.” (157)

### **Here’s Where You Come In...**

*Let’s use these skills to write three brief documents:*

A thank you note of no more than five lines for a six-figure gift:

A paragraph thanking volunteers that will be included in a letter:

An e-mail to let your board know about a difficult development in the organization (make one up):

Write three sentences (no more than 40 words in total) to describe an organization in which you currently lead or where you once led that are punchy, meaningful and personal: