

So What? How to Communicate What Really Matters to Your Audience

By Mark Magnacca

Book Review

Reviewed by Barbara A. Culver, CFP®, ChFC, CLU, AEP

Barbara Culver, CFP®, ChFC, CLU, AEP, is a widely known legacy planner, consultant, speaker and author. Her Purposeful Planning™ program, www.purposeful-planning.com, an intensive course involving instructors from different professions, trains advisers to transform their way of working with clients to sustain legacies.

After reading So What? How to Communicate What Really Matters to Your Audience, it seems that in some ways, the book cover goes directly to the heart of the matter. It's not just that the title of the book is so direct, it's that the cover graphic, with the title at an angle-turned on its ear-nails the concept. For what author Mark Magnacca does in the book is to ask the reader to shift his or her thinking in much the same way.

Most of us, for most of our careers, have been taught to be very clear about what we want to say and how we want to explain our subject matter to our audiences-either in formal settings or casual conversations. But clarity alone doesn't guarantee that our audience truly "gets" what we're trying to say.

"It's tough, but true," writes Magnacca in the book, "the people you're trying to communicate with, sell to, or convince don't really care about you, nor about what you're offering them ... until they understand exactly how it'll benefit them." That's the "ah ha" of the book. And the corollary is, "If you help enough people get what they want, you can have anything you want."

It's not a complex concept, yet its simplicity is deceiving. It almost seems like a "duh" concept, but it remains a constant challenge for people to think about what's important to others when trying to impress them with their offerings. For whatever reason, people often tend to be complacent, thinking about things as they always have. When we shift our perspective from ourselves to others, the world looks different.

Magnacca offers a straightforward process for helping the reader make the shift. Once he's shown through one of the many real-life examples included in the book how impossible it is to engage an audience that doesn't see the benefit to them of what you're communicating, he explains how to make the necessary changes. He describes the process as the "So What Filter," which enables you to see information in a new way-i.e., how it will benefit the person(s) with whom you are interacting.

Magnacca outlines three critical questions-the "So What Matrix"-which every communicator must ask him or herself.

The first is "for what?" For what reason are you giving your presentation (or otherwise communicating with people)?

The second question is "so what?" Why is this important to the audience?

And finally, "now what?" What do you want to have happen as a result of this communication?

(If you want to try applying the "So What Filter" to one of your own speeches or presentations, take a highlighter and strike out everything that does not clarify to your audience what's in it for them.)

In response to his own "now what?" question, Magnacca invites the reader to participate in his 21-day challenge, a mini coaching program to help reinforce the key concepts of the book. He offers more information about this on the Web site www.sowhatbook.com. It's a reasonable commitment to achieve the objectives set out in the first chapter of the book: Engage your audience because you are more relevant; Make more money; Get what you want in life.

Maybe it really is that easy.

FT Press (2009)
\$12.99