

With budget cuts and fewer resources to go around, we are just going to have to figure out how to do more with less," says almost every departmental supervisor in the United States.

This statement has been the American mantra for much of my professional career. Overused to the point of nausea, it has become a cliché in our cultural vocabulary. However, I am here to officially set the record straight. If you give me fewer resources, you are going to get less, not more. Just in case that isn't clear, I will restate it this way. If you give me less, you will get less, and the less that you do get will be lousy.

One of several jobs I had in high school was working at the old city cemetery. The venerable old sextant, Roscoe Jenkins, would sit on the truck tailgate chewing Brown's Mule while holding court every day on a range of subjects. One of them was his version of what I would later come to know as the Project Management Triangle. The textbook definition of the triangle goes like this: The quality of work is constrained by a project's budget, deadlines, and scope; a project manager can trade between constraints; and changes in one constraint necessitate changes in others to compensate or quality will suffer. Let me translate using Roscoe Jenkins' words: "If something you want is good and fast, it won't be cheap; if it's good and cheap, it won't be fast; and if it's fast and cheap, it won't be good."

Increasing efficiency is always a good idea, and it is often where we see the greatest gains in any kind of endeavor. But there is this thing called a 24-hour day, and people certainly have physical, mental, and emotional ceilings. These are constraints or barriers that cannot be overcome or crossed. Doing more with less eventually leads to organizations and individuals doing a lot of things poorly and doing absolutely nothing well. If our overlords are successful in brainwashing us with this less-equals-more logic, in the future no one will do anything well and everyone will do everything poorly.

If I heard it once, I heard it a thousand

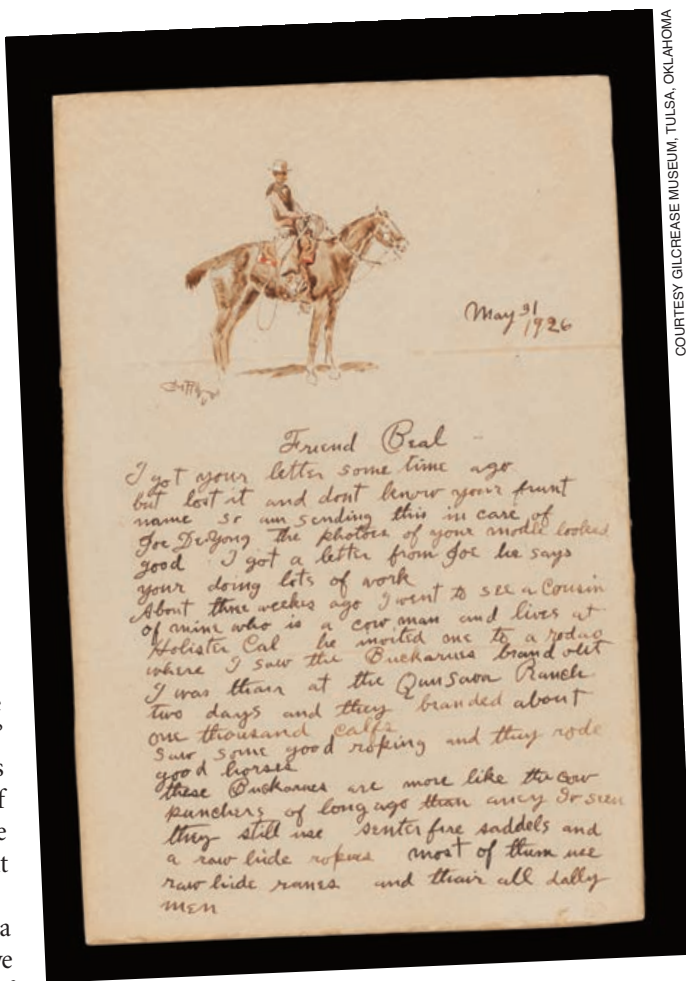
TALES FROM THE WASTELAND

Just Write a Letter

If it's fast and cheap, it won't be good.

By Barry Perryman, Ph.D.

times growing up, "Use your head for something besides a hat rack." So here is my simple remedy for fighting back against the stupidity inherent in the system. Write a letter. I don't mean a letter of complaint about the mantra



COURTESY GILCREASE MUSEUM, TULSA, OKLAHOMA

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to your boss or the governor. I mean write a letter. Just write a simple letter to a friend, a relative, a loved one, a grandchild, or anybody. If letter writing catches on with everyone (as it did with Charlie Russell), maybe it will do some good.

How, you ask? To do something well requires an investment in time and resources, not a relinquishment. It requires critical thinking, creativity, organization and time. I

have university students today who do not know how to address an envelope, let alone write a letter. Their creative writing skills subsist of emails, texts and tweets. How can we, as a society, neglect teaching and practicing such a simple yet magnificent skill?

Here are a few examples of first lines from Civil War era letters: "Dear Friend, I take present opportunity of dropping you a few lines in answer to your very kind note which came to hand a few days past and was gladly received. I was glad indeed to hear from friends who I esteem so high as you."

"My dearly beloved Florence! Several days have passed and I have not heard from the 'girl I love'! If you knew how anxious I am about you I know you would write very, very often."

"Dear Son Arthur, William Porter I expect will start for your camp tomorrow. We shall send some things by him. Mother and the boys have written all the news I suppose so that I shall not have much to write."

These letters are simple in their beauty. The authors all critically thought about what needed to be said, how it should be said, and in what order it would be said. They also understood the value of composing something of quality within a resource-limited environment. Access to writing materials and postal stamps was generally limited back then, but they recognized the need for quality even under those conditions.

Isn't it amazing how a simple act of writing a letter could potentially teach a child about the Project Management Triangle (aka, good, cheap, and fast), and how to be prepared when some future supervisor tries to con them into believing they can do more with less? So here is my challenge: Just write a letter with a kid, or write a kid a letter.

Take the time and effort to create something of quality. I think I'll sit and write one too...and hope they can still read cursive. ■

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