

The Art of Explanation - Making Your Ideas, Products and Services Easier to Understand

Lee LeFever

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The Art of Explanation - Making Your Ideas, Products and Services Easier to Understand Lee LeFever
Your guide to becoming an explanation specialist.

You've done the hard work. Your product or service works beautifully - but something is missing. People just don't see the big idea - and it's keeping you from being successful. Your idea has an explanation problem.

The Art of Explanation is for business people, educators and influencers who want to improve their explanation skills and start solving explanation problems.

Author Lee LeFever is the founder of Common Craft, a company known around the world for making complex ideas easy to understand through short animated videos. He is your guide to helping audiences fall in love with your ideas, products or services through better explanations in any medium.

You will learn to:

- Plan: Learn explanation basics, what causes them to fail and how to diagnose explanation problems.
- Package: Using simple elements, create an explanation strategy that builds confidence and motivates your audience.
- Present: Produce remarkable explanations with visuals and media.

The Art of Explanation is your invitation to become an explanation specialist and see why explanation is now a fundamental skill for professionals.

The Art of Explanation - Making Your Ideas, Products and Services Easier to Understand Details


Date : Published October 23rd 2012 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (first published October 3rd 2012)

ISBN : 9781118374580

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Format : Paperback 256 pages

Genre : Business, Nonfiction, Language, Communication, Writing, Self Help

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Greg says

This wasn't a worthless read, and I may even reference a few things in the future. But this book was too general to be the guide that I was looking for. The author, as he himself analogizes, kind of left me standing by the side of the pool instead of helping me to jump in.

My particular complaint is that the author consistently, in word and deed, underestimates the danger of ignoring and annoying more knowledgeable audience members on any topic. This book annoyed me, because I already thought enough of explanation to specifically search for and buy a book on how to explain concepts. But the book itself spends most of its time trotting out the basics and explaining its own need for existence.

I'm not saying it didn't have good points and thought-provoking pieces to it, but I *spent money on a book about explaining* and got a book that I probably could have written myself. Explaining is a big part of my job, to be sure, so I may know more than a lot of others who don't often have to explain complicated things, but that's exactly why I bought a book on explaining in the first place.

The author believes that there's not much danger in writing an explanation to reach the whole range of understanding levels by sacrificing specificity and accuracy where it helps understanding. That can be a good point, but the author is likely to believe that because he owns a company that makes money by simplifying things so that newbies can understand them. In my work, I'm often asked to explain software limitations to angry doctors and hospital executives. I don't have three weeks to refine a simplified message for my audience, and the possible result of annoying the more advanced audience members is that nothing ever gets done because we never talk about the true nature of the issue.

Which, yet again, is not to say that this book was worthless. There are good points that can be applied to my own situation. But as a professional who works with explanations daily, I found it to be more general than I expected and less specifically helpful.

UPDATE: After thinking on it a little bit more, what I hoped to see in the book was more strategies for "how to make people understand something complex *once*." A lot of my own job is getting approval for things from non-experts. The non-experts have to be informed on what they're deciding on exactly once, and this has to happen often several times a day. So what I wanted was more conversational techniques, information about what kinds of phrases and strategies cause confusion, how to recover from making an unclear statement, etc. This book wasn't that specific.

Tigran Mamikonian says

[illegible]

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Ryan O'Connor says

One of the things that interested me about this book was the concept that explaining is a skill. Like any skill, your ability to help people understand the world around them can be improved. This book does several things well in its three main parts, planning, packaging, and presenting explanations. Coming from the data analysis / business intelligence field, it's easy to become enamored with an analysis, but until other people understand what you understand, you haven't finished your analysis.

Long story short, great book for improving your ability to increase understanding.

Stephen says

It is simple to understand and gives me a different perspective of the importance of Explanation.

Juan says

Must-read for communicators but it will not show nothing new if you are already doing talks and presentations often.

Jay says

I like the kind of book that takes a narrow topic, makes it somewhat unique, and just tells you how to do something. The Common Craft folks, purveyors of videos that explain things, define their niche and show exactly how it's done. It ain't rocket science, but their product has a well-thought out method behind it. In my book, good business books either change your way of thinking or make you want to act, and this one does both, in a relatively short volume. Well done.

Siran says

This book gave me so much confidence in my abilities to explain something to people. It works in all areas of life! Thanks to the author.

Susan says

I really love this book. I find the illustrations helpful, especially the visual aid of the A-Z scale of understanding and the objective of helping others progress along that scale.

Jeff says

A must-read for communicators, or anyone who has to explain information, concepts or presents. My notes:

Explanation: An explanation describes facts in a way that makes them understandable. The intent of an explanation is to increase understanding.

What do great explainers have in common: empathy. Great explainers have the ability to picture themselves in another person's shoes and communicate from that perspective.

Without a way to explain something effectively, we limit its ability to spread.

Packaging ideas focus on a few elements:

Agreement -- Big picture statements that most people will recognize. "We can all agree gas prices are rising."

Context -- Gives the audience a foundation for the explanation and lets them know why it should matter to them. "More of your hard earned income is going to pay for transportation."

Story -- Applies the big idea to a narrative that shows how the change can impact someone. "Meet Sally; she's tired of paying so much for gas and needs alternatives."

Connections - Accompany stories and provides analogies/metaphors. "Sally could see that taking the bus was like multitasking because she could work and communicate at the same time."

Descriptions - Direct communication focused on why? "Sally found that she could save more than \$20 a week by taking the bus three times weekly."

Conclusion - wraps up the package with a summary of what was learned. "The next time gas prices get you down, remember..."

Content is king, but context is the kingdom.

Think of your audience this way: There are ten people in a room. Two with little interest, six with interest, and two experts.

Your challenge is to reach all of them.

Facts give stories substance. Stories give facts meaning.

Elements of a Common Craft script:

Agreement. Context. Story. Connection. Description. Realization of solution. Call to action.

Abdulaziz Alzain says

This book is a must read! If you want to be the CEO (Chief Explanation Officer) at your organization this book will be your guide to become one. What I liked about this book is it teaches you how to become an explanation expert and tell your story in less than 4 minutes. Also it teaches you how to make it less complicated for the people who knows nothing about your product or service or don't know how to use it. Read it and thank me later!

Alaeddin Hallak says

If you have an idea, product or service you want to entice people with or simply explain it in an effective way, this is the book for you. Great book with no none-sense approach to crafting highly effective explanations that help people just get it!

Daniyar says

This book gave me some insights about explaining, and how should we explain. The most interesting and useful part maybe packaging your explanation and common errors that people make.

Manel Pique says

It helped me to understand why my explanations tended to fail and how to improve them in order to become a better professional.

It's also good to know that everything in the book is very well explained :)

Justin Price says

As the author points out, we tend to take explanations for granted, but once you read a few chapters, you look at things a little differently (especially PowerPoint slides). Even if you don't learn any new techniques or ideas by reading this, it still makes you more mindful of how you explain.

Nurlan Imangaliyev says

A team of people who specialize in explaining things via short videos didn't have to stretch this book for so many (for such a book) pages. Had to skip through some parts. Enjoyed the last few chapters more than the rest of the book.

