



Demystifying Ghostwriting For Effective Communication

By Anthony Taiti

Many leaders in the corporate, political, and business worlds command indisputable attention as articulate thought leaders through op-eds, keynote speeches, and topical discussions. They have a strong presence on social media and in local dailies, where they provide expert commentary on a variety of topics within their field. During events, they wow attendees with their meticulously crafted speeches, addressing the theme's intricacies with tactical precision, saying just the right things that sound like sweet music to the listeners' ears.

This may come as no surprise, but more often than not, behind those refined insights and commentaries is usually a quiet scribe, a PR or Communication professional working in the shadows as a ghostwriter.

Ghostwriting is the art of capturing another person's vision, voice, and ideas and translating them into compelling, authentic text. While it is a contentious issue in some circles where it is viewed as deception, ghostwriting is an inescapable strategic role for PR and Communication professionals, who are part communicators, part strategists, and part mind readers. It typically happens because many people, particularly C-suite executives, don't have the time to write or simply lack writing skills. Regardless, ghostwriting is allowed for them.

The Harvard Business Review puts this into context. In their article titled "What CEOs Really Do," researchers Michael Porter and Nitin Nohria assert that

"CEOs are paid to make strategic decisions, manage risk, and set the direction of the organization - not to micromanage or handle every communication themselves." This reinforces the argument that ghostwriting is a strategic communication support function that allows leaders to focus on their most critical responsibilities. According to Deborah Grayson's article "8 Ways Leaders Delegate Successfully," effective delegation allows leaders to focus on their top goals and develop their teams. She argues that when they entrust critical tasks like writing to competent professionals, leaders can ensure that these functions are handled proficiently, allowing them to dedicate more time to their strategic roles.

The cardinal rule of ghostwriting is that you don't write like you; you write like them. A ghostwriter should be so adept at sounding like the person they are writing for that no one will question if the words they speak or write are their own. As a skilled writer, your brilliance is pointless if the words you write do not sound like the person you represent. You must mirror their voice in vocabulary, tone, and rhythm. Whether your CEO speaks in energetic phrases marked with big words, or if they are conservative and use soft language, you must sound similar in your writing. Your job is to listen, observe, and mimic them with precision.

How can you learn another person's voice for effective ghostwriting? First, understand their values and ideals. This is about appreciating what shapes their thinking and what they aspire to achieve in life beyond their job. It could be integrity, fairness, or justice, and your writing should reflect these qualities. Second, observe how they communicate in their natural settings. This includes informal speeches and unscripted statements, all of which allow you to learn crucial patterns in their communication. For example, you will learn whether they like long or short sentences and how they

express themselves while addressing specific topics. Of course, PR and Communication professionals enjoy polishing their writing, and as ghostwriters, they may be inclined to do the same while aiming to make their boss sound fantastic. While this is okay, it should be done in moderation in order to maintain authenticity. For instance, avoid using sophisticated language or advanced vocabulary when writing for someone with a lower education level and who does not speak as you have written. Third, understand their audience. Your boss interacts with a diverse group of people, and they know how he or she communicates with them. If the text differs from how they sound when communicating, doubts emerge. Therefore, whether it is for employees or shareholders, your writing must align with the audience's expectations of his or her personality. This way, the boss builds trust with them by maintaining a consistent and authentic voice.

Ghostwriting has downsides that may cause one to feel left out. They include the absence of a byline or public applause. As a result, ghostwriters must cultivate high emotional intelligence in order to focus on the big picture. As much as you may be more proficient than your boss, shed your ego and align your writing with how they communicate. Keep in mind that when you do it appropriately, your words become their authentic voice, and that is powerful.

Remember, the best ghostwriters are invisible, but their impact is undeniable.

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