

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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Welcome to the superstar communicator podcast. My name is Susan Heaton-Wright, a leading impact speaking and communications expert. My aim is to show you how to make an impact. So you will be heard or listened to career success.

Listen weekly to the podcast and go to our website, superstarcommunicator.com Hello everybody. This is Susan from Superstar Communicator. Do you know one of the things that I'm always going on about is making sure that you keep things concise. And don't use complicated or jargon language that cuts off your audience. Well, this inspired me to interview this amazing man on the other end of the internet in Spain. He's called Jeff Heasman. And he's a fellow Trainer with an organisation that we've both been very busy with in the last few months, the Cli. So welcome, Jeff.

Thank you, Susan, and thanks for inviting me to, to talk to you today.

And tell the audience a little bit about what you do.

Okay, thanks. So I spent a number of years in law. I acted on behalf of claimants in litigation, and subsequently, I worked for a number of insurers as a liability adjuster. That's basically someone who advises insurance companies when an incident has occurred. And we carry out investigations firstly into how the accident occurred, but then we prepare reports about whether the insurance policy that this particular but personal business has bought is relevant to the incident that has happened. So initially working on behalf of claimants then on behalf of defendants which brought me into a lot of contact with legal language and language of insurance contracts. As you can imagine, I then re qualified in language and psychology. And when I read qualified in language and was outside of the insurance and legal industries, it really opened my eyes as to the type of language that I myself was using when I was with inside the legal and insurance industries. And really, I made it my mission all the way back seven or eight years ago, to try to make a change so that Imagine a world where people could actually understand what their lawyers are saying, and even better Imagine if people could actually understand the insurance policies that they buy.

Goodness me, you are speaking my language, boom, boom. We've got to keep things really straightforward, haven't we? Particularly when we're in a virtual world, which is the one that we're in now? Have you come across people that are going to far too much detail and the audience is lost?

Yeah, I think The thing is that in the virtual world that we find ourselves in now people's attention span is much shorter. People have also defaulted even more than before to email where it's so often that the message can become lost. And so I think that even now, the message is getting lost even more than it

was before. And so I think it's even more critical in the new virtual world that we find ourselves in to be focusing even more on plain language and trying to get across a message that is clear, simple and precise.

But what happens if you have to use some legal terms or within the insurance industry some phrases that are part of the compliance?

Yeah, so this is a question that often comes up actually. So there are certain technical terms that from a compliance point of view or from a technical point of view, may need to be used. The thing about it is that when you do need to use a technical term, the best way to explain this to the client is to use the term in action. And to explain exactly what it means that they can get an illustration of how that term applies to their particular circumstances, or, as I often teach people is to imagine you're explaining this word to your grandmother, how you're going to break it down into simple terms as to what this word actually means, so that you can explain it to your grandmother. So for example, a word that often crops up in insurance condition precedent, if I said to my grandma, God bless her, you know, Grandma, what do you think a condition precedent is, then she's going to look at me in a very confused way. So it may be that I use the term condition precedent, but then I can say, Well, look, grandma. What this essentially means is that the insurance company is going to pay if you do this or if you don't do this. So I may use the term in a technical document. But I need to give the explanation as to what that term means that I'm speaking to my grandmother and even better give a working example to illustrate how it will work in someone's particular circumstances.

Now, I do apologise, I'm just thinking about my grandma.

bright has a button, she would have run rings around us.

She would have thought a dictionary worked it out and thrown it back. But I think it's really really interesting the fact that you would say that phrase and then you almost have a case study to attach to it to make it easy for the other person to understand.

Yeah, I think if you use the word and then give a case study or an illustration and explain in simpler terms, what it means it also sensitises that person to that word, so they become so they get familiar with the word they hear the word in action, but then they're familiar as to how it applies in their particular circumstances. There's very few and far between words that there are no plain language alternatives for it's what we tend to call terms of art. For example, in law, we have this legal defence called *res ipsa loquitur* (SIC), which sounds fantastically complicated, doesn't it? All it essentially means is, the circumstances of the accident speak for itself. But it's an actual defence. It's the name of an actual defence, in law, particularly in motor claims. So lawyers do plead {*res ipsa loquitur* or *lock hitter*} as part of the formal case. So it's a term that is used but of course, then you can just explain to the client Well, what it essentially means is circumstances of the accident, speak for themselves. For example, if you're involved in a car that goes into the back of another car, the circumstances often speak for themselves, residents. But unless you take that step and actually explain things a bit sounds like some sort of nasty disease that you might pick up a virus.

But it is talking about lawyers. And I'm pleased if there are any lawyers on this podcast, please don't think I'm picking on you. But with certain professions of which I would put lawyers into that category, there are

sometimes phrases that are said to almost Up you're better than the other person. What are your feelings about that?

I think that's right. And I, if I'm honest, I think it's done unintentionally. And I think it's done out of habit. But what we always have to think when we're communicating is we have to think about the target reader. We have to think about the target listener and how they're going to perceive the language that we are using and what I often say to lawyers and insurance and other People who are often using technical jargon is to listen to their voice Listen, for example, to their email voice when they write emails, read it out loud. And listen to the language that you are using. Imagine you are talking again to your grandmother or to a friend or someone and how that's perceived because, you know, in formal communication lawyers and insurers and others, and I'm not picking on them, it's just the field that I know other professionals do it is that they so often use terms like now here with please find attached. Now imagine I go to grandma and say, here with a cup of tea, would you like said a cup of tea? She's going to look at me in an extremely strange way and wonder why on earth are you talking to me in that in that pompous way? What on earth has gone into you? But that's exactly how readers perceive our language when they get emails and letters saying here with please find a said attached said document, etc. So I think it's unintentional, but it's a matter of habit that maybe doesn't quite sound legal. Enough or maybe it doesn't quite sound professional enough unless I literate with these here with, and all these sorts of things. And one issue about habits is that if you think about terms like the parties mutually agree, well, they only agree if it's mutual, and it's only mutual if they agree, or things like the past history of the claim. It's only the past fits the history, it's only the history if it's the past, but we get used to the sort of phrases and we include it in formal documents because we think it doesn't quite sound legal enough, unless it's in there and terms like you know, that we use so often in, in daily life, you know, that unless you do something by a certain amount of time, something will be null and void. Well, null and void essentially means the same thing. Null is the French word void is the Latin word and what happened over time as the courts were speaking Latin and then speaking French and then we had Anglo Saxon English come into the mix is that we started to mix French And Latin words for clarity so that people could understand what the term meant. And it's, for example, why we have Will and Testament will. The French word Testament, the Latin word, they merge it together. So there's some clarity as to what the lawyers at the time was speaking about. But here we're talking about hundreds of years ago, but these terms still survive today.

Do you think though, that there is an image element of the language that's used rather like you would expect a lawyer to wear a suit and a tie, you wouldn't expect them to just have a vest on loads of tats on their, on their arms and perhaps some facial piercing and all of that, which we see if I turned up. Personally, if I turned up to a meeting with a lawyer and was presented with somebody like that, however fantastic. They were, I would be a little bit taken aback with respect

Yeah, it's absolutely right. And I'll give you an example. Actually, I was a dean of a law school in Zambia in southern Africa. And it was a new law school and the university had the faculties. And all of the other faculties such as drug free from which you come from the others, such as sciences and medicine centre all had these beautiful colour graduation, hoods, etc. And we were discussing what the colour should be for law, except it wasn't really a discussion because I was told that it could only be black. And I said, but why black because you have all of these beautiful colours for these other faculties? And they said, No, because lawyers must be dignified and respected, and so it must be black. And so it reinforces exactly what you said that there's this. There's this image that the lawyer must be using this traditional language, it must be wearing suits or, you know, not be anything out of this fixed image that we have or otherwise there's an issue about trust or confidence in the person that we are dealing with, but that need to be on

if I can to give you an example of a plain English equation that I've come up over the last few years to show you that actually, it's not just about appearance and how central languages to honesty, trust and transparency. So we have this equation and it's plain language equals simplicity. Simplicity equals understanding, understanding equals transparency, transparency equals honesty, honesty equals trust, and trust equals customers. So that's exactly how integral in plain language is. It's part of your actual appearance, you can be the best lawyer. You can be the best insurance professional in whatever you specialise in, but actually, your public face and what people see from what is inside your mind is the way that you communicate. So if you're communicating in this formal way, if you're communicating in a way that they can't understand, that's the impression that They can have you in it's how so often people you know, when I go around teaching plain language you arrive at an airport somewhere you get in the taxi, taxi driver says what you're here to do me and you say, Well, I'm here to teach insurance professional chapter, how to talk and write in plain language you can imagine the taxi drivers respond to use is very direct language normally. But that's because it's the image that is presented. So it's really interesting that you pick up on the image point because I agree, we imagine lawyers to look a certain way. And we expect them to communicate in a certain way. But the fact is that plain language is integral to this and it doesn't mean that we start saying, Hey, man, come into my office dude and sit down and you know, this is sick, man, what's going on, etc, etc. It's not about all of these in formalities, and conversational type language. It's formal language, but it's language that people actually understand. So you don't need to drop the formality. But you do need to come in In a way that people actually understand.

That's so, you know, that's so true to my heart. I believe that you know, it, communication is always two way. And if one person is unable to understand the other, then you know, it is not a conversation.

And that's it. And so often, from my experience lawyers or insurance professionals, when they're going through products may say, to the client, do you understand? Now, imagine going back to when you're in class, and your teacher would say to you, Susan, do you understand or Jeff, do you understand or does anybody or Does everybody understand it was a very brave person who would put up their hand and say, Sorry, sir, sorry, Miss, I don't understand. The natural reaction is for the person to say Yes, I understand. Yes, everything is clear. So we we then throw a load of gobbledegook and we throw a load of language at them that they simply don't understand. And then we put the fundamentals By saying, Do you understand? And I think it was George Bernard Shaw, who said, the biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place. And that's so clear about plain language because the lawyer feels like they've communicated all of the key points. And then they've asked the client if they've understood that the client has said yes, but actually, it's all an illusion because the client nine times out of 10 probably didn't understand and then the client didn't want to question the lawyer because they're respecting their professional authority. So as George Bernard Shaw said, the biggest problem is the illusion that the communication or that the advice has actually been given.

So one of the things that I always ask people coming on my podcast is three to share three top tips that you can share with the listener about plain, straightforward language in this case.

Okay, so I think the key point, as I've already mentioned, is the grandmother test if I was explaining this to my grandmother Would she understand, then I think the second thing is to always apply it to that person's particular circumstances because we can always give general advice we can always come up with different ideas that we throw at people in, in technical language, but if you can actually apply it to their particular circumstances and give them illustrations as to how these things actually work, then it not only gives them good advice, but it enables them to see the advice that you are giving in action. And that

to check whether somebody has understood is to use this skill of concept checking. So going back and checking whether someone is understood by asking some sort of question related to the advice that you have given So can you tell me how you think this works in your particular circumstances but in a neutral tone in a friendly way so that they don't feel like you are actually testing them to concept check to ensure that they have understood right than that default question that we so often fall into, which is, do you understand

brilliant tips. And one thing that was hitting me while I was listening to you was the fact that sometimes people hide behind for more language because they're frightened themselves. You know, and you want to whatever profession not legal, not insurance, but any profession hide behind that jargon or the the scientific things, when in fact, they're out of their depth.

That's absolutely and that's why I call it the veil of legal language because it's almost like you put this veil to try and hide behind it because you feel maybe a bit insecure or not confident about what you're saying. But you've read somewhere that it's written in this way, or you've said things in this certain way, because you're trying to almost sort of mask the fact that you're not quite so confident or that sometimes you're not actually quite sure what You're talking about there was an interesting study done by a professor called Professor vj bacteria. That actually was one of the leaders in the plain language movement a couple of decades ago. And he sat with some of the legislative drafters in the UK. And each time they would write a word, I mean, you could imagine he would sit there and say, Can you explain to me why you've used that particular word, and they couldn't give reasons why they used those particular words. And in some cases, it didn't understand what those words actually meant. They were just falling into the old sort of autopilot of using that word in that particular piece of legislation. So it backs up your exact point about you know, almost hiding behind language and we're not really understanding why you are using it language is fascinating and we could carry on all all night discussing language because there are sometimes people want to show that they've got higher status and somebody else with the language that they use and and I often work with people on trying to eliminate Those words that can undermine you professionally, which is a completely different topic. I'm sure we could have another podcast interview on that alone. But is there any way that people can contact you if they'd like to work with you? Or if you've got any courses that people might be interested in going on?

Absolutely. So I'm currently developing an online learning platform called online upskill it's being prepared at the moment, there'll be a number of on demand and live courses available there. And hopefully, we're going to see you on there Susan at some time in the future with some of your own wonderful courses. In the meantime, a number of my courses and a bit about me is available on www.insuranceupskill.com so that's insurance. upskill.com and I'd love to hear from any of your listeners. Hello@insuranceupskill.com I will make sure that I'm that That information is available in the the notes for this, and also the podcasts and are transcribed so that the information is there.

Perfect. And just raise me say thank you so much for having me on and keep doing all of the brilliant work that you're doing. So

Oh, thank you so much, Jeff,

for you. You're one of my training mates,

training buddies, and it's really you know, it's an that I feel privileged to know you and it's the COVID-19 that has brought us together in a way, isn't it?

It's a mutual feeling. I'm looking forward to what we can do together in the future. Thank you

for that. Thank you so much for giving up some of your time to share some incredible content with my listeners.

Thank you. Thanks very much.

Thank you for listening, everybody. Until next time, this is Susan from superstar communicator. You have been listening to the superstar communicator podcast. Don't To get to subscribe and review the podcast on iTunes and apps, please contact us if you want to discuss any topic could suggest a topic for us to include, or a guest who could come on to the podcast. Go to superstarcommunicator.com