English: Writing Skills

Lesson 5

Chapter 4

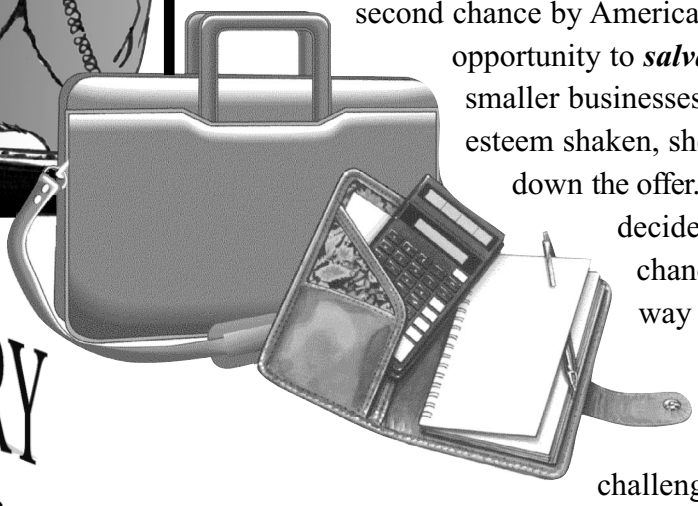
A CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

Section 1

Lessons 1-5

In 1991, Anne Busquet was general manager of the Optima Card division for American Express. When five of the 2,000 employees were found to have hidden $24 million in losses, Miss Busquet was held accountable. She had to face the fact that, as an intense ***perfectionist***, she came across as ***intimidating*** and ***confrontational*** to her ***subordinates***—to the point they were more willing to lie than to report bad news to her.

Busquet lost her Optima job but was given a second chance by American Express: an opportunity to ***salvage*** one of its smaller businesses. Busquet's self-esteem shaken, she nearly turned down the offer. Then Busquet decided this was her chance to alter the way she related to others. She took the new job as a personal challenge to change.



Realizing she had to be much more understanding, Busquet began to be more patient. She tried to listen to her employees more carefully and intently. She learned to ***elicit*** bad news in a non-intimidating way.

Four years after she was removed from her previous position, Anne Busquet was promoted to an executive vice-president at American Express.

Failure is not the end; it is the teacher for a new beginning and a better life! ■ (HB)

VOCABULARY

Perfectionist: a person who requires perfection and is intolerant of mistakes
Intimidating: causing fear in others
Confrontational: openly or directly addressing problems
Subordinates: employees under the direction of a supervisor or manager
Salvage: save from ruin
Elicit: draw out, bring forth

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DEVELOPMENT: USING THE RIGHT KIND AND RIGHT AMOUNT OF SUPPORT

As you develop your composition and add examples, facts and details, be sure to stay focused on your topic and to explain each idea thoroughly. Just because you like an example or a detail, does not mean it is relevant to your topic. Writing that "strays" or includes unnecessary information causes the reader to lose interest. All of the information in a composition should contribute directly to the development of the main idea. Also, be careful not to make a statement and forget to support it. Two common errors in writing are: (1) using facts, details and examples that are not relevant; (2) not using enough facts, details or examples to develop an idea.

In Kansas, Isha, an 11th grade student, wrote a composition in response to the prompt, "We should examine our own faults before others are forced to." Isha double spaced her rough draft and gave it to her teacher for approval. Notice the teacher's notations on the essay. The teacher saw that Isha made some statements but did not use enough support. Isha also used some examples, facts and details that were not relevant to her main idea.

If a person never admits to his own faults, he may risk losing friends and jobs. *(What kinds of faults would cause someone to lose friends or employment? Give some examples.)* To grow as a person means to become stronger in character. Being willing to admit mistakes and faults strengthens a person and frees him to try again. *(to try what again?)* A person who admits faults and works to correct them does not waste time and energy trying to cover up his faults and mistakes. The person's time and energy are therefore spent becoming a stronger and better person rather than repairing relationships that may have been harmed.

If a person does not choose to look at and correct faults, that person may lose friends, jobs, business and trust. *(This statement is not supported.)* However, if the person realizes his or her faults and seeks to correct them, his peers and friends will trust that person more because he has been honest and humble. In any case, honesty is the best policy. *(This statement does not support your main idea.)* In the story of Ms. Busquet, her willingness to look at her failings and improve herself earned her a better position and undoubtedly richer relationships. She likely made more money, too. *(This statement is irrelevant to your main idea and is also an unsupported detail.)* Examining one's own faults leaves a person less fearful of making mistakes in the future. *(why?)* It also can actually make someone more successful in work and relationships. *(redundant statement)*

Isha, you have made a good start, but you need to include more details and examples. You may want to include some personal experience or the experience of someone you know, as well as the example of Anne Busquet from the vignette. Some of your statements need more explanation. Some of your statements need to be removed because they are not necessary. Make these corrections and let me see your essay again. *Mr. Stalworth*

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Isha diligently reworked her rough draft and turned in a final draft to Mr. Stalworth. Read Isha's final draft below. Notice the corrections she made.

Addressing and correcting our own faults before others are forced to is a wise route to take. If someone else is forced to inform us of a needed change, we may suffer embarrassment, a breach in a friendship or even a loss of employment. Too often we make excuses for bad habits such as bragging, complaining or repeating confidential information, and are not willing to recognize that such behavior could break up friendships and cause loss of trust. In the workplace, if we are too often late, lazy, sloppy or unkind to co-workers, we may suffer the consequences if we do not admit and correct those faults ourselves.

Admitting personal mistakes and faults strengthens a person and saves time and energy. It frees a person from the burden of pretending the problem does not exist and allows him to spend time and energy becoming a better person instead of covering up the problem and repeating the same errors. Unfortunately, some people fail to correct their faults, even after being told of the problem.

Janna and her friend, Michael, enjoyed activities together for awhile, but soon Michael told Janna he was tired of hearing her complain about her job. Their friendship became strained because Janna had not stopped to think about how her bad habit of complaining affected others. Even after Michael told Janna that he did not like her complaining, Janna failed to correct the problem. Eventually, Michael found Janna's company undesirable altogether.

Larry is an example of someone who corrected his negative habit by observing the offensive behavior of another person. Larry corrected his own problem before anyone had to tell him. He and a new friend, John, set a date to jog each Monday morning together. John often did not show up and made excuses for his absences. This made Larry think about his relationships with other friends, and he realized he needed to be more reliable when others needed help or expected his participation in something. Larry did not mention to John that John's repeated absences were annoying. Instead, Larry simply made sure that he himself was punctual when meeting other friends and family members. Later, one of his friends pointed out the noticeable, positive change in Larry.

Ms. Busquet is an example of correcting her problem after being painfully informed of the problem by her superiors. She corrected her failings and improved herself which later earned her a better position and undoubtedly richer relationships.

Most likely, people will appreciate honesty and be willing to give one another a chance to improve. In the case of a friendship, the bond between friends can be strengthened by acts of honesty, apology, and efforts to try harder. In the case of employment, a person should not assume that a person will be given another chance once a fault or mistake becomes a large-scale problem. People like Ms. Busquet, Larry, and even Janna would probably recommend that people take a look at themselves before others need to do it for them.

Isha's corrected composition has sufficient information to support each idea. The composition also contains various examples of people who did or did not respond well to correction. The examples included some helpful details that made the composition interesting.

You are doing well. Continue to the Activities.

Life Principle

"Understanding comes through communication, and through understanding we find the way to peace."

–Ralph C. Smedley

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