

## XAVIER MAGAZINE

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### NEWS & NOTES

#### The Great Communicator Tom Clark

Tom Clark designed the Williams College of Business' business profession program and is director for the entrepreneurial center. But for many, Clark is best known as the instructor who taught them how to write clearly—a skill being lost as a result of the rapid proliferation of computers, text messaging, e-mail and Blackberrys. We asked Clark to weigh in on the art of clear, concise, written communication.

"The key to successful communication is the ability to look at yourself through the eyes of the person you're communicating with. That requires you to actually think about and get a better understanding of how that other person's mind works."

"At P&G, where I also teach business writing, the one-page memo is kind of a model for how the company thinks, and it's reflected not only on paper but also in how people communicate orally. Good writing at P&G reflects good thinking. So does good public speaking and any other kind of oral communication."

"One of the critical issues we're facing now is being in an instant communication society. When somebody sends you e-mail, they probably expect you to respond within 24 hours. That's a big difference from when we had paper communication and somebody might not expect a response for two or three days. The impact of that is people may not put in the level of thought and reflection as they did before."

"We teach Xavier business students the same thing we teach at Procter & Gamble: If you are writing in a short communication environment, there are three things that have to go in the beginning of every document: the what, the why and the when. 'This is what I want you to do in response to this document'; 'This is why we have a shared interest in this topic'; 'This is when I need a response.' In a voicemail, you follow the same process, except you put your name and phone number first so that if the person doesn't get the phone number they don't have to wait to the end."

"It looks like today's students do not get the same kind of fundamental training in spelling, grammar and diction earlier students had. Now, fortunately, you have tools like spell-check and grammar-check that catch those things, but you have to understand why it's a mistake in the first place before you can understand whether to push 'accept' or not. That's one of the things that you see is that those skills seem to have been diminished coming into college."

"With Blackberrys, you have a screen that is even smaller than you get with e-mail. And so again someone is expected to communicate with even fewer words. And the criticality of being able to say what you think first is absolutely essential. You cannot have flowery introductions; you can't start with background or anything of that nature."

