

2006/11: Nigel, Redux – A Cranky Analysis

contributed by Nigel Foley [graphic designer / thirty-something / undercover agent]

EDITOR'S NOTE: We received so many emails about Nigel Foley's "Learning From Your Cranky Elders" article that we invited him back for comment. The vast majority of readers applauded his advice that younger designers tap the wisdom and expertise of older colleagues. (See this month's RANT & RAVE.) Cranky as ever, Nigel decided to address the following, uncharacteristic response from a (presumably young) reader named Stephanie: "I recently read the article "Learning from Your Cranky Elders" and I was amused by her wit but saddened by her narrow-mindedness. Not all twenty somethings have brains cross-sectioned out between my space and booze and not thirty somethings are necessary wiser." Needless to say, Nigel was eager to respond.

My dear Stephanie,

I am not too cranky to see your response to my little piece for what it is: a desperate, subconscious attempt to do exactly what I advised. To learn from someone older. And remember, you cranky elders out there, though they may seem to speak a different vernacular, it is important to listen closely to our young colleagues when, however subconsciously, however sub-grammatically, they reach out for our help.

Therefore let us respond to Stephanie, line by line.

I recently read the article "Learning from Your Cranky Elders" and I was amused by her wit but saddened by her narrow-mindedness.

Though I am broad-minded enough to believe gender is irrelevant to talent or wisdom, I must insist that you youngsters recognize that your male colleagues are male, and female, female. My name is Nigel. I am male.

Perhaps you're confusing me with Nigella Lawson, the famous British culinary talent (who is female). Next time, before jotting a quick note to me, a coworker, or, more importantly, a current or potential employer, I would suggest knowing the person's gender and knowing his or her name. This will ensure the recipient understands to whom you are addressing your message. It's the first step to good communication.

Next, your response points out:

Not all twenty somethings have brains cross-sectioned out between my space and booze and not thirty somethings are necessary wiser.

You are quite right to join the legitimate scientific community in questioning the tenets of phrenology. (Maybe a Gen X colleague can talk to you about irony, symbolism and humor in illustration.) But it is when you say "not thirty somethings are necessary wiser" that we get to the crux of the matter.

I almost wish you were hopped up on Red Bull and vodka or dazed by a MySpace marathon when you responded. One assumes you meant to say "not all thirty-somethings are necessarily wiser." True enough.

But how much wisdom, I wonder, does it take to suggest that in a clause of six words that is to appear in a forum of your professional peers, you shouldn't leave out a word and a hyphen while leaving in the impression that you're not overly familiar with adverbs? Especially if you're trying to dispel the notion that your generation tends to be easily distracted from the task at hand and doesn't show the courtesy of respectfully and professionally communicating with peers, older or not.

Sorry to be so persnickety. I'm a designer, not a writer; I shouldn't get on my high horse about grammar. (However, I did ask an older colleague who is a writer to take a look at this before I submitted it for publication.)

When you ask our advice, youngsters, you might have to endure a little snideness, a little false superiority. But please put up with it. Please see beneath our jealousy of your supple youth that you might actually find some useful information. We really do want to help you. And you can always complain about us on your blog after work.

Sincerely,
Nigel