
“Get out of my closet.”

Buddy looks at me in some surprise. I’m kidding, right?

Then he reads the body language. Nope.

I’ve been working on a table in a storage room not much bigger than a closet for five weeks. There’s no window, air movement, or place to lay out a document; on the other hand, there’s a good supply of printer/copier paper, old mice and extension cords, and coffee fixings. The space (*sic*) also features an industrial-strength, national-security-worthy, two-way paper shredder that staff come to use at least once a day. They have the grace to be sheepish. Especially in this confined space, it would wake the dead.

We’re closing in on a milestone review and I’ve got my head down trying to write the Executive Summary. The implicit instructions have been clear, as always. *Make it factual but not boring. Make it sales-worthy but not salesy. Make it creative but not cutesy. Make it executive- and evaluator-friendly but not two separate documents. Make it complete but not overly long. Make it hit all the themes but not tackily. And make it quick.*

The production staff are in their happy place, running around madly, printing and collating the copies for the inbound executives to read and mark up. The technical writers are taking a well-earned day off. The proposal manager has nothing to do except wait for Someone to finish the Executive Summary so he can review it along with two other partner-company luminaries, before it’s cleared for exposure to the other executives.

Thinking that an interruption will help Someone finish sooner, he comes by to ask how it’s going.

“Pretty good: I’m almost done.”

My deliberately abstracted tone and failure to look up from the screen are meant to suggest that he might be happier somewhere else, but he’s not feeling suggestible. He asks how I plan to handle a graphic that we want in the final version but that is still in the hand-drawn stage.

“When I’m done writing . . .”

I pause artistically. Does he take the hint? He does not. He stays put. I keep talking.

“I’m going to print a copy,
stick the graphic in as-is
so they can see
where we’re going with it,
and make the three copies
for the first review.”

He beams.

“Great! Then just take your draft
over to the photocopier and press 3.”

Now I look at him. He’s kidding, right?

“You know, so you can get 3 copies.”

Nope, he’s not kidding.

Does he think I don’t know how to use a photocopier? Does he think I should leap up right now and go get those copies?

I have no idea, but I know him well enough to believe that he thinks he's helping. And the good news is that I see a way he really can help. I point to the door.

"Get out of my closet."

He might not be happier if he's somewhere else, but I will be.