Twitter Thread by Aaron Berman



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I'm recently reminded that the tips I learned editing the President's Daily Brief can help anyone writing on complex issues, like for busy executives, or for random people on Twitter.

So here are they are, with Star Wars examples. These are simple, but hard.■

1/n

Here's my list:

1. Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)
2. Be simple and format clearly
3. No value-laden language (Twitter users please learn this!)
4. Convey uncertainty clearly
5. Keep a bunch of other stuff in mind too

2/n

1. Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF).

The title (5-7 words) and first sentence (2-3 lines) should have ALL THE INFORMATION to understand the issue and, if needed, make a decision.

3/n

GOOD:

"Death Star Vulnerability Discovered"

"Death Star plans that Princess Leia obtained show it has a fatal flaw, which our X-Wing force is well-positioned to exploit."

This conveys the main point and key opportunity for Rebel leadership.

4/n

NOT GOOD:

"New Information About Death Star"

"Princess Leia sent us the Death Star plans, which will help with our military planning."

This is boring. Rebel leadership won't read the rest of the paper. And then maybe this never happens:

5/n

This could be EVEN BETTER though:

"Death Star Vulnerability Creates Opportunity "

"Death Star plans showing it has a fatal flaw suggests a massed X-Wing assault would have the best chance of destroying it."

Now we're cooking. Rebel leadership will read on.

6/n

2. Be simple and format clearly, so a busy reader can quickly skim and understand.

GOOD: "The Trade Federation has new raw materials it could use to construct a droid army."

7/n

NOT GOOD: "The Trade Federation has recently been receiving an influx of materials like steel, transparent aluminum, and positronic neural nets that could possibly used in droid construction to create an army."

(Yes I know I'm mixing franchises here...)

8/n

Also, that last example was a "text brick" which is hard to read. Don't do that. Instead:

BOLD OR HIGHLIGHT MAIN POINTS

- And, use bullets to visually offset supporting evidence
- Also, make liberal use of white space

9/n

3. No value-laden language.

This is a big one. I would LOVE if people on Twitter could stop doing this. Probably not possible...

10/n

GOOD: "We do not know how large the faction is in the Klingon military that seeks to sabotage the peace negotiations and maintain Klingon-Federation hostilities."

This is neutral, and can prompt a constructive conversation on what steps the Federation should take.

11/n

NOT GOOD: "There are diabolical elements among Gorkon's staff seeking to destroy us. They're throughout the Klingon military and need to be stopped at all costs."

Now it seems the Federation needs to act aggressively, and if you disagree you're an appeaser!

12/n

4. Convey uncertainty clearly.

This might be the most important point on the list. I could write a whole treatise on this, and many people have.

But basically, be very careful about terms like "probably", "likely", "may", "could", etc. Why? These terms are ambiguous.

13/n

"The Sith will likely wipe out the Jedi within a week."

How confident are you the Jedi will be gone in a week? 50%, 80%, 99%?

What should you do if you're 50% confident, vs. 99% confident?

14/n

The problem is, alternatives suck too.

"The Sith may wipe out the Jedi within a week." Ok, but will they or won't they?

"There's an 80% chance the Sith will wipe out the Jedi within a week." Ok, but how did you calculate that?

15/n

There's a lot more written on this, and every case is different. My go-to here is focus on the RISK and what to do about it.

"We don't know how quickly the Sith will wipe the Jedi out, but their forces are stronger and we need to plan for a rout in the near-term.

16/n

5. Keep a bunch of other stuff in mind too.

I'll save this for another time, if I decide to write more Tweets on this. In the meantime, hope this is helpful!

/END

Ok I did not expect this to blow up, but glad it was useful. And kudos to those who spotted the Trek examples. Maybe next time will be opportunity analysis as illustrated by Battlestar Galactica...

Ok I did decide to do a second, "201" tips list. Here you go!

https://t.co/u1yZ7eCTAj

> Recently I shared tips I learned writing for and editing the President's Daily Brief, with Star Wars examples. People seemed to appreciate them, so everyone loves a sequel, right?
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> 1/n
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> — Aaron Berman (@AaronDBerman) July 6, 2022