

**GuideMarks™**  
**FOSTERING**  
**SHARED GROWTH**



**John D. Harrington**

*with a foreword by Linda Dzialo, Ph.D.*

GUIDEMARKS - FOSTERING SHARED GROWTH.

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This book is dedicated to the professionals  
at Funds For Learning®. You are the real authors  
of the GuideMarks™. I am just the lucky one  
who gets to write about them.



## F O R E W O R D

**T**ruly great communicators engage their audiences and provide lasting memories through storytelling. Their words paint vivid pictures of everyday situations. Listeners, or those who read such a narrative, become engrossed in the story and then are delighted – and sometimes surprised – by the potent message illustrated by the anecdote. John Harrington, CEO of Funds For Learning, is a great communicator. As such, he masterfully uses stories to bring the company’s eighteen core values to life in what he terms Funds For Learning GuideMarks.

Beginning in 2011, I became a follower of weekly Funds For Learning GuideMark™ entries as they were delivered electronically to my computer. My interest in their messages and my enjoyment of the wisdom they provide have prompted me to read each GuideMark email as soon as it appears in my incoming mail! All the entries are powerful in a whimsical, unexpected way. Each story beautifully illustrates a complex, sometimes abstract, concept. They illuminate our common humanity and our constant search to work together more effectively.

As the CEO of Great Expectations, a teacher professional development program, I am intensely involved in work with educators. I file the Funds For Learning GuideMarks™ in a

personal folder on my computer because the weekly discussions are directly applicable in classrooms where teachers are striving to instill core values in learners. Each GuideMark is a treasure that I can use in my own personal life or, most certainly, in my work in education. How wonderful that these instructive tales are now compiled in a book for easy reference!

It is powerful and enriching when an organization's culture complements its mission. This is the case for Funds For Learning. As you read this compilation of compelling stories, you will see reflections on the qualities and actions that matter most. These qualities and actions are important and can impact the productivity, level of fulfillment, and overall performance of individuals joined in a common mission.

*GuideMarks: Fostering Shared Growth* will most certainly enrich the culture of your own family, church group, social circles, and work environment.

– Linda Dzialo, Ph.D.  
CEO, Great Expectations

# INTRODUCTION

**P**eople talk about the culture of an organization as if it exists in and of itself. In reality, an organization's culture is defined every day via its people: each interaction, each act of service, each communication, the work that is done, the way work is done, and so on. At Funds For Learning® we understand that each of us, working together, creates our organization's culture. We strive to foster a positive work environment that delivers success for our clients and develops team members who are happy, healthy, and growing as individuals. These types of environments do not create or sustain themselves without a commitment, by everyone on the team, to certain standards of conduct and behavior. In short, to build and keep a good working environment at Funds For Learning, we are intentional with our actions and our words. We are building our work around a high-performance team model. We rely on one another's strengths to get the job done, and ultimately, we are all dependent on each other for success.

This is the purpose of focusing on one of the eighteen Guide-Marks each week. By taking time to reflect on one aspect of the Funds For Learning culture, it helps us be intentional concerning that one element. In the midst of serving our clients, we take time

to talk and think about our core values. This helps us recenter, refocus, and most importantly, repurpose ourselves to demonstrating that value in our actions and communications, as well as encouraging that core value in the lives of our clients, coworkers, friends, and family. By being intentional in the way we do things, we all get to play a role in building a positive work environment for each other. That's a pretty amazing deal.

You may wonder at the absence of characteristics such as respect, honesty, trust, and integrity in the GuideMarks. We consider these qualities to be non-negotiable and are embedded in the GuideMarks. As a matter of fact, they are the bedrock of the GuideMarks. It is precisely these character qualities that fuel and support the practice of the GuideMarks.

Each week for the past four years, I have written a newsletter relating stories that illustrate the week's GuideMark. This book is a compilation of those stories. It is my sincere hope that assembling them in one place will give these stories new life as we share our journey with each other and our clients. The stories may change, but the fundamental core values we profess do not. They continue to be the polestars by which we navigate our journey together as E-rate Guides.

As we approach our 18th anniversary as an organization, it is important to celebrate our clients, our work, and our culture. I can't imagine a better group of people to share my journey with than all of you.

– John D. Harrington



## B A C K S T O R Y

**F**unds For Learning® is a professional firm specializing in the federal E-rate funding program. Our mission is to provide high-quality consulting and support services for the needs of E-rate program participants. As their E-rate Guides, we consult with clients to help them understand, effectively utilize, and maintain compliance with E-rate rules and regulations. We help prepare and submit paperwork, and we interact with program administrators on our clients' behalf.

The E-rate program provides discounts on certain services and products that are essential for classrooms and libraries to receive voice, video, and data communications. The amount of the discount depends on the level of poverty and location of the school or library receiving service. The discount ranges from 20% to 90% of the cost of eligible services.

To be eligible to receive discounts, a school or library must meet certain eligibility criteria. In general, elementary and secondary schools are eligible to receive discounts, including many private schools and religious schools. Public libraries and library systems can also receive E-rate discounts, provided they meet the eligibility requirements for libraries.

Funds For Learning is the developer of an award-winning web-based service called E-rate Manager®. This tool helps program participants prepare and organize their paperwork and stay on top of all their E-rate information. E-rate Manager® provides easy access to form preparation wizards, historical E-rate funding data, and on-demand E-rate training modules. The service comes in two varieties – one for applicants and one for service providers.

In addition to helping our school and library clients apply for support, Funds For Learning is an active advocate for all E-rate stakeholders. Our website is visited by thousands of people each month for free news, updates and other information about the E-rate program. We also support efforts to reform the E-rate program and increase funding for schools.

# CALMING PRESENCE

*As professionals, we cannot  
freak out in the midst of stress.*

## DEFINITION:

- Maintaining proper composure and perspective, even when the stakes are high
- Offering a steady and consistent approach in the midst of stressful circumstances
- Reducing the stress in others while staying collected, despite external agitation

## DESCRIPTIONS & OUTCOMES

- Steady and collected
- Not agitated or disturbed
- Steadiness of mind under stress
- Composed
- Peaceful
- Cause to be calm
- Collected
- Abate stress

## OPPOSITES

- Agitation
- Commotion
- Disturbance
- Stir up

## INTRODUCTION

Calming presence refers to a steady approach to our work in which we maintain our composure in the midst of stressful circumstances. Often times, there are impending deadlines to meet and/or bad news to deliver, but a calming manner can encourage better thinking, more effective solutions, and a better quality of life. Funds For Learning customers hire us, in part, to provide them peace of mind. They hire us to be a calming presence in the midst of their busy, hectic, stressful lives. We cannot guarantee their outcomes, but we can certainly improve their journey by keeping our composure through the good times and the bad.

## STORY #1 – MAINTAINING COMPOSURE

One afternoon a few years ago, I lost my cool with a Funds For Learning colleague. I really lost my cool. When he left my office, I slammed the door so hard that part of the doorframe fell off. (This is NOT one of the reasons we moved offices.) To make matters worse, I had something important to explain to this person, but my loss of composure insured that anything I had to say would not be heard. I lost my perspective and, in that moment, behaved foolishly. It is an embarrassing story for me to share.

Not losing perspective is easier said than done, especially when there is a lot on the line. Emotions, such as anger or fear, sometimes try to drown out the truth of a situation. Yet, getting our work done properly requires a calm and collected approach. Funds for Learning clients engage us because they need our expertise – expertise that typically is delivered in the

midst of stressful circumstances: deadlines, money that was needed yesterday, audits, investigations, changing rules, and so on. Simply put, as professionals we cannot freak out in the midst of all this stress.

Losing our composure impedes our work and makes it less likely that we will be able to provide value for our customers. In fact, part of the value we offer Funds For Learning customers is the calming presence we provide. They don't just pay us for our E-rate knowledge; they pay us for the manner in which we deliver our E-rate knowledge and for helping to reduce the stress that they would otherwise be experiencing without us.

A word of caution: Calming Presence doesn't mean "disengaged" or "detached." And it certainly doesn't mean that we don't deliver bad news or don't operate with a sense of urgency. On the contrary, one of our most important tasks is to help our clients properly prioritize their E-rate work. Sometimes we have to help our clients know how serious a situation really is; but they are more likely to hear that news if we deliver it to them calmly.

Back to my door slamming fit. The next day, I went and found the coworker that I had treated so rudely. I needed to do two things. First, I needed to apologize for my childish action. (This gave me another "opportunity" to feel embarrassed.) Second, I needed to take the time to explain calmly what it was that had bothered me the day before. This time, because I gave him feedback without losing my composure, he could actually hear what it was I had to say. He understood it and everything was good.

What I find truly remarkable and encouraging about this event is that my coworker was a calming presence. He didn't

lose self-control. If he had, the whole situation may have escalated even further. Instead, he stayed calm, waited for me to cool my jets, and we moved on. End of story.

By the way, he still works at Funds For Learning, and he continues to be a calming presence for our clients all across the country. Whether it is with one of our colleagues or a client, we can improve someone else's day and help everyone achieve their goals more effectively by providing a calming presence.

## STORY #2 – A BREATH OF FRESH WATER

I grew up living near a lake. During the summers I swam for hours nearly every day. I was a good swimmer.

One day, I was swimming in a pool with my aunt. She was an adult and she could swim. We were playing in the water, bouncing up and down, when I suddenly breathed in a mouth full of water. I panicked. I started kicking and screaming, flailing my arms around, scrambling to climb on top of my aunt. Our moment of fun had quickly turned into a real crisis. My aunt and I could have easily drowned that day; but fortunately, my aunt remained calm (or at least much calmer than me), and she was able to pull us both over to the side of the pool and get us out safely.

Reflecting on that moment, I find it rather ironic, but not surprising, that I almost drowned. If I had drowned that day, it would not have been because of my abilities. I was a good swimmer. My body was not incapacitated and I had the physical strength to swim to the side of the pool. My brain had full control of my legs and my arms. (I know this because I was kicking and waving them about with gusto!) I also had plenty of energy to draw upon. In fact, I was probably using up a lot

more energy drowning than I would have needed simply to swim to the side of the pool. Yet, even though I possessed all of the resources necessary to save myself, it was only because of my aunt that I survived.

So, why did I nearly drown that day? It is because I panicked. I freaked out, lost my cool, and started to self-destruct. My abilities, know-how, and physical strength were all firing, but they were all firing in different directions, and at different times; the only place I was headed was straight down to the bottom of the pool.

There is a lot of wisdom in not freaking out. When we panic, we begin to lose control over our resources and faculties. Unwittingly, at the moment that we need them the most, we can give up the very tools or training that we need to handle a situation. That's what happened to me that day in the pool. I had what I needed to save myself, but I panicked and lost that opportunity.

Many circumstances aren't as dramatic as trying to pull yourself out of the deep end of a pool, but they sure can feel that way. If you feel yourself starting to panic, remember my aunt's example. Stay calm. Don't panic.

### STORY #3 – KEEP CALM AND BE CONSISTENT

At home, at work, or wherever you find yourself, there are opportunities throughout the day to help reduce the stress and anxiety that others might be experiencing. Calmness comes about in many ways. We can bring a sense of calmness through our tone of voice or simply by not freaking out. In either case, a healthy reaction to a situation can play a big role in helping lower the stress and anxiety in a room.

Moving beyond *reactions*, there are also *proactive* steps that can be taken to provide a calming presence. Performing duties in a consistent and steady manner can lower stress, too. Whether it is a service that we provide to a customer, or even chores that we do at home, fulfilling our responsibilities using a predictable, consistent approach can bring a sense of peace to the situation. People like to know what to expect. It helps them plan and prepare, it provides them with a sense of familiarity, and it reduces the mental load certain activities place on them.

To illustrate this, think about going to buy groceries. Just imagine if every time you went to the grocery store, it had been rearranged. That would create stress for you. It would tax you mentally having to search every aisle or constantly ask for directions. It would slow you down trying to find everything on your grocery list. Plus, even if you liked the new layout, all the time and energy spent learning your way around would be for naught if it was all rearranged again on your next visit. There are reasons that the grocery store isn't rearranged every day, or even every month.

So it is with the things we do. We can help others experience a sense of peace and calm by doing our work and approaching our tasks in a consistent manner. It sounds simple, and it sort-of is, but something as rudimentary as answering the phone in the same way can be a calming presence. Pay attention to the ways you behave and respond. Seek to discern what others expect from you, and start to develop some consistencies in these tasks or the way you handle a task. It may help others stay calm – whatever life has in store.



# PRACTICE

Here are a few tips that I have found to help me guard against panicking.

- Identify and write down concerns. Be specific. Be very specific. This exercise is important for two reasons.
  - It helps ferret out unreasonable/unnecessary/unrealistic concerns.
  - It helps disengage the “fight or flight” mechanism and lets the critical thinking side of your brain brain engage – which is better at thinking through panic situations.
  
- Write down a list of resources that can be brought to bear on the situation. This will really help your brain’s critical thinking become a part of the equation.
  
- Make a list of best-case scenarios and potential positive outcomes. Hey, that which is good for the goose is good for the gander. Why should the worst-case get all of the attention? At least give a little time to the positive things that could come out of this situation, too.
  
- Brainstorm three reasonable ways to address the situation. Then, brainstorm at least one other solution. It will probably be one originally filtered out or dismissed because you couldn’t see how it

might work. Then come up with one more potential solution that's even more outside the box than the other four.

- By the time you get to this step, your brain should have been busy long enough to start to realize that, although the situation may be serious, it's probably not the end of the world, and if you keep your head fastened on straight, there are steps that can be taken to help address the circumstance.

# COMMITMENT

*Commitment is what is required to see an intention through to the end.*

## DEFINITION:

- Keeping promises while facing challenges or the temptation of an easier path
- Seeing something through to the end and keeping the right attitude about it
- Honoring my responsibilities with diligence, even when it requires sacrifice

## DESCRIPTIONS & OUTCOMES

- Sticking with it
- Faithfulness
- Worthy of trust
- Diligent and reliable
- Dedication to pledge
- Dependable sacrifice to keep a promise
- Taking ownership of a situation

### OPPOSITES

- Not finishing the job
  - Undependable
- Not worthy of trust
  - Wishy-washy

## INTRODUCTION

What does commitment mean to you? To me, commitment means seeing something through to the end and keeping the right attitude about it. Sticking with it, not quitting or giving up too easily, while remaining true to the cause and maintaining a healthy perspective.

Real commitment is more than a legalistic fulfillment of duties, more than just sticking with a project until the end. Real commitment requires doing things well with a proper attitude, having a productive, healthy state of mind, and being focused on the good purpose behind the task. When we stick to our jobs and have the right mindset, we increase the odds of getting the job done well, and we encourage others in the process.

## STORY #1 – JOHN AND THE VOLCANO

In 2010, I was invited to travel to Uganda to meet with a group of local community leaders. I was asked to be one of the “featured speakers” at a leadership event that was bringing together individuals from all over Uganda. Many of the attendees would travel for days by foot to attend this meeting. I was honored by the invitation and I gladly accepted it.

I got my presentation ready for the leaders, and I prepared to leave the United States. Unfortunately, just a few days before my planned departure date, something unique happened: a volcano in Iceland erupted, disrupting all travel via Europe. (My travel to Uganda was through Amsterdam.)

At first, it looked like I would have to cancel my presentation. (I couldn't Skype in to the conference because there wasn't much electricity where I was headed!) But I could not get over the fact that there would be leaders traveling by foot for days to

## COMMITMENT

attend this conference. Surely, I thought, if they were willing to work so hard, and sacrifice so much to be there, as one of the speakers I should be willing to do the same. After all, it was a leadership conference!

So... I stayed up all night working with various airlines and, eventually, I was able to stitch together an itinerary that got me to Uganda. (I had to fly the long way around the planet via Tokyo and Bangkok to get there.) At the end of it all, I was able to make it to the conference, and I spent several wonderful days meeting with an amazing group of people. It was a fantastic experience. I hope that the attendees got something out of it because I know it had a deep impact on me.

I am glad that I pushed through and found a way to get to that conference. If I had let the volcano stop me, I would have missed an incredible opportunity. Instead, I was able to travel to Uganda. I made many new friends, learned a lot, and was changed for the better in the process.

The GuideMark Commitment is about facing challenges and not backing down, even if it might be easier to quit or take a different path. For our school clients, we make a promise to help them get funding for their Internet access. There are many times that it is challenging, frustrating, and downright “impossible.” But when we stay committed to the course, and do our best to honor our commitments, it is amazing what can happen.

## STORY #2 – ALL FOR A GOOD CAUSE

Sometimes there is confusion about the difference between involvement and commitment. I can be involved in something, but not committed to it. For example, have you ever seen those car wash fundraisers in parking lots around town? You pull in,

donate a few dollars, and a bunch of strangers wash your car. I might be willing to involve myself with one of these causes by getting my car washed. I would do this because:

- I see that these people are working hard to support a good charity and
- It will not really take too much out of my day – plus, I will get my car cleaned.

However, I am not going to hang around to help wash cars or help the charity put that money to use. Furthermore, if they don't raise enough money to support their cause adequately, I'm not going to go out and start raising funds to help them. In fact, there is a good chance that if this charity disappeared, I might not even notice. I may be involved, but I am not committed.

By definition, our commitment level to something is measured by our willingness to stick with it when we face an obstacle, when things get tough, and/or an easier path presents itself. It isn't really commitment if it melts away in the face of adversity.

At Funds For Learning, our job is serving customers. We have many opportunities to test and demonstrate our commitment. Most of the E-rate funding process is an exercise in clearing hurdles, navigating obstacles, and not giving up... even when we feel like it. Our clients trust that we will remain on task and see the work through to completion in a proper manner. In fact, they have placed their school's budget, facilities, and reputation on the line based on our commitment to them.

Similarly, members of the Funds For Learning team rely on each other. Our interdependent workflow is built on the com-

mitment of each team member to follow through on his or her part. Functioning as a team means knowing that we can count on each other.

The next time you face an obstacle, or are just feeling worn down and ready to give up, remember that the challenge in front of you is an opportunity: it is a chance to demonstrate your true commitment.

### STORY #3 – THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICE

This past weekend, two of my children were in a music recital. There were dozens of kids involved, representing a broad range of ages and experience levels. The children's performances were grouped together by instructor; and after each group finished, their instructor would perform a piece. It was fun to see all the kids, and you could quickly get a sense of their skill level, but what really stood out to me was when the instructors performed. It immediately became obvious why the instructors were doing the instructing. They had skill, experience and dedication to playing their musical instrument – and their performances were really, really good.

Watching performers at the recital, I thought about our GuideMark Commitment. Do you want to make beautiful melodies with a violin or piano? It can be done, and the outcome is amazing. But, it doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen without years of practice and sacrifice. It requires tutoring, and classes, and rehearsals, and recitals, and practice, and practice... and more practice. All of which takes commitment: sticking with it when sacrifice is required. I'm quite certain that those talented music instructors had many opportunities to quit playing their instrument over the years. It generally isn't very

convenient to be committed to something for the long haul. I'll bet there were events that they missed or things that they would have liked to do that they didn't do because they had a rehearsal (or recital) to attend.

There are very few things in life that we can do well without commitment. It takes sacrifice to practice. It takes dedication to show up consistently. It takes diligence to try again. All this points to an important truth about commitment: it comes down to choice. And not just one choice, but hundreds, even thousands of choices. Making the choice to try again. Making the choice to get out of bed. Making the choice to go practice when you don't feel like it. Making the choice to not give up. Making the choice to keep a promise that is hard to keep.

At Funds For Learning, we are committed to being professionals and to being the very best at helping schools and libraries get funding for technology. It's a choice that we have made and are making. We choose to pursue excellence in our work, and in our work environment, and we strive to provide superior customer service. It isn't always easy being committed, but when we are committed to doing something (like playing a musical instrument, or seeking federal E-rate funding), the results can be pretty amazing.

## STORY # 4 – INTENTIONS VS. COMMITMENTS

A lot of people like to make resolutions for the New Year. Resolutions about eating less, exercising more, spending extra time doing this or that, and so on. To me, New Year Resolutions are a great illustration of the relationship between intention and commitment. Having an intention does not mean I am committed. An intention is something I would like to do, or plan to do.



## COMMITMENT

But depending on my level of commitment, I may or may not actually follow through on my intention. In the face of challenges, obstacles, or changing circumstances, commitment is what is required to see an intention through to the end.

Let's look at a day-to-day example of the relationship between intention and commitment. Assume you are really busy and I tell you that I am not going to call or e-mail you today so that you can focus your attentions where they need to be. *It is my intention not to bother you.* If, after only 10 minutes, a question pops into my head and I pick up the phone to ask you about it, you will quickly learn that I am not committed to my intention.

I am sure that you have heard the saying "talk is cheap." And it is. Many times it is easy for me to say I will do something, but it is much harder for me to follow through with what I said. My intent, while good, may not be enough, unless I follow it through with commitment. It is wonderful to have good intentions, but until those intentions have the proper commitment level behind them, they are merely intentions, easily subject to change.

I challenge you today to consider your intentions. Think about the things you want to do, and then evaluate what commitments you need to make in order to follow through on your intentions.

At Funds For Learning it is our intention to provide quality service for our clients. We want to provide accurate work and expert assistance that closely matches each client's unique needs, and do so in a timely fashion with fees that are fair and affordable. We achieve these intentions by understanding them and then committing to see them through.

# P R A C T I C E

In a day and age where almost everything is laced with immediacy, the concept of commitment can seem counter-cultural. Entire meals can be microwaved in just minutes—and if you don't feel like cooking there is a smorgasbord of fast food to choose from. Thoughts and opinions can be distributed across the world in an instant. Communication has gotten so fast that words can be sent before the sender even has chance to think about what they've just said. Commitment, however, is not in the league of "right now" or instant gratification. Commitment is fueled by longevity and follow-through. Consider the following as you decide: "Are you committed to this, or is it just a passing interest?"

- Don't go with the fast, easy solution. Many times it may be the harder solution that is best for the client in the long run.
- Keep positive and don't get discouraged when it gets hard. It's easy to say and harder to do.
- Understand that it takes time. Keep the end goal in mind and be willing to adjust your path to get there.
- Understand the *why* behind the *what*. Chances are that if you know *why* you are doing something, you are more likely to stick to the task and see it through to completion.

# FOCUS

*Honing attention, time and energy  
into fulfilling specific responsibilities.*

## DEFINITION:

- Concentrating efforts along the right priorities in an effective manner
- Honing attention, time and energy into fulfilling specific responsibilities
- Guarding against distractions and saying “no” to that which degrades high-quality performance

## DESCRIPTIONS & OUTCOMES

- To concentrate attention
- Emphasize
- Fasten
- Center
- Train
- To have a clear perception
- To bring into focus

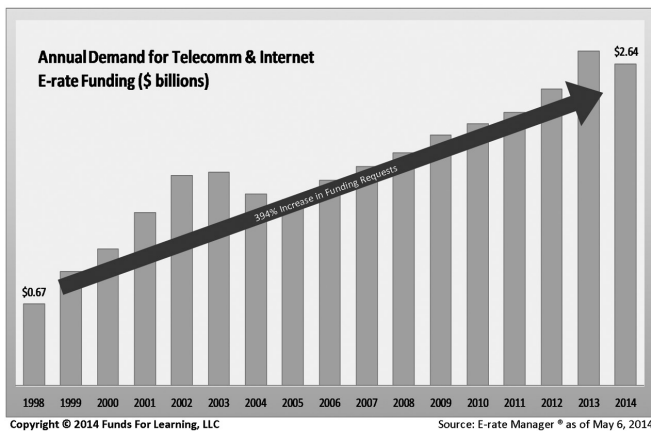
### OPPOSITES

- Blurry
- Out of focus
- Without direction

## CORRECT, BUT SLOPPY WORK

	A	B	C
1	669.3831		
2	931.955		
3	1117.57		
4	1419.44		
5	1720.043		
6	1747		
7	1574		
8	1526.998		
9	1682.857		
10	1792.784		
11	1906.95		
12	2050.95		
13	2149.485		
14	2249.292		

## CORRECT WORK LABELED WITH REFERENCES



In both cases, the numbers are correct. So, technically speaking, you could say the first and the second picture are both acceptable; however, it is obvious that the first picture is severely lacking. There is no way to know what the numbers represent or where they came from. Furthermore, they don't communicate much in the way of trends or other metadata associated with the figures.

The second picture, on the other hand, includes all of the same data, but it communicates what it is and where it came from, plus it shows the data in a much more revealing light.

The big story: the 336% increase in demand for telecommunications and Internet funding, even though the amount of E-rate funding available remains virtually unchanged since it was set in 1997.

When we take the time to do our work neatly, we reduce the risk of errors and we significantly increase the value of the work we provide to others. Yes, neatness usually requires that more time and energy be invested on the front end of a project; but it is almost always worth the extra effort.

## STORY #2 – THE COSTS OF CLUTTER

Have you ever misplaced something and had to spend time searching for it? I have, many times. It drives me crazy, especially when I know it is my own fault for not being organized. I have lost items in my desk, in my briefcase, in my sock drawer, in my car – and in many other spots – simply because I left those places in disarray. I have come to this important conclusion: *A messy desk is an invitation for something to get lost.* It's as if important paperwork is drawn to disorganization.

*Neat and tidy work flows out of neat and tidy work spaces.* Too often, my desk drawer is disheveled, and this has a real impact on my productivity and the productivity of those around me. Case in point: last week I was at an off-site meeting when I realized that I didn't have my wallet. Where was it? I double-checked my pockets and looked through my briefcase. No luck. It wasn't there. Then I checked with a colleague back at the office. They looked around my desk. Fortunately for me, they

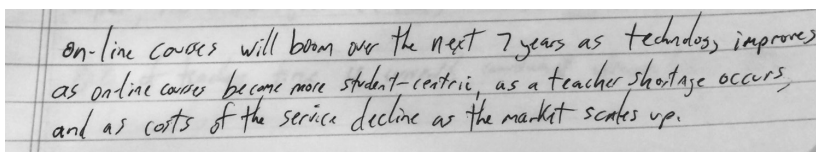
found it. Unfortunately for them, finding my wallet meant bringing it to me off-site.

My wallet was left on my untidy desk. Not knowing where it was caused me stress and cost a coworker an hour of time as they delivered it to me. Not only did my misplaced wallet almost ruin my day, it stole someone else's precious time. If my desk had been better organized, it is less likely that I would have misplaced my wallet. This would have been better for everyone.

Neatness Counts. Consider the cost of not being neat.

## STORY #3 – FROM CONTENT TO COMMUNICATION

Please review the following two images.



### **Impact of Online Courses Expanding**

Online courses will boom over the next 7 years as:

- Technology improves
- Online courses become more student-centric
- Teacher shortages occur
- Cost of the service declines as the market scales up

Image #1 is a hand-written note I made while reading *Disrupting Class* by Clayton Christensen. Image #2 is a slide I created from the hand-written note. Both images contain the same basic information. Yet, even though their content is essentially the same, the second image is much easier to read.

## NEATNESS COUNTS

It takes less time to review and it is more likely to be recalled. In short, image #2 does a more effective job of communicating its information. The secret: neatness.

Neatness Counts, and everyone benefits when we do our work neatly.

- Clear communication **reduces the risk** of misunderstandings and unspoken assumptions.
- **Neatness communicates value.** It says: *I respect your time and I want you to understand this information with as little effort as possible on your part. I am willing to work a little harder so that you don't have to struggle.*
- **Neatness fosters trust and builds confidence.** It says: *I will perform my work in an orderly fashion. I am covering all the bases and you can easily check my work.* Tidy work helps **guard against errors and omissions.**
- Well-organized work **saves everyone time later.** It is easier to reproduce and repurpose. It is also easier to check after-the-fact, such as during an audit.

The benefits of neat work far outweigh the extra investment of time that is required upfront. Personally, I always want to be improving the neatness of my work. Perhaps I should start by improving my handwriting. If “Image #1” above had been written neatly to begin with, perhaps I wouldn't have had to reformat the information into a new slide!

