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Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own. The following excerpt is from Robert W. Bly's The Content Marketing Handbook. Buy it now from Amazon | Barnes & Noble or click here to buy it directly from us and SAVE 60% on this book when you use code MARKET2021 through 4/24/21. Dean Mitchell | Getty Images I love formulas for writing for two reasons.First, the best formulas are simple, easy to remember and rapidly mastered. Knowing them can help you create content and copy that's twice as effective in half the time.Second, the reason they became formulas in the first place is that they work!Related: The 10-Step Effective Content Marketing CampaignThere are literally dozens of time-tested content and copywriting formulas out there. If you don't know any of them, you could be unnecessarily wasting your time reinventing the wheel with each promotion you write. You could also be writing inferior copy that diminishes sales.One of the oldest formulas — and perhaps the most famous — is AIDA. AIDA stands for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. It says persuasive copy must first grab the reader's attention, then get them interested in what you're selling, then create a desire to own the product and finally ask for action.AIDA is one of my favorite formulas — I've been using it to write successful promotions for four decades. Even better, it works just as well for content.Less well-known than AIDA, but in its way almost as powerful, is the SELWAB formula. SELWAB is a mnemonic device to remind marketers what's most important to the prospect. It stands for "start every letter with a benefit."Yet another writing formula I use — one I invented — is the "Five C's." It says that every good piece of content is clear, concise, compelling and credible, and has a call to action. Let's take a look at each element of the Five C's formula in a bit more detail.Clear Your writing must be clear to everyone who reads it — not just to you or the client or the marketing director or the product manager. There's an oft-quoted saying I like that defines clarity this way: "It's not enough to write so that you can be understood. You must write so that you cannot be misunderstood."The typical advice given in writing classes about clarity is to use small words and short sentences, paragraphs and sections. This is sensible, as they make your content easier to read.But clear writing stems primarily from clear thinking, and the converse is also true. If you don't really understand what you're talking about, your writing will be weak, rambling and obtuse. On the other hand, when you understand your subject matter, know your audience and have a useful and important idea you want to convey, the clarity of your writing will inevitably reflect that.Related: 9 Ways Your Content Marketing Can Generate Leads and Close SalesConcise The key point is that concise and brief aren't synonyms. Brief means "short." If you want to be brief, simply cut words until you reduce the composition to the desired length. Concise means telling the complete story in the fewest possible words — no rambling, no redundancy, no using three words when one will do.Compelling It's not enough to make the content easy to read. It must also be so interesting, engaging and informative that the reader can't put it down — or, at minimum, feels compelled to skim it to glean the important points.A major reason why so much content isn't compelling is that it's written about things that interest the marketer, not the prospect. Marketers care about their products, their organizations and in particular their "messaging" — the key points they want to get across to the reader. Unfortunately, readers aren't interested in any of these things. They care about their own problems, needs, fears, concerns, worries, challenges, interests and desires.As copywriter Don Hauptman has often said, the more your copy focuses on the prospect instead of the product, the more compelling it will be. The product is only relevant insofar as it addresses one of the reader's core concerns or desires.Credible The late copywriter Herschell Gordon Lewis noted that we live in an age of skepticism. Simply put, prospects are disinclined to believe what you say precisely because you're trying to sell them something.Fortunately, there are a number of useful tools at your disposal for building credibility and overcoming the reader's skepticism. Your prospects are wary of salespeople but are more inclined to trust advice from recognized experts in a field or industry. Therefore, you can overcome their doubt by establishing yourself or your organization as a thought leader in your market.One way to do this is by publishing a lot of content. Prospects distrust advertising but are somewhat more accepting of information sources such as websites, white papers, blogs and magazine articles. Become an active publisher of valuable content in your niche. Communicate your key messages in documents that are published in editorial formats, such as webcasts and white papers. Not only will your prospects find the messages more credible, but these publications will also accelerate your ascent to subject matter expert (SME) status in your niche.Another obvious but often overlooked means of building credibility is to offer a strong money-back guarantee and then, when customers ask for refunds, grant them quickly and cheerfully, without question or argument.Rude, slow, or unresponsive customer service can quickly destroy any credibility you've gained with your customer. In fact, take steps to resolve customer problems beyond what's required so customers feel you personally care about them and that they're getting more for their money than they have any right to expect.Related: The 7 Rules of Writing Persuasive Technical ContentCall to Action A call to action (CTA) tells the readers what action they should take and how to do it. These CTAs can appear throughout the text, or you can put them in a box or sidebar to make them stand out. Common CTAs include:Downloading a free white paper or ebookRegistering for a webinar or teleseminarGetting a password to access protected content on a websiteRequesting a free estimateAsking to get a phone call from a sales repPurchasing a product online from a shopping cartSubscribing to an online newsletterDid you enjoy your book preview? Click here to grab a copy today—now 60% off when you use code MARKET2021 through 4/24/21. Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own. Is successful leadership caught or taught? It's a question worth asking if you want to conquer new areas in work and business. Even though I served as a leader and educator for most of my Air Force career and now coach leaders in top organizations around the world, it was as a follower in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" POW camp that I really learned about leadership. Shutterstock Most POWs held in North Vietnam were fighter pilots and aircrew. Like entrepreneurs, we were accustomed to operating independently, using flexibility and problem solving to accomplish our mission. But in the confinement of that crucible experience, we had to adapt our behavior and mindsets to covertly work together and survive as a team. Courageous leadership examples everyday inspired us to resist the enemy and return with honor.Related: 5 Tips for Entrepreneurial Success From Gen. David Petraeus I'm often asked, "What is your most important piece of advice for young leaders?" Actually it's the same for all generations -- never stop learning and growing in your leadership. It was a priority for me as a young POW right out of college, and I'm still learning every day and encouraging others to do the same. In my upcoming book, Engage with Honor: Building a Culture of Courageous Accountability, I share the seven Cs below that we used in the camps, and explain how they apply to us today.Developing your leadership core.We had seasoned, highly-trained leaders in the camps, but no one had ever been a POW. We were all stripped to our core, but the senior leaders bore the brunt of the torture and deprivation. There were three foundational attributes that set them apart and enabled them to suffer and sacrifice while inspiring the rest of us. Character -- They knew right from wrong, and they embraced the military Code of Conduct for POWs as the standard. Have you clarified what you stand for? What are your non-negotiables?Courage -- They consistently suffered torture and humiliation to do their duty, live up to the Code, and set the example for the rest of us. Do you cave in to your doubts and fears, or do you lean into them to keep your commitments, make tough decisions, and do what's right?Commitment -- They did not waiver. They were beaten down, but they bounced back time and again. They believed in their mission, and they were loyal to our cause. Do you remain faithful to your values, and do you stay the course to achieve your goals?Related: 7 Refreshing Do's and Don'ts for SuccessIf you're growing in these three Cs, you'll be leading by example -- showing others what an honorable leader looks like. You don't have to be perfect, but you can be authentically vulnerable and transparent, honestly admitting your mistakes and correcting back to course. This leadership philosophy attracts and inspires followers everywhere -- not just in POW camps. Building your leadership competence.By living and leading with honor, you'll have the credibility to hold others accountable. But courageous accountability follows a proven process. These next four Cs give you the tactical, soft skills that you need to create a culture of success: Clarify -- Our POW leaders set policy, and we took great risks to communicate it to even the most isolated cells. As an entrepreneurial leader, it's easy to assume that internal and external customers know and understand your perspective. That's totally unrealistic. Do you have clarity about mission, vision, values, standards, policies and the specific task expectations? Do you over-communicate them to make sure clarity gets to every level in the organization? Do you include the "why" wherever possible? Millennial leaders especially want to know why.Connect -- POW leaders showed great respect and concern for others. They made us feel important because we were all suffering as a team to achieve the same goal -- return with honor.Connect differently with each person. Do you connect with each person based on their unique natural talents and behaviors? Assessment tools such as Leadership Behavior DNA™ help assess the strengths and struggles of your team members.Connect at a heart level. Do you regularly communicate to individuals that they are important? Do you support and listen to them to send a message that they are valued and respected?Collaborate -- Even though senior leaders were clearly in charge, they approached issues more as teammates than as bosses whenever possible. Collaboration is crucial in our knowledge age. As the leader, do you listen to others' ideas, give feedback, coach, train, support, develop, and correct as needed? Millennials especially respond to collaborative leadership.Closeout -- Get closure with celebration or confrontation -- Most POWs were incarcerated for more than five years, so celebrating our freedom was a landmark experience. But in the midst of our POW experience, we learned that celebrating survival milestones and even minor accomplishments lifted our spirits, brought us together and energized us for the next battle.Celebrate -- Many leaders don't like celebrating for fear that performance and production will go down. Done properly, it's just the opposite. Do you have doubts and fears about celebrating? How could you gain courage and commitment to celebrate more? Confront -- Even when you've done everything right to promote success, sometimes people don't come through or meet organizational standards and values. Do you courageously confront when appropriate, or do you procrastinate? What would a respectful plan to confront fairly and firmly look like? Carried out, how would it be received by your team? Related: 3 Ways to Hold Employees Accountable for Their Career GrowthMoving forward.If you're concerned about your current leaders as well as next generation leaders, the best thing you can do is to adopt these attributes and then lead with courageous accountability. Growing together is the cheapest and most effective way to improve performance, bottom line results and the culture of your organization. So, honorable leadership is both caught and taught. Choose to engage with honor, and build a culture of courageous accountability.

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