



By Kent Warneke, Editor Emeritus

Here at the Daily News, our email in baskets typically are full of press releases each day. Nothing surprising about that because there are many organizations, individuals and businesses that seek to share information about what they are doing, what they're planning and what they've accomplished.

Part of our job is determining what is worthy of publishing in print and online as a news story and what falls more under the paid advertisement side of things. It can be a judgment call. But there's no question that a well-written press release — one without jargon and indecipherable acronyms — increases the chances of a press release being published.

So I thought it might be helpful to share some tips I came across recently from a public relations firm on how to write a good press release. Here are some of the ideas the PR firm suggested:

1. Grab attention with a good headline. The beginning of a press release is the most important. A strong headline (and, for that matter, email subject line when the release is sent out) will pull in journalists seeking good stories. Your headline should be as engaging as it is accurate.
2. Get right to the point in the first paragraph. Because journalists are busy people, one must assume that they will only read the first sentence and then scan the rest. So, get the message of a press release out quickly. Every important point should be addressed in the first few sentences. The subsequent paragraphs should be for supporting information.
3. Include hard numbers. It's easy to fill up a page with a creative, colorful narrative. Leave the artistry to the writers — pack a press release with hard numbers that support the significance of a product or announcement. If claiming a trend, supply proof to back it up. Quantify an argument and it will become much more compelling.
4. Make it grammatically flawless. Proofread a press release — and let a few other people proofread it as well — before sending it out. Just one error can leave a bad impression.
5. Include quotes whenever possible. There is a source of natural color that cannot be replicated: quotes. Including a good quote from someone in the company or close to the product/event can give a human element to the press release, as well as being a source of information in its own right.
6. Include contact information. A common oversight that can render a press release ineffectual is a lack of contact information for reporters to follow up with. Don't forget to include an email address and phone number on the release (preferably at the top of the page).
7. One page is best — and two is the maximum. As with most good writing, shorter is usually better. Limit a press release to one page, though two pages is acceptable. This will translate into a more readable document — something journalists are always looking for.
8. Provide access to more information. Although it's wise to limit a press release to one page (or two), that doesn't mean it can't show people how to learn more. Providing links to a company or organization website, where prospective writers can learn more, is a crucial element to the release.



Early education matters

THE AUTHOR is an Albion rancher and cattle feeder and member of the Boone County Foundation.

Why does early childhood education matter to someone like me, a rancher and cattle feeder? I recently was asked that question when I attended the Thriving Children & Families Conference in Kearney. I'm a rancher with no young children or grandchildren. I am not an educator or social worker. I certainly wasn't the typical person attending the conference.

So why did I become a passionate advocate for early childhood education?

I assure you I didn't start out that way. My journey began in 2015 when the Boone County Foundation held a meeting of organizations and leaders to set priorities for the county. Child care was identified as priority No. 1 by younger participants. Nothing was done. Two years later, the process was repeated with the same results. Still nothing.

Finally, with some skepticism, our foundation and the Albion Economic Development Corp. partnered to conduct some surveys and interviews. It became clear that a critical shortage of child care exists and is only going to get worse. We began the effort to address it. In my mind, we were looking to provide more space to park kids while their parents worked, simple as that.

A committee, led by ag producers and business owners, was created with the goal of building a child care center. Also, a broad coalition was formed which includes the hospital, school, nursing home, city and economic development groups. More than \$2.8 million has been raised in less than a year. Our center has become a communitywide effort.

As plans developed, the education of our committee began. We learned the importance of child care availability to employers. We heard many times of the need for improved child care options to expand the existing labor pool. There are parents who

want to work but can't due to lack of child care. We saw that expanding child care is critical to community development. We must provide progressive options to attract young couples to our community and to retain the families we already have.

However, it was when we came to understand the benefits that a quality center can have on a child's development that I and others came to fully appreciate just how much of a difference we can make. What did we learn that is so compelling?

Children who start behind stay behind. Children who are not ready when they begin kindergarten are distinctly disadvantaged. Worse, the vast majority remain behind all the way through school and into the workforce.

This is a vicious cycle of poverty and all its related societal problems.

Here's the good news: a quality-based early childhood center can break that cycle. Research and real-life experience clearly prove that children who are given the opportunity to attend an early childhood development center are better prepared for kindergarten. This is a huge advantage and it is especially important to provide this benefit to at-risk children.

As an example, Wayne, in northeast Nebraska, clearly is transforming children's lives. Before this community had an early childhood development center, an average of 17 children per year fell into the classification of "not ready to begin kindergarten." Once their center began operations, that number fell to five.

Let that sink in.

In Boone County we are working on building plans, applying for grants and conducting a public awareness campaign. We are hoping construction can begin in 2020. Our center will provide care from infancy through 5 years of age. Its staff will be trained to help children from the earliest age to develop socially and emotionally by incorporating a proven, play-based curriculum. These are the basics, yet some children are not receiving them at home.

Through early childhood education we can change the trajectory of a child's life. Let's do it!

jay@wagonhammer.com



**JAY
WOLF**

Nebraska View