Are Busy Bees Making Honey or Just Buzzing Around?

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When choosing an article to analyze, I was immediately drawn to Barbara Erhenriech’s article ‘The Cult of Busyness’ (Prose Model, 1997). This article appealed to me as it holds such relevance and connection in my own life. The topic of the article is busyness as it relates to success. I will be discussing the audience, purpose and arrangement of this article and show that the author captures her target audience through persuasive discussion.

Although this article was published in ‘Prose Models’ (1997), which is a ‘collection of essays and rhetorical writing’ (Amazon.com), I do not believe the sole intended audience is the reader of superior writing. This article could easily have been published in *Chatelaine*, *Readers Digest* or *Macleans*, as it appeals to and targets busy people, and those who know them. The first two paragraphs of the article recount an experience, and it is in this experience that Erhenriech finds her audience. Many readers will recall times when they have been on either end of a similar phone conversation. Therefore the larger audience is the busy parents, career focused, committee attending people that fill every working persons social circle. As we know, audience and purpose are intertwined (Strategies For Successful Writing, 2010. p. 5) and the author develops this by establishing her purpose and drawing the audience in at the same time.

Erhenriech’s purpose is somewhat murky at first as the reader isn’t sure if she is mocking the busyness or appreciating the struggle. As she builds her essay it becomes clear that her purpose is to shed light on what she calls the ‘Cult of Busyness’ (Prose Models, 1997). She ‘persuades the reader’ (Reinking et al., 2010, p. 4) not through definition but through examples. At times Erhenriech cites far-fetched cases of what the busy people are doing to improving their career’s position while maintaining a lifestyle or appearances. She also purposely ‘entertains the reader’ (Reinkin et al., 2019 p. 4), using examples like the ‘art dealing neurosurgeon’ or the ‘modern, self-sufficient woman’ (Prose Models, 1997, p. 10). The real purpose of her essay comes at the end as the reader is left to wonder: ‘is the busyness that fills our lives worth what we lose in the process and time of being busy’ (Prose Models, 1997, p.11). Through reading this opinion piece, I was left wondering ‘is it all for not?’ as the busyness often controls my own life as I manage through working, school and family life. It is this reaction in myself that proves to me that she has indeed captured her target audience.

In the arrangement of the article, the writer begins the essay with antidotal musing, comically reflecting on real events. This sets the tone for the article as a funny opinion piece or ‘creative nonfiction’ (Sargent and Paraskevas, 2005, p. 290) with hard edges. These hard edges are the ‘topic sentences that reveal the writers main idea immediately’ (Reinkin et al., 2019 p. 60) in each of the paragraphs three to nine. Ehrenreich nicely develops her article as she maintains a consistent pattern through out the paragraphs. Each paragraph starts with a strong statement followed by information she uses as examples or proof to support the statement. This opinion piece is just that, as the writer does not cite any published research or consult outside sources for quotes. The evidence that she uses is her experiences and opinions, which are alone persuasive. These strong statements actually get stronger and stronger as she moves though the article. The strongest statement being the first sentence in paragraph 7, the thesis statement: ‘The secret of the truly successful, I believe, is that they learned very early on how *not* to be busy’ (Prose Models, 1997p.10). This ‘climactic order often used in personal writing creates a crescendo pattern’ (Reinkin et al., 2019 p. 67). The crescendo is developed in the preceding paragraphs with the idea that ‘successful people are not controlled by their multitasking to do list’ (Prose Models, 1997p.10). She concludes the article strongly, questioning if ‘all the busyness is worth it in the end, if personal relationship are compromised’ (Prose Models, 1997p.11).

Barbara Ehrenreich captures her target audience through persuasive discussion. The discussion is developed through the author knowing her audience and having a clear purpose. She appeals to the working busy people that we know or who we are, by discussing relatable situations. She maintains her focus through out, bringing the reader closer to the thesis statement, questioning if filling our lives with busy tasks, really creates success. She engulfs the reader by maintaining a consistent pattern and arrangement through out the essay finishing with the reader left to make up their own mind about how busyness impacts their lives. This article highlights that idea that busyness does not necessarily create success, as successful people are not necessarily busy (Prose Models, 1997p.11).

References

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