



Dr. Kathleen A. Begley
The Write Woman
KBegley@writecompanyplus.com
610-429-1562

Sending a Business Request to Santa Claus By Kathleen Begley

Dear Santa,

I'm writing to you early this year because I want to beat other people to the punch with my request for this season's most popular gift item. No, it's not an update on the usual perfume, necklace, or sweater – though I remain grateful for everything you have ever bestowed on me. Well, maybe not those heavy dangling earrings that ripped my two earlobes into four separate flaps back in the 1990's. But I say let bygones be bygones. This year I have only one request.

I want a bailout -- a really big one.

I decided my best course of action was to ask one of the few living celebrities with an unsullied reputation – namely you -- to plead my case with the U.S. government. Santa, as you may know from reading the North Pole Times, the financial industry just got a bailout from bewildered taxpayers to the tune of \$700 billion. I suspect the only expenditure bigger than that is the money you spend each year on Christmas gifts.

But back to my favorite subject on Earth: me.

When it comes to my getting a bailout, I suspect you may be thinking I don't deserve one. I run my communications training business too traditionally: I try to follow the rules. I know, I know, I know – how boring is that? But, with all due respect, I want to point out that I never got notification that the rules for getting massive payoffs had changed.

Here I am, trying to be nice, when the federal government starts rewarding naughty.

Santa, I'd appreciate your telling Uncle Sam that I'm trying hard to change. Right now, in fact, I'm working on a seminar to help other corporate leaders and innovative entrepreneurs improve their bailout scores as well. Here's the advice I have so far:

- Spend, spend, spend. And keep really sloppy records. If at all possible, splurge on a spacious mansion, a fancy car, and a vacation home in Florida. The Sunshine State is the ideal location because laws there allow you to keep bazillions in real estate instead of paying your debtors. I know you'll enjoy getting a welcome-to-the-neighborhood gift bag from former football star O.J. Simpson if he ever gets out of prison for terrorizing those upright denizens of Las Vegas.
- Arrange indecipherable deals. If I understand correctly, the genius of the New York financiers was that they arranged transactions with thousands of layers. Generally speaking, this approach forces investigators to spend their lifetimes trying to figure out your system. By then, you can be happily resettled in Zurich or Budapest. With satellite television, you'll barely notice that you no longer live in the United States.
- Cultivate denial. For as long as possible, tell your employees, your lenders, and your family that everything is just fine. If your mother becomes suspicious because she remembers your stealing penny candy when you were a child, don't sweat it. With any luck, she'll be as dead as Bears Stern and Lehman Brothers by the time the full truth comes out.
- Cling to the façade. Even when your house of cards completely falls, avoid sharing details with anyone, particularly loyal workers. Let them find out from the news media that they're jobless. Brush off any suggestions that you should go to the expense of buying



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cardboard boxes to help these whiners carry their possessions out of the office; you're never going to see them again, anyway.

- Ignore the little people. What do they know? Besides, excitement is good for retirees, who compose the biggest chunk of small investors. It keeps their minds active. What can be more energizing than discovering at age 81 that the bank containing your life savings has gone belly up? Surely, that news will make their hearts stronger.
- Walk away with millions. Although some complainers will criticize you for lining your pockets in such desperate times, who the heck cares? If these judgmental sorts were as smart as you, they would have acted irresponsibly enough to get a bailout, too. Refuse to get suckered into their self-pity.
- Launch a new career. The obvious choice: professional celebrity. As an experienced flim-flamer, you can easily get a fresh start by publishing a tell-all book. It should catapult you onto talk shows, which will launch you as a host on the Food Network. Before long, with perhaps a smidgen of help from perky and plump Rachel Ray, you'll be appearing regularly on live television cooking the linguini rather than cooking the books.

So Santa, there you have it. Obviously, I deserve a bailout as much as any other greedy and irresponsible person. By the way, come Dec. 24, am I correct to assume that you want me to leave the same treat as last year – not cookies and milk, but fresh sushi and blue martinis?

Dr. Kathleen Begley has owned and operated Write Company Plus communications training for almost 20 years. She gives corporate seminars on topics including writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com with your thoughts on her articles. She responds to everybody. Uninterested in reading Dr. Begley's pearls of wisdom? Opt out by hitting your reply button and writing "delete me" in the subject line. The Write Company Plus webmaster will immediately rub you out.