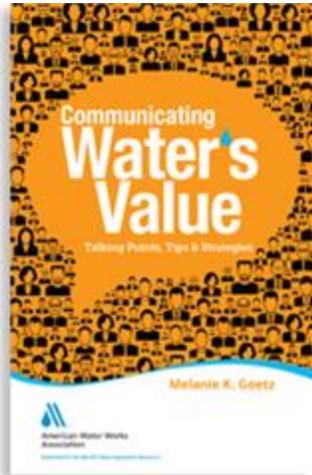


FULL LENGTH REVIEWS



Communicating Water's Value: Talking Points, Tips & Strategies

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Jerry Brown, General Manager, Contra Costa Water District

“Our managers read “Communicating Water’s Value” and discussed its application in a retreat setting focused on meeting the needs of our customers. Melanie’s book is an unbelievably useful resource for water professionals, and opened our eyes to the intricacies of consumer behavior and the power of effective communications.”

Rob McElroy, P.E.

“If you are interested in moving your utility in a new direction, then this book is for you. If you are wondering what you may be doing wrong, this book can provide you examples to learn from. If you are searching for new ideas, this book is packed with them. If connecting with your utility customers seems to be a mystery to you, this book can help explain why.

Goetz’s “Communicating Water’s Value” is packed with practical advice, real-world illustrations, easy-to-understand analysis and insightful commentary all designed to help you see the world better and find the right path forward. The author does an outstanding job of presenting “case files” of both success stories as well as cautionary tales that draw the reader in and get you thinking. Goetz skillfully presents powerful analogies that allow you to grasp some fairly deep concepts that hit the mark every time for me. As a utility manager myself, I found myself reading it and nodding, “Yes, yes, YES,” throughout (my only distractions being the thoughts of what specific story I would share with who on my staff the next day)! Thoroughly engaging, hard to put down, a treasure trove of ideas...I cannot say enough about this book as a guide, resource and inspiration to utility managers everywhere!”

Peter Prevos, P.E., Coliban Water, Australia

The literature on managing water utilities is dominated by technical tomes on how to implement the latest engineering developments to improve services. Engineers often see marketing only as peripheral their quest to provide a reliable and safe water supply. It is therefore a delight to read a book on how to improve services in water utilities using marketing techniques common in other industries.

Communicating Water's Value: Talking Points, Tips & Strategies by Melanie Goetz is based on a solid foundation on years of experience, backed by the latest scientific findings in behavioral economics, neuromarketing and related disciplines. This book is by no means a nerdy academic treatise. The countless vividly written examples from Melanie's experience in working with utilities will appeal to water utility professionals and place the theory in context.

The book delves into the non-rational (a term I prefer above 'irrational') aspects of human psychology and explains how the latest marketing techniques from the competitive commercial world can be applied to enhance the value proposition of water utilities.

Marketing has earned itself a bad name for being deceptive and manipulative, which is one of the reasons it is not often practiced in public services. Melanie's book shows, however, that good marketing can tap into the forces of psychology and be used for good instead of evil.

Melanie recognized in the book that her work is "preaching to the choir". This book should be read by engineers, economists, accountants and all other professions that are normally at a distance from the customer interface. As pointed out in the latter part of the book, innovation can only arise from positive deviance. Daring to be different and break the shackles of tradition will not be easy in an industry dominated by traditional thinking.

David LaFrance, CEO, American Water Works Association

Finally! Guidance, a framework, on how to communicate the value of water in a way that its true value can be appreciated and the general public can understand. Melanie Goetz is a marketer who is vested in the water industry; in her breakthrough book, *Communicating Water's Value: Talking Points, Tips & Strategies*, she provides game-changing insights about how water professionals can communicate water's value to its ultimate stakeholder—the customers.

Every water professional needs to read this book. If you are reading this column, I know you have a level of interest in the value of water, and you know how complicated it is to communicate its value. This book will help you think about how to achieve that goal in ways you have never thought about before.

Every student interested in water needs to read this book. If you are a professor, this is a must-read for your students; it will help them understand the context of the water profession and how successful water professionals need to be both technical experts and great communicators—which requires a whole set of different technical skills.

Perhaps you are asking yourself, what does a marketer know about water? Or maybe you think marketing is just hype and spin, and it has no place in the technical aspects of providing water. Well, rest

assured, Goetz is no water novice. She has a solid background on water from serving as a board member of a water utility, being a water consultant, owning her own well, and moving her family to make sure they lived in an area with a reliable water supply. She readily admits that being a marketer in an “engineering world” is complicated at times, but she counters that her expertise in marketing enhances and magnifies the value provided by water experts—it’s an important and necessary balance.

In her book, Goetz says that “the value of any product, water included, is established subjectively by consumer’s perceptions or its importance.” And that is where her expertise lies—framing and shaping perceptions. While water professionals focus on important and critical development of safe water supplies, people like Goetz focus on how to frame the value of safe water in simple terms—in short, she helps frame the complicated technical issues so that customers understand and perceive water’s importance.

A couple of key things to note about the book—first, Goetz covers a vast amount of territory, including rate setting, pricing, social and marketing norms, perception of value, irrationality of numbers, discounts versus rebates versus coupons, ethics, working with the press, and more. Second, she realizes that framing value is not a one-size-fits-all proposition, but she definitely provides new ways for water professionals to think about how they communicate water’s value and why doing so is important. And third, she draws on real examples of how several water utilities have already taken steps to think outside the box when marketing the value of their services.

When I asked Melanie why her book was important, her response was to the point. She said, “The people in the water profession need a bigger voice; they need to stop flying under the radar and need to start taking credit for the impactful work they do.” She further said that “while some marketing may be ‘spin,’ that is not the case with water—in this case, marketing simply ensures that the value of the technical work does not go unappreciated.”

Goetz strongly believes that a critical piece of marketing water’s value is in how the discussion is framed. And the framing, when done properly, will have a positive effect on the perception of water’s value—and perception is the name of the game. In her book, she follows this framing rule. Each chapter is written in a very conversational tone and begins with a non-water example that helps frame the point of the chapter. Then, once the point is framed, Goetz applies the example’s principles to water to make her point. It is an excellent example of walking the talk.

No matter how important, everything we know about water is not always interesting to non-water experts. And the complexities we understand can be turnoffs, as Goetz says: “If we have to wonder and ponder over what someone is trying to say...it just ticks us off.” And that is why understanding the value of marketing—differently from what we do today—is important. The last thing we want to do is tick off our customers.

If you think this book is not for you, well, I would recommend you think again. When asked who her target audience was when she wrote the book, Goetz answered simply: “I wrote it so my husband would read it; he is a water engineer.” I’d say Goetz knows her audience.

Amy Conklin, Coordinator, Barr-Milton Watershed Authority

“In her book, *Communicating Water’s Value*, Melanie Goetz takes what should be a mundane issue and weaves it into a compelling and entertaining story. She connects seemingly disparate events to emphasize her points. If you are in the water industry, you’ll find this a great read.”

Lain Leoniak, Water Conservation Manager, City of Bozeman, MT

“This book is a must read for water utility professionals at any stage of their career. It makes a compelling case for the importance of on-going communication and relationship building between water utilities and the people they serve and how to make these interactions successful and effective in a variety of contexts.”

**Carolyn Steffl, Esq.,
Moses, Wittemyer, Harrison and Woodruff, P.C.
General counsel to nine public water providers in the state of Colorado**

Public water providers are constantly struggling to keep water rates low while replacing aging infrastructure, meeting new regulatory requirements and treating for emerging contaminants. Yet, we all field complaints that water is too expensive. What if there was a book to provide concrete, easy tips which will reduce the complaints and increase your residents' appreciation of the water utility and your services? Now, there is.

Water utilities hire rate consultants to make sure rates are equitable and sufficient but rarely focus on how to explain the rates so that residents understand they are equitable and needed. The book *Communicating Water's Value* by Melanie Goetz helps fill that gap. Her advice, through engaging examples, consumer studies, and marketing techniques will help you answer basic questions such as: Should more revenue be generated from base fees or user fees? What should we call base fees? How should we explain rate increases? How should we explain tiered pricing to be most effective in encouraging conservation? How can we deal with problems like odor proactively? How can we use social media in our messaging?

By reading Goetz's book, I learned why traditional economics and marketing seldom work in the water world, where customers pay base rates even if they don't use the water and pay more per unit if they consume more water. These concepts make sense to those of us who spend our lives working with water, but are counterintuitive to the public. For these reasons, a new approach to marketing was needed. If you are contemplating a rate increase, or even if you are not, *Communicating Water's Value* will help you talk the same language as your customers so they understand the importance of the clean and reliable water you provide.