



THE JOHNS HOPKINS  
CENTER FOR CLINICAL TRIALS

Department of Anesthesiology and Critical Care Medicine  
Department of Biostatistics  
Department of Epidemiology

Department of Medicine  
Department of Ophthalmology  
Oncology Center

Tuesday, 9 May 1995

Memorandum

To: SHPH staff of Center for Clinical Trials

Fr: CLM

Re: Pass-off protocol

As with a football team, we are interdependent. To make a pass one has to have a passer and receiver. To have a high completion ratio, a team has to have good passers and good receivers. Only those teams with good quarterbacks and receivers are likely to make it to the superbowl. This note is about passing and receiving in regard to transfer documents. A transfer document is one created by one person for use by another person to produce a finished document. Transfers, to the extent that they are the product of a joint effort, can be thought of as a completed pass or one that is fumbled, depending on outcome. Passers fail by calling the wrong signal, looking at one receiver and passing to another, or throwing before the receiver is in position because of being rushed. Receivers fail by not listening to the signal, by running the wrong pattern, or by failing to keep their eye on the ball.

A pass that is caught and then dropped is a fumble. Fumbles result in a mad scramble to recover the ball. If the opposing team gets the ball you have to go back on the defense and hope for another chance later.

Passers and receivers have to get used to working under pressure. They know that they will be rushed, and thus have to learn to perform in spite of the pressure. They know that the game plan set forth in the locker room may be modified on the field by the coach. In short, they learn to live with last minutes changes because it is the nature of the game.

Quarterbacks do most of the passing. The good ones know that to complete a pass they have to take the handoff, have protection in the pocket, have sufficient time to get set, and have to throw the ball with authority and accuracy to the intended receiver. If they execute poorly they blame themselves not their receivers. Further, they know that once in a while a perfectly thrown pass will be dropped. It happens. They don't blame the receiver for their mistakes. But by the same token they do not take kindly to repeated failures to catch the ball when, in their eyes, it should have been caught.

Incompleted passes result in a loss of a down or the ball if they occur on the 4th down (NFL style ball). Loss of a down means no gain on the play. They next play starts at the same line of scrimmage as for the previous play.

In the context of work, we encounter a loss of a down every time something has to be redone because of a missed signal, failure to concentrate on making a completion, or running the wrong pattern. Whether a passer or receiver, the only thing that matters are completed passes. As

"coach", I see a team with a low fumble rate but with too many loss of down plays. We need to improve in the category. To do that, team members have to know their "positions" and know how each relates to the whole. It is the responsibility of the coach and quarterbacks to do that. Each player has to try to catch the ball and hold on to it. Completions that are dropped an instant after they are caught are incompleated passes.

As a team we need to work at reducing the number of times a document has to be turned around before completion. I distinguish in this context between an iteration and a turnaround. An iteration comes about as a result of a work in progress, for example, as in drafts of a letter or manuscript. A turnaround comes about as the result of a failure to deal with the required changed indicated for a given iteration. From the vantage point as "coach" the most common reasons for turnarounds on letters are failure to spell check and to read the letter from the viewpoint of the recipient (ie, failure of concentration). The discipline I want as "coach" is to make spell checking automatic. Anytime any change is made, the document should be spell checked before it is printed. I see the failure to spell check as a lapse of concentration that results in loss of a down (ie, another turnaround).

The second discipline required is that of careful reading. Before a document is handed off it should be read. It is not enough to merely make the changes and pass the document on. Two reading approaches are useful. The first one is to read on the screen. Once a document passes that test the second reading should be from a hard copy as if one were the "recipient" of the document. As coach, it drives me up the wall to see or get turnarounds where I know that has not happened due to presence of nonsense words or sentences. If the words or sentences do not make sense to you they will not make sense to the recipient. There is more to a turnaround than the mere mechanics of making indicated changes.

The production of a hard copy ensures another discipline that is not always evident and that has to do with simply looking at the printed document. Use of the UP view option is not sufficient. The proof is in the pudding and the pudding in this case is the printed document. As "coach" I am fairly certain that this discipline has not been followed when I see headers and footers that are correct, fonts that are wrong, or bad page breaks. Getting a letter with nothing on the last page except the closing is a dead giveaway.

As "coach" I have admonished against using the screen for Word Perfect as if it were a sheet in a typewriter. One of the reasons I object to a double-spaced screen setting (aside from reducing the amount of readable text on the screen) is that it contributes to turnarounds. If the document is to be single-spaced when finished it should be prepared single-spaced and viewed in the single-spaced format. Even the passer wants a double-spaced format. One of the reasons for bad page breaks in a finished letter is that the person producing the various turnarounds does not see the letter in its finished, single-spaced, format until it is put into final form and ready to mail.

As a passer, the expectation is that the receiver will resolve questions or queries contained in a document. A question mark in a document should be addressed either by the receiver or by the proofreader. A turnaround that starts with a question mark and is returned with the question unresolved is a busted play. It should not happen. As "coach" I view those occurrences as the result of a missed assignments.

We are judged by the quality of our end product. In the case of letters, those judgments are based on the content, accuracy, and appearance of the letter. We have a busted play whenever we end up with wrong addressed or misspellings of the name of addressee or copyees. Ditto for dates in continuation headers that do not match the date on the first page.

Documents that have attachments require those attachments at the draft stage. A document is not complete if it calls for attachments and they are not provided. The reasons are obvious. The passer needs to see the attachment to make certain that the receiver has gotten the right signal. Further, the receiver and passer both need to see the way they are listed in the enclosures portion of the letter to make certain that the listing is accurate.

Most documents have histories. The file for a letter may start with a tape in a plastic folder. The file returned should be the draft of the tape and the tape. The file continues to build with each subsequent iteration of the letter until it is mailed. The file is purged when the mailing occurs.

The file should include all relevant documents, including with the letter or document that generated the file. References cited should also be part of the file. Iterations should be arranged from newest to oldest and should be prominently numbered for ease of recording and should be stapled to prevent losses and improper linkages.

Documents that are passed to a receiver as an electronic document for conversion to Center formats need to be returned in electronic form as well as hardy copy form. If a file starts with a diskette it should remain with the file and should be updated with iterations of the document. In my case this means that if I bring in an electronic copy of a letter for document produced at home the return file should include the electronic file as created in the office.

Many documents undergo various iterations and turnarounds. The passer relies on the clock time contained in footers in the document. The failure to update the footer causes the passer to be confused as to the most recent document. Any turnaround, no matter how trivial, requires a change of the footer time and date.

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