

Writing & Editing

Information versus Transformation

by Elsa Ramírez de Aguilar

Any work you do is the product of a vision, but that vision can change. Staff come and go, and the vision is transferred and adjusted, for better or worse. This has been my experience in managing SETECA's publishing ministry, Estudios Clase, for the last 13 years.

Even when the vision has been declared and confirmed in written form, it is easy to lose sight of it. Maintaining one's focus on the vision depends on the philosophy applied to the work and the worldview of the people who manage it.

Estudios Clase produces Bible and theology training materials for people in the Spanish-speaking world. Our books are academic; they are intended to train people for professional ministry. But what does this mean?

In a recent review of our books, I realized that while most informed readers about Bible doctrine and practical ministry, few dealt with character development and spiritual formation.



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To effectively minister to others, a person must first be transformed by the Word of God. Our vision and mission clearly specify that this is necessary, but our authors' focus was the transmission of *information*, not on the *formation* and *transformation* of the audience.

Although the information in our books was very good, my assistant and I began to reorient all our publications, focusing on people—that is, aiming to

impact our readers by daring them to change their lives and behavior—so our books would fulfill their purpose of training them for ministry.

First, each of our books is divided into lessons or chapters. The lesson or chapter begins with an introduction of what a person is to gain from this material. In reviewing our books, we saw that very few chapters challenged readers toward personal transformation. Hence, we studied the content and identified personal goals of relevance to our readers, then explicitly stated these goals in the introduction for readers to consider.

Second, we revised the body of the lessons. We included more examples drawn from everyday life. We included case studies dealing with personal, family, church, or community circumstances. Even if a given situation did not apply in their own lives, we asked readers to consider possible solutions. We also provided opportunities for readers to share their own situations in study groups.

Third, each section of the lesson or chapter has a closing section where the reader is invited to reflect on the content. We saw that these sections included few points that made people think about themselves, their own situations, and their own lives. We created questions about the personal implications of the lesson content, to guide readers to think about their own circumstances that might need to be changed or improved. We linked these questions to the goals outlined in the chapter introductions.

This process has opened my eyes to the need for editors to be sensitive and responsive—and true to our stated objectives! Christian products should transform readers. If we really want to do the work of God, our products must truly touch lives. Focusing on people means not just publishing information, but contributing to the spiritual formation of readers and, ultimately, to the transformation of their communities. ❖

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