In a Surprise Move...

By Paula LaRocque

Journalists don’t speak as they write. If they did, it would sound something like:

**Hack:** How were things at your vacation facility?

**Frack:** We had wide-ranging weather all season. One storm dumped more than seven inches of rain on our densely wooded lot, spawning hurricane-force winds and golfball-sized hail. Plus an unprecedented number of visitors arrived amid the facility restoration.

**H:** My, that must have sparked burgeoning confusion and decimated your plans for restoring your vacation site to a state-of-the-art facility. Was it sort of a defining moment?

**F:** It spurred a major shift in sleeping arrangements, triggered sweeping changes in the menu, and fueled a personal economic crunch.

**H:** What a chilling effect! How long were you beleaguered by this worst-case scenario?

**F:** The visitors left early, actually, but not before offending everyone, including a close friend and lifelong politician who hails from New York City and has close ethnic ties.

**H:** You say your friend is from delegate-rich New York?

**F:** Right. Anyway, yet another politician friend, D-Dallas, weighed in on the issue by calling for the visitors' immediate withdrawal from my vacation site. And that provoked a firestorm of criticism.

**H:** Awesome. Did that level the playing field and cause the visitors to leave your strife-torn facility?

**F:** Heck no. That was just the cutting edge. Next, they targeted my housekeeper, 45, and launched an unprovoked attack.

**H:** You mean they fired a broadside at her, too? Did a heated debate ensue? Did they hurl verbal insults at each other?

**F:** Too true. In effect, they unleashed a new round of difficulty, and the whole matter escalated to what some called "critical mass."
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H: Which side blinked finally?

F: Well, in a bizarre twist, our embattled housekeeper resigned amid allegations of wrongdoing.

H: Too bad! Your guests actually cited instances of infractions?

F: Oh, a litany. Even a laundry list. But we're in the midst of negotiations and may be able to reinstate the popular employee.

H: Is the bottom line that there's a thin line between a soft and a hard line?

F: So it seems. In the wake of the controversy, there was a sharp decrease in the number of visitors to the summer facility.

H: A sudden downturn, a free fall, or a steep decline, I guess. Should we call it a sea change or a ground swell? Anyway, looks like you've won a stunning victory. Better than a staggering defeat any day!

F: I'm cautiously optimistic. But the same scenario could repeat itself all over again next year.

H: Déjà vu!

Paula LaRocque is a highly rated speaker and writing consultant who has worked with hundreds of groups in the United States, Canada, and Europe. She taught writing at Western Michigan, Texas A&M, Southern Methodist, and Texas Christian universities and was writing coach and assistant managing editor at The Dallas Morning News from 1981 through 2001. She is a columnist for Quill magazine and for The Dallas Morning News and author of "Championship Writing: 50 Ways to Improve Your Writing" (2000) and of "The Book on Writing: The Ultimate Guide to Good Writing" (Fall 2003, Marion Street Press). She served on the Associated Press Managing Editors Executive Board, and received the APME’s Meritorious Service Award for exemplary contribution to journalism in 2001. She lives in Arlington, Texas, and Park City, Utah.