

Advisor

THE Newsletter of Effective Communication

The Language of Trust

In his thought-provoking book, *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam shows how Americans have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors and social structures over the past 25 years. He also flags another societal development – the decline in trust people have in each other. As Putnam sees it, once-familiar phrases such as, “Don’t trust anyone over thirty,” were more than just catchy slogans. They were accurate indicators of changing attitudes held by some young people.

Today, the issue of trust has taken center stage. In particular, the spotlight is on some of our best-known and most important institutions.

Following this year’s unprecedented

meeting of American cardinals in Rome to discuss sexually abusive priests and related cover-ups, the largest and most influential non-governmental institution in America, the Catholic Church, is experiencing a crisis of confidence.

And church leaders are not the only ones with a credibility problem. In light of Enron, Tyco, Global Crossing, Adelphia and WorldCom, distrust in corporate America is on the rise. A January 2002 *Business Week*/Harris poll found that the percentage of Americans who have “hardly any” confidence in business leaders nearly doubled to 24 percent from 13 percent in 1999.

As our parents taught us, trust is earned, and once lost, is hard – though

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Recommended Reading: Five Books on Public Speaking That Pass Muster

A question we’re frequently asked by some who attend our Effective Presentations workshop is whether there are any good books on public speaking. According to *Books in Print*, more than 2,000 books on public speaking are currently available. Unfortunately, few of the ones found on bookstore or library shelves are worth reading. Here are some that are. In our view, each of the following rates four or five stars:

Khrushchev’s Shoe and Other Ways to Captivate Audiences from One to One Thousand

by Roy Underhill

(Perseus Publishing, Cambridge, MA, 2000, 227 pp., \$24.00)

Rating: ★★★★★

During an address to the United Nations’ General Assembly, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, irritated by the indifference of his audience, took off his shoe and pounded it on the desk.

In *Khrushchev’s Shoe*, Roy Underhill recounts this incident and shares other stories to illustrate how our efforts to engage an audience can make or break a presentation. It draws on lessons from some of today’s greatest communicators such as Garrison Keillor and Larry King, and historical figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mark Twain to show readers how to entertain, inform or persuade a group of any size.

The book shows readers how to deliver presentations that are better received because they involve personal interaction

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 Schedule of public seminars for 2002-2003

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not impossible – to regain. Restoring trust in corporate America will not be easy. In large measure, success will depend on how business addresses a variety of issues: how earnings are reported, how executives are compensated, how corporate boards are chosen – to name a few.

When it comes to trust, actions speak louder than words. Someone who lies, cheats or steals is a liar, cheater or thief, respectively. And no words – however effectively delivered – can change that fact. But words matter. And honest people with poor communications skills sometimes undermine their credibility. Perception is reality. In this article, we'll examine the link between language and trust. Communicating trust is a skill – one that can be learned. Let's begin class.

The Scientific Side of Trust

The overriding goal of any communication is to establish trust. If your audience doesn't see you as trustworthy or credible, you won't get your message across or be able to address their concerns. Trust, credibility or believability is overwhelmingly determined in a specific part of the brain – the non-rational or emotional part.

The human brain is incredibly complex, but one way to look at it is as a two-part structure:

Emotional Brain

- Brain stem and limbic system
- Non-reasoning part

Rational Brain

- Cerebral cortex
- Seat of conscious thought, memory, language, creativity, decision-making

When most people communicate, they aim their message at the rational part of their audience's brain. In other words, they rely on logic and common sense to move someone to action – e.g., learn something, believe something, do something, buy something. And while our goal must be to reach this rational part of the

brain, our message first must pass through the emotional part of the brain.

In the spoken medium, if you want to get your message across, you must reach and connect with the emotional part of the brain. You have to convince this part of the listener's brain that you are trustworthy.

As Bert Decker says in his book, *You've Got to be Believed to be Heard*, "The emotional judgment that is formed in your preconscious mind about the speaker determines whether you will tune in to his or her message – or tune out. If you don't believe in someone on an emotional level, little if any of what they have to say will get through. It will be screened out by your distrust . . . Even if the facts and content are great by themselves, they are forever locked out because the person delivering them lacks believability."

To test this theory, ask yourself how you reacted to the following individuals if you saw and heard any of them on TV recently: Kenneth Lay, Andrew Fastow, Jeffrey Skilling, Sherron Watkins (all of Enron); Bernard Ebbers, Scott Sullivan (both of WorldCom); Martha Stewart.

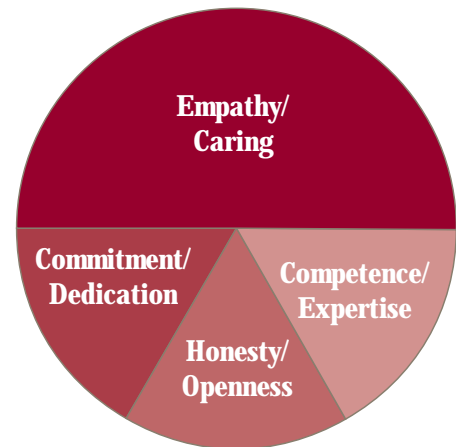
Research shows that impressions made in the first few seconds are so powerful that it takes an additional four minutes for someone to get fifty percent more impression – favorable or unfavorable.

The Components of Trust

Research conducted by Susan Santos provides some valuable insight into trust.

- Empathy/caring account for half of a person's credibility, and is assessed in the first 30 seconds. That's why, for example, it's critical for a company spokesperson to express sorrow or concern when there's been an injury or loss of life in an accident. When delivering a business presentation, a speaker demonstrates empathy/caring by addressing the informational needs and wants of the audience.
 - The other three components account for 15-20 percent each.
- Competence/expertise: What is your

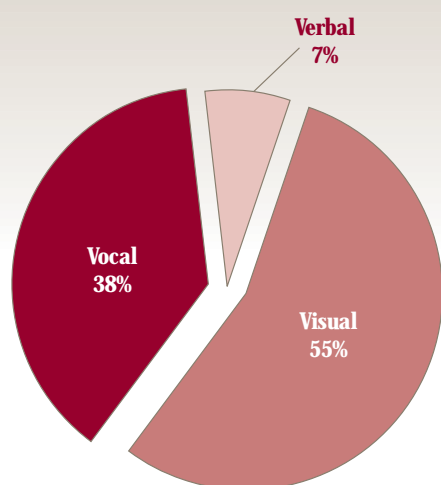
knowledge level? Honesty/openness: Do you appear remote or guarded? Do you take questions? Commitment/dedication: Do you care about or believe in what you're discussing?



- Technical training tends to drive out empathy/caring. (Hence, all the jokes about engineers and computer nerds.)
- Women are automatically perceived as having a high degree of empathy/caring, but need to work on projecting competence/expertise.
- Men are automatically perceived as having a high degree of competence/expertise, but male communication patterns generally don't exhibit empathy/caring.

UCLA Professor Albert Mehrabian also has examined trust. According to Mehrabian, a spoken message has three components: verbal (the words you use to express your ideas), vocal (how you sound) and visual (what people see).

- Visual and vocal components account for 93 percent of believability, the verbal component a mere 7 percent. (The verbal component refers to the words you use to express your ideas, not to the ideas themselves. Poor ideas, delivered in a visually and vocally appealing manner, do not necessarily generate believability.)
- When trust is low and concerns are high, non-verbal cues will override verbal cues (what people see says more than what you say).



Communication Pitfalls That Undermine Trust

In recent years, much has been learned about communication that undermines trust, credibility and believability. According to the most current research, here are the pitfalls to avoid:

Failure to Listen

Most of us spend 70-80 percent of our waking lives communicating, and nearly half of that time (45 percent) is spent listening. But we are poor listeners; we listen at an efficiency rate of only 25-50 percent. One reason for this is that the average person speaks at a rate between 150-200 words per minute (WPM), but we can hear at a rate of at least 600 WPM. That leaves a lot of time for our minds to wander. Another reason is that when someone is talking, most of us are thinking about how we're going to respond.

Listening is hard work. When you listen actively, your pulse goes up and you breathe faster. To listen effectively, and to show your audience that you are listening:

- Take notes.
- Repeat or paraphrase what the speaker has said.
- Ask the speaker to clarify or elaborate on what was said.
- Don't interrupt.
- Look at the speaker.

Jargon/Lack of Clarity

If you've ever watched the TV show *ER* or *NYPD Blue*, you've probably been frustrated when you couldn't understand

some of the language being used. Most of us incorporate the specialized vocabulary of our profession into our communication. This can be very difficult for an audience that isn't familiar with the terms you're using. Moreover, audiences are generally wary of people who lapse into jargon. For example, doctors or lawyers who fail to explain things in layman's terms rarely inspire confidence, and often engender suspicion.

- Define all technical terms and acronyms.
- Use language that can be understood by a 12-year-old, or is four grade levels below the average education level of the audience.

"Communicating trust is a skill - one that can be learned"

Particularly troublesome forms of business jargon are the popular, but often meaningless, misleading or inaccurate, statements, expressions and euphemisms of "corporatespeak" typically found in news releases, ads, speeches and other corporate communications. You know the type: The ad that states Company XYZ is "the leader" or "the premier firm" in its field. The internal memo that says Mr. Big "has left the company to pursue personal interests," or Mr. Bigger will now be in charge of "special projects." The news release that explains a certain action (usually layoffs) "will position the company for long-term growth and success."

Here's what one CEO (we'll conceal his identity) said recently when asked what he considered to be the secret to success: "Never say never. The tougher the challenge, the sweeter the reward. Always think 'outside the box' and be proactive on how you approach every challenge." So much for original thinking . . . and expression!

• Communications that carry real weight in the marketplace and with other audiences must be substantive, and must illuminate not obfuscate.

- Tell the truth. Back it up with supporting facts. Don't hype the truth.

Personal Attacks

Americans have made it clear that they are tired of personal attacks in political campaigns. *Argumentum ad hominem* – using race, gender (and sometimes the character) of a person is never a legitimate argument, and it destroys the credibility of the person using it. Organizations, not just people, can also be the target of a personal attack.

- Address the issue, but don't attack the person or the organization. (For example, your view of Greenpeace may be that it's a radical environmental group made up of hippies, lawbreakers and publicity-seekers, but when you talk about the organization, you need to describe it as one whose tactics and proposed solutions are well intentioned but misguided.)

Humor/Sarcasm

We've all seen speakers try to use humor in difficult or uncomfortable situations. Frequently it's done to break the ice or as a defense mechanism when dealing with skeptical or hostile audiences. But be cautious when using humor.

- Use humor in difficult situations only if it is directed at you yourself.
- Never use humor when dealing with sensitive issues such as health or safety.
- If you use sarcasm, you may cause its target to lose face, and you risk having the audience see you as mean-spirited, and empathizing with your opponent.

Technical Details & Debates

At times, people are confronted by others who disagree about the facts of a situation – whether global warming exists, whether a particular drug or medical protocol is safe, whether an historical event actually happened. Lengthy discussions or arguments rarely enhance credibility, and frequently erode it.

- Avoid too much detail.
- Don't be drawn into protracted, technical debates.
- Focus your remarks on factors that bolster credibility: empathy, competence, honesty, dedication.

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Shifting Blame

Some people say America has become a society where people refuse to accept responsibility for their actions. Who's responsible for cigarette-related illnesses? Tobacco companies. Who's responsible for obesity? Fast-food companies. Who's responsible for societal violence? Hollywood. Who's responsible for hot-coffee burns? McDonalds.

- Don't shift blame or responsibility.
- Remember that there's a difference between blame and responsibility. You can accept responsibility without accepting blame. (Although it was a victim and blameless, Johnson & Johnson accepted responsibility for the Tylenol poisonings. In contrast, Bridgestone/Firestone and Ford initially refused to accept responsibility for the deaths associated with the Ford Explorer.)
- Take responsibility for your share of the problem.
- Acknowledge mistakes. (This writer received a letter from management at his health club that began as follows: "Recently we announced an incentive for those members who nominate ten new members into the club between June 1, 2002 and May 31, 2003. After careful review, we have concluded that the program was flawed and we had made a mistake.")

Temper

- Keep your composure – no matter what!

Broken Promises

- Do what you promise.
- Don't make promises or commitments without strict deadlines. Then meet those deadlines.

Organizational Identity

The public tends to see large corporations and other organizations as uncaring, faceless entities. Some actions or statements by corporate spokespeople can reinforce that image – that you are

taking cover or hiding.

- Put a human face on your organization.
- Issuing a press release is preferable to saying nothing, but having a real person talking on camera is the best way to make your communication personal.
- Avoid words such as "the corporation" or "the company." Instead, use your company's name along with "our company" and "we."

Non-Verbal Messages

Non-verbal cues – tone, volume, gestures, posture, eye contact – often tell us whether to trust someone. Remember the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon presidential debate? Those who watched it on television believed that Kennedy won, but radio listeners felt Nixon won. Actually, Nixon had more experience and more foreign affairs knowledge than did Kennedy. And on radio, Nixon sounded fine, but on television he looked sweaty, shifty-eyed, unshaven, uncomfortable. Kennedy looked handsome, tanned, friendly, composed.

- In part, your audience will judge your credibility on your degree of interest in the outcome. (A neutral party with nothing to gain is more credible; a person who knowingly acts against his own interest is the most credible.)
- Truthful people speak with expression and animation. Halting or slow speech communicates exactly the opposite. After the United States conducted a retaliatory air strike in Libya in 1986, then Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger gave a three-minute press conference. Although the reasons he gave for the bombing were credible, he was not; Weinberger had 59 "ums" and "ahs" interrupting the flow of his statement. Moreover, he read the statement, never looking at the audience or the camera. By most accounts, he did not earn the trust of his audience – those in the United States or throughout the world.
- When appropriate, smile. We tend to trust a smiling face implicitly. (George

Rotter, a psychology professor at Montclair University, cut out yearbook photos of college students and then asked people to rate the individuals for trustworthiness. In almost every instance, people chose the students with smiling faces as the most honest.)

- Face your audience directly with a forward and open posture. Avoid crossed arms and the "fig leaf" stance.
- Make sustained eye contact: deliver one complete thought to one pair of eyes for 5-10 seconds. Repeat this process.
- Avoid delivering presentations in a darkened room, and where the focus is on your visuals. In every presentation, you are the message, and being seen means you are willing to be judged for trustworthiness.
- Encourage and take questions from the audience. When doing so, come from behind the lectern and approach the audience.
- Never leave a public meeting early.

Other Trust Generators

Effective communication is regularly cited as one of the most important contributors to success in business. What are some other communication strategies you can use to promote trust?

- **First and foremost, communicate.** Many companies clam up when the news is bad, but this is a time for more, not less, communication.
- **Communicate in person.** Some experts cite the decrease in face-to-face communication (and the increase of less personal forms of communication, such as E-mail) as a contributing factor in the erosion of trust. When possible, meet face-to-face with employees, customers, vendors, analysts and other key constituencies. (Most employees prefer to get information from their immediate supervisors, senior executives and small-group meetings – in that order.) Video or Internet conferencing, is an effective

Forum Topics

Communicating trust and credibility:

In light of events at Enron, Global Crossing, WorldCom and other companies, polls show that trust in corporate America is eroding. When it comes to restoring that trust, actions will speak louder than words. But words also matter. And trustworthy people with poor communication skills sometimes undermine their credibility. Communicating trust is a skill – one that can be learned. We'll examine what research can teach us about communicating trust and credibility.

Strategic message development and delivery:

Among the most challenging tasks communications pros face is helping others develop and effectively deliver strategic messages to a variety of external and internal audiences. We'll work on skills that help get an audience to listen to, hear, understand, and act on what was said.

Media relations:

• The news media today.

Communicating through the news media today is more challenging than ever. Myriad developments (many of the technology-driven) in news gathering and reporting techniques are changing what constitutes a successful interview. In a state-of-the-art briefing, we will explore how changes in the news media today are impacting a company's media relations efforts, including the development, delivery and reception of a spokesperson's key messages.

• Mastering the remote interview.

One trend in television news is the growing use of remote interviews, which present spokespersons with some unique challenges. We'll examine those challenges and show you how to prepare your spokespeople to participate successfully in such interviews.

• Creating and cultivating media-savvy management.

Communications professionals frequently face the challenge of convincing management to be accessible to the media. We'll discuss how to create and cultivate media-friendly managers who view media relations as an integral part of corporate reputation management.

Harnessing the science of persuasion:

Persuasion skills may be more necessary than ever. And behavioral scientists now know that persuasion is governed by basic principles that can be taught, learned and applied. We'll identify these principles, and examine how their use can be incorporated into every organization.

Crisis management:

• The anatomy of a crisis.

What you should know about the changing nature of today's crises.

• Crisis simulation.

There are two inseparable aspects of every crisis: operations and communications. Participants will assume the role of a crisis communications team member, be asked to analyze the communications implications of a simulated crisis, and develop communications strategies and tactics to manage that crisis successfully.



Communication Leadership Forum

November 14-15, 2002 • Houston

NEW Ideas.
NEW Approaches.
NEW Techniques.
NEW Technologies.

Exploring and embracing them are the first steps toward performance improvement. It's true in athletics, in medicine, in business . . . and in communications.

Today's new realities have shattered comfortable assumptions, and are ushering in a new age of communications. In this new age, communications will take on added importance, but only if communications practitioners show inspired leadership, adaptability and innovation. In short, "communications as usual" will no longer cut it.

At The Ammerman Experience Communications Leadership Forum, seasoned communications professionals examine and discuss timely and critical issues in the field of communications. The Forum is designed to help these individuals elevate their own strategic communications skills, and prepare them to help others in their organization to communicate competently and confidently in a variety of situations and venues.

Reserve your place today.

- The registration fee is \$1,350 for the complete two-day program.
- Attendance is limited to ten participants.
- For more information or to register, call 800-866-2026.

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tive substitute.

- **Encourage/facilitate two-way communication.** The best kind of communication is two-way. But it takes on added importance when people are not sure what or whom to believe. Ramp up or begin formal and informal mechanisms to get feedback and input – surveys, Q&A sessions, suggestion programs, open houses, town hall meetings, etc. Public companies may want to reacquaint shareholders (especially employee shareholders) with one of the roles of the audit committee of the board of directors. That committee, typically comprised of outside directors, is the appropriate body to which individuals can and should bring information regarding unethical or illegal activities occurring within the corporation.


“You can enhance credibility by coordinating your activities or forming alliances with other credible sources”

- **Increase your employees’ financial acumen.** Most employees have little or no knowledge of finance and accounting. Yet recent events have propelled these topics to the forefront. Take advantage of this development by offering a workshop or seminar that shows employees how to read an annual report, including a balance sheet and income statement. Or offer employees a primer by providing them with a pamphlet or booklet on the topic. What better way to generate confidence in your own numbers than by providing employees with the means to analyze those numbers.
- **Utilize credibility transference.** You can enhance credibility by coordinat-

ing your activities or forming alliances with other credible sources. (Sears did this when it added name brands such as KitchenAid and Whirlpool to its product line. Ace Hardware did this when it selected John Madden as its spokesperson.) For example, issue joint communications or conduct joint news conferences with other sources. Quote supporting statements made by other credible sources, including:

- * Local citizens who are perceived to be neutral, respected, and well informed about an issue.
- * Professors (especially senior professors from respected local universities).
- * Physicians and other health professionals.
- * Law enforcement officials.
- * Not-for-profit organizations.

- **Get out into the community.** Don’t just donate money to worthy organizations in your community. Find opportunities for some of your employees to get in front of groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, etc. In particular, let the community see and hear attorneys, accountants and employees from other professions with perceived credibility problems. Remember that hourly and middle- and lower-management employees often are perceived to have more credibility than does senior management.


- **Recognize advertising’s limitations.** Paid advertising is generally useful for large markets consisting of multi-thousands of purchasing influences, but it has less credibility than other communication tools, such as editorial coverage. Establishing credibility with the news media is not accomplished overnight. It requires the commitment of time and effort. Be accessible, especially when the news is bad. 

KENNEDY - Continued from page 12

Washington, December 14, 1962

Dear Mr. Chairman:

“... With regard to your reference to the confidential channels set up between us, I can assure you that I value them. I have not concealed from you that it was a serious disappointment to me that dangerously misleading information should have come through these channels before the recent crisis. You may also wish to know that by an accident or misunderstanding one of your diplomats appears to have used a representative of a private television network as a channel to us. This is always unwise in our country, where the members of the press often insist on printing at some later time what they may learn privately.

Because our systems are so different, you may not be fully familiar with the practice of the American press. The competition for news in this country is fierce. A number of the competitors are not great admirers of my Administration, and perhaps an even larger number are not wholly friendly to yours. Here in Washington we have 1200 reporters accredited to the White House alone, and thousands more in other assignments. Not one of them is accountable to this government for what he reports. It would be a great mistake to think that what appears in newspapers and magazines necessarily has anything to do with the policy and purpose of this government. I am glad to say that I have some friends among newspapermen, but no spokesmen.” 

Advisor is a quarterly newsletter of The Ammerman Experience. The mission of our firm is to help clients succeed in the communications arena. The mission of this publication is to provide thoughtful, useful, state-of-the-art information to help you do that. Your comments and content suggestions are welcome. Contact Ken Haseley at 1-800-866-2026 or by E-mail at kenhaseley@compuserve.com. This issue and previous issues of *Advisor* can be found on our Web site: www.AmmermanExperience.com.

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with the audience. Underhill argues that messages reach their target best when they are delivered in the familiar medium of storytelling, and that presenters must first address the existing beliefs of their audience, then move on to establish credibility, and finally, present a persuasive argument.

Simply Speaking: How to Communicate Your Ideas with Style, Substance, and Clarity

by Peggy Noonan
(HarperCollins, New York, 1998, 212 pp., \$23.00)

Rating: ★★★★★

Simply Speaking is a book of advice and anecdotes about writing and giving speeches. It's about what works and what doesn't when you're communicating using only words.

Bestselling author, columnist and presidential speechwriter Peggy Noonan shares her experiences from years in the White House speechwriting trenches. (She wrote many of Ronald Reagan's most memorable speeches.) She offers specific techniques, fascinating anecdotes and professional trade secrets. The book is especially helpful for those who don't have access to a professional speechwriter (that's most of us!), and must craft their own presentations.

Among the topics she covers:

- Developing a text that interests you
 - The all-important first paragraph
 - Using logic to move your audience
 - Strengthening your speech with a vital element: humor
 - Winnowing your thoughts down to the essentials
 - Respecting simplicity and clarity
- Because the book is currently out of print, there may be some difficulty in purchasing it. Your best bet may be to check your local library.

You Are the Message: Secrets of the Master Communicators

by Roger Ailes with Jon Kraushar
(Dow Jones-Irwin, Homewood, IL, 1988, 185 pp.)

Rating: ★★★★★

Roger Ailes has coached some of the most powerful people in America to inform, persuade, influence and entertain others. (His success in preparing Ronald Reagan for the president's crucial second debate with Walter Mondale is legendary.)

In *You Are the Message*, he teaches simple concepts and practical techniques about a full range of personal and professional communications. His ideas will enable you to communicate effectively at meetings, speeches, business presentations, negotiations, job interviews – even television appearances.

Ailes examines what he calls “the composite you.” It makes up the total message you send to others, and includes: the words you use, your voice, the way you move, the signals your facial expressions send, and your attitude. Among the topics covered in the book:

- How television has changed all the rules of communications
- The ten most common communications problems
- The four communications errors that audiences won't forgive
- Breaking through fear and other performance blocks
- Who some of the master communicators are – and how they do it

You've Got to be Believed to be Heard

by Bert Decker with James Denney
(St. Martin's Press, New York, 1992, 33 pp., \$13.95)

Rating: ★★★★★

If time or inclination permits you to read only one book on public speaking, make this the book you choose. It is certainly one of the best books, and may very

well be the best book, on effective communication out there.

Decker breaks new ground in the field of communication by suggesting that believability is essential to effective, persuasive communication, and that believability is overwhelmingly determined in the emotional part of our brain. In the spoken word, if you fail to make an emotional connection with your audience – if for some reason they don't believe you, trust you, even like you – you will not be able to reach, persuade or motivate them.

Although the author's ideas are based on extensive research, the book doesn't get bogged down in technical jargon or scientific ideas. It's practical and reader-friendly.


“I Can See You Naked”

by Ron Hoff
(Andrews and McMeel, Kansas City, 1992, 326 pp., \$12.95)

Rating: ★★★★★

No, this is not one of those books that encourages you to visualize your audience naked to help reduce nervousness when speaking in public (although Hoff acknowledges that this misguided concept from the folklore of presentation instruction still lingers).

A new, revised edition of the national bestseller subtitled, *A Fearless Guide to Making Presentations*, “*I Can See You Naked*” is a comprehensive guide that addresses most, if not all, informational needs about presentations. Subjects covered include developing a powerful opening, controlling nervousness, creating interest, understanding the audience, and answering questions. This revised edition contains 16 new chapters.

Have a favorite book on public speaking? Tell us what it is. E-mail the name to: kenhaseley@compuserve.com 

Case Study



Mission Possible: How One Company Uses Improved Communications to Achieve Impressive Results for Its Clients

How does The Dow Chemical Company meet the challenge of bringing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of new facilities online – flawlessly? By using the resources and talents of ePM, an Austin-based firm that provides technology and consulting services to help industrial manufacturers improve their performance in large-capital projects and processes.

The story began when one of Dow's business units planned to triple the amount of capital assets it would install over a five-year period compared to the amount installed in its recent history. The plan involved multiple projects, and while the organization successfully managed similar projects in the past, it concluded there was room for improvement. Of particular concern was the transition from construction to start-up and the beginning of sustained operations. In many companies, planning for this critical transition is left for the construction phase, where it is often too late or too expensive to implement design changes or find additional people resources that would facilitate the start-up process. As a result, facilities may be mechanically complete but unable to start up and operate as planned. The resulting delays can be significant, leading to foregone revenue and unsatisfied customer commitments.

Dow was determined to avoid such an outcome. To reach their goal of "perfect startups," the company brought in ePM to help create and cultivate a new kind of integrated organization – one where business, project and operations teams worked together differently, with a common focus on planning for sustained operations beginning in the earliest stages of a project.

Improved communications would play an important role in the transformation, so ePM partnered with The Ammerman Experience in order to help some 30 team members from the business unit and

engineering functions to become better communicators.

Paul Jahn, a product manager at ePM, spoke to *Advisor* about this innovative initiative, and other lessons learned about communicating in a technical environment. Those who work in organizations where information flows are critical, or who face the challenge of improving the communications skills of technically trained people in their own organization will find his comments particularly insightful and valuable.

Q. Your firm helps companies that are building complex manufacturing facilities do so quickly and efficiently. What causes inefficiencies and other problems in projects?

A. We've found that when projects end up with outcomes different from those originally intended, one or more elements of project integration are missing.

Sometimes there's a failure to structure the organization to fit the project. Research shows that you can't necessarily take the organizational template that worked last time, and expect it to serve the next project equally well. This is why we use a predictive project modeling and simulation technology called SimVision[®], to help companies tailor their organizations to suit the unique characteristics of individual projects.

Another common problem lies in the area of leadership and governance. Typically what's seen is a lack of alignment between business and project objectives, and a lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in the project.

Third, in most projects many different work processes function simultaneously. If team members aren't actively managing the interfaces or handoffs among these processes, re-work-relat-

ed costs and delays are often introduced.

Fourth, the commercial environment defined by the owner's contracts with contractors and vendors may actually drive behaviors that are inconsistent with the business objectives. A lump sum contract for a revamp project with significant scope uncertainty is one example.

And finally, there's communication – the nervous system of the project. You can nail all of the factors I've just mentioned, but without effective communication to support them, you've got a problem.

Q. Talk more about that nervous system. What kind of communication is critical?

A. Horizontal and vertical. A traditional view is that what's important is the day-to-day communication among project team members and their counterparts in the contractor firms. But a larger network of people needs to be part of your formal communications strategy – for example, outside investors, vendors, government agencies, etc. You don't necessarily interact with these people daily, but you need to keep them engaged throughout the entire project. Otherwise there may be some unpleasant surprises.

Having well established, horizontal communication links is critical. If they're not there, and a crisis develops, you lose responsiveness because you have to invest time to establish the link and then communicate the message.

Q. And what about vertical communication?

A. We've found that there's a tendency for project team members to believe that once they've passed information on to

CASE STUDY - Continued from page 8

their direct reports, they've done their job. But it doesn't work that way. You need to make sure your message has made its way down to the craftsmen in the field. Most of us recognize we have communication overload today. To break through the incredible amount of "noise" people are subjected to, you may have to repeat your message several times. It's part of leadership's responsibility to ensure that key messages have been received, and if not, to figure out where the kinks in the hose are.

Q. What have you observed about how technically trained people communicate?

A. They have a tendency to start with the details and data, which become the core of their communication. For example, they might spend a lot of time preparing the details – spreadsheets, attachments, etc., but very little time thinking about the bigger picture. Then they'll attach a short, hastily written cover note. Communicating this way can cause confusion, resentment and waste. Starting out by analyzing the audience, thinking about the communications objective, and then providing only what data are needed are not things that come intuitively to them.

Sometimes our clients fail to appreciate the value of face-to-face communication. Today, we're able to communicate large amounts of information over computer networks. People can review drawings or make plans without everyone being together physically. Part of the data will be there, but the visual and vocal elements of communication may be missed. You can't rely just on E-mail, teleconferencing and videoconferencing, even though they are quicker and easier.

Take the case of where a business team and a project team are considering issues that could fundamentally change the nature or scope of a proj-

How the technically trained can improve their communication effectiveness

Conventional wisdom has it that technically trained individuals are poor communicators, but are logical, sequential, analytic thinkers. If that's so, what makes them good thinkers can also make them better communicators, because effective communication is about approaching communication strategically.

Here are some tips that can help people with (and without) technical backgrounds communicate more effectively:

- Approach every significant business communication as a series of sequential steps in which you determine: objective, audience, message, and medium.
- Look for ways to establish a personal bond with your audience. If you can't meet face to face or talk on the phone, personalize your E-mails so they stand out from the clutter.
- Gear your communication to the level of sophistication of your audience – remembering that there's been an erosion of scientific and mathematical literacy in this country. Regardless of your audience's level of expertise, you'll do well to eliminate or explain jargon.
- The greater the level of complexity of your subject, the more important is the use of analogy, example, illustration.
- Even though your subject matter is technical, you are still talking to human beings – people who get bored, and daydream, even during serious, important presentations. Keep your communication upbeat, fast-paced, simple.
- Technical conversations or talks are not the same as technical papers. Don't dwell on detail; hit the key points.
- Avoid excessive use of PowerPoint or other visuals. Limit their use to pie charts, bar graphs, flow diagrams and the like.
- Be careful of "over" or "under" communicating – having too many or too few names on a distribution list, including "cc:" and E-mail. Trust people to do their jobs so they don't over communicate to cover their backs.
- Early on, indicate the time by which a response to your communication is required.
- Where informing is the primary objective, consider using communication modes other than face-to-face meetings.
- Use face-to-face meetings for high-stakes decisions and critical information.

CASE STUDY continued from page 9

ect. That's a discussion where you'll want people in the same room. Team members may have concerns or objections they're not voicing, but their body language indicates there's an issue.

Q. Your comments seem to reinforce the popular notion that left-brain thinkers are not necessarily the best communicators.

A. I think there's some truth to that.

Typically, engineers and other technically trained people are not well acquainted with how important it is to establish a human connection in order for communication to be effective. They're trained to approach communication from the vantage point of, "Let's get to the facts, and the facts will carry the day."

One of the most valuable insights the Dow team members gained through The Ammerman Experience training had to do with the importance of establishing rapport with the receiver of a message. There's a tendency to believe that messages sent – whether by E-mail or FedEx – go directly to the logical side of the recipient's brain. But that isn't the way it works. Messages must first get through the brain's emotional gate.

Q. What was the idea behind The Ammerman Experience training?

A. Let me answer by first providing some background. The way we help a client improve its approach to designing and implementing large-capital projects is by bringing them a combination of things: New knowledge – state-of-the-art technology and technical skills. New behaviors – applying that knowledge in new ways, doing things differently. Practice – gaining familiarity with that new knowledge and new behaviors, generally through training, including simulations. And support – help or guidance in implementing the new knowledge, behaviors and prac-

tices throughout the organization so the desired results are achieved. We call this integrated offering our First Product™ Enterprise Solution.

The team recognized that although Dow excelled in many aspects of communication, communicating across functions in capital projects was an area of concern. In fact, there had been some recent project breakdowns directly attributable to ineffective communication.

So we partnered with The Ammerman Experience, and brought the Dow team to Houston where we conducted a three-day workshop focused on communications. Prior to this training, we conducted a survey to determine what areas of communication needed attention. The survey provided some valuable insight into the communication habits of technical professionals.

Q. How so?

A. For example, team members reported spending on average upwards of 40 hours per week in communication activities, including meetings, using E-mail, and phone conversations. This statistic, typical in many businesses today, helped the team recognize how communication permeates all of what we do, and made them appreciate the value of good communication. They learned that communication is not just one of the ways in which work gets done, in many cases it is the work!

Q. Specifically, what was the focus of the communications training?

A. First, we wanted participants well grounded in the principles of effective communication – to see that there is some science to it. We stressed the importance of preparation versus impromptu communication – for example, writing down two or three key points you want to make in a phone call. We actually put them on the spot when they first arrived, and asked them to describe their company's "perfect start-up" initiative. We asked them

again after they had time to prepare, and they were clearly able to see the improvement.

Second, we wanted to show them how to apply that knowledge in their daily activities. For instance, showing them why it's important to ask themselves some questions before communicating: Who is my audience? What's my objective? What message do I want to communicate? What's the appropriate medium? (We spent time talking about the relative merits of E-mail, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, etc.) In other words, they learned how to approach communications strategically.

Finally, we gave them practice in applying what they learned. We had the project teams work on an actual communications challenge they were facing or would face in the future. One team had an important review with the business management team coming up, so they developed a communications strategy for the meeting and reviewed it with their peers, who offered several useful suggestions.

Q. In a way, it seems that you are saying communication on a project needs to be managed with the same intensity as the traditional nuts and bolts activities of design and construction.

A. You're right. Just as a project needs a safety plan or a procurement plan, it will also benefit from a well-thought-out communication plan. There is indeed a science to it, and project teams that invest time in learning and applying that science will realize a handsome return on their investment in the form of improved project outcomes.

For more information, contact Paul Jahn directly at 512-470-2101 or pjahn@epm.cc 

In Brief

Your Speech Style Matters

Want to appear smarter? Speak loudly and quickly. Psychologist Robert Gifford, Ph.D., of the University of Victoria in British Columbia, taped high school students answering tough questions, while listeners were asked to rate the speakers' intelligence. Students who spoke loudly and avoided "ums" and "uhs" were perceived as smarter. Gifford also found that it was easier to judge IQ accurately when listening without looking. So for job interviews and sales pitches, "phone contact first may help," says the psychologist.

Beyond Bartlett's

When delivering a speech or presentation, you have less than a minute to convince an audience that you have something interesting to say. So give special thought to your opening. Don't squander this important moment (or the equally important closing) by saying something ordinary or mundane. One way to grab attention is by quoting someone else. If you think *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* is your only resource for finding pearls of wisdom, think again. Check out these Web resources:

www.quoteland.com Search for quotes by topic or author. Find sports quotes, literary quotes, special occasion quotes. If you have a favorite quote, this site can help you track down who said it and when.

www.quote-world.org More than 13,000 quotes from some 150 topics. You can also get a quote delivered to your E-mail inbox every morning – free.

www.quotegeek.com Contains quotations from literature, personalities, movies and television.

www.famous-quotations.com Quotations are organized alphabetically, and by author and category. Find proverbs from various countries. Add your name to its daily, free mailing list of famous quotations.

www.quotationspage.com The oldest quotation site on the Web, it has a searchable database of more than 15,000 quotations, along with links to 51 other quotation sites.

www.bartleby.com/100 This database contains a collection of more than 11,000 searchable passages, phrases and proverbs traced to their sources in ancient and modern literature.

Message Received?

People tend to overestimate how well they get their point across, says Boaz Keysar, a University of Chicago psychology professor. In his recent study, speakers tried to convey meaning using ambiguous statements. Speakers who thought listeners understood were wrong nearly half the time. Some suggestions to ensure understanding:

1. Be careful of relying on cues. Listeners sometimes nod, make eye contact, smile or say "uh-huh" to be polite or move the conversation along. Don't misinterpret these as signs of understanding.
2. Ask listeners if they understand. Say "Is that clear?" or "Does that make sense?" Or ask them to restate what you said. Preface your request with, "I want to make sure I said that right."
3. Avoid grammatical problems such as unclear pronoun reference. In the statement, "Bill frequently talks to his neighbor about his lawn," it's not clear whose lawn Bill is talking about. To eliminate confusion, say, "Bill frequently talks to his neighbor about his neighbor's lawn" or "Bill frequently talks about his lawn to his neighbor." Remember, it's not the listener's responsibility to understand; it's the speaker's responsibility to be understood.

A Different Agenda


According to an online poll by dilbert.com, 21 percent of workers indicated that they are likely to daydream about their next vacation during business presentations. Another 40 percent say they focus on the game they're playing while pretending to take notes. Some 29 percent think about job hunting. And speaking about job hunting . . .

Communication and Post-college Employment

When companies hire new employees right out of college, what key factors affect their hiring decision?

A new study by Collegegrad.com shows that 38 percent of all employers rank a candidate's course of study during college as the key factor. Communication skills were seen as the second most important factor, with 24 percent of employers indicating

they paid close attention to an applicant's ability to express ideas.

"No matter how strong your resume, no matter where you went to school, no matter what your grade-point average, if you cannot successfully communicate your background and experience, you will likely fail in the interviewing process," said Brian Krueger, president of Collegegrad.com, a Web site for recent college graduates. 

Dan Ammerman's First Novel, *My Mother's Secret*, Now Available Online

The Ammerman Experience is proud to announce the availability of company CEO and founder Dan Ammerman's first novel, *My Mother's Secret*.

In the story, Elaine Baylor accidentally knocks over a picture frame. As it shatters, she discovers that the mother she thought perfect and loving in every way had a shocking secret.

The startling discovery unfolds as Elaine emotionally sorts through her mother's personal effects following a private plane accident that also killed her wealthy father. Elaine, now the heiress of a monumental fortune, makes a surprising decision to ignore the secret and proceed with her life.

In a meeting a few hours later with her mother's attorney, she is inspired to begin an unpredictable search in a small Pennsylvania town. Emotionally drained and frustrated with the progress of her search, she fervently pleads for divine intervention. The help she receives throws the Pennsylvania town, its medical center and the Houston business community into a tailspin resulting in a court trial that seeks her fortune.

Ginger Townsend, an ambitious, agnostic attorney for her deceased father's company, questions everyone's faith, honesty and integrity while trying to make God the chief witness.

Only a stranger on a special mission can resolve the dilemma, and he does . . . in dramatic fashion.

You may order your copy of *My Mother's Secret* through: iUniverse.com, Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com, or Borders.com. 

Kennedy and Khrushchev on the News Media

Present-day government leaders are not the only ones who've expressed frustration with the news media. President John Kennedy and Soviet Chairman Nikita Khrushchev did just that forty years ago.

During a four-year period beginning in 1960, the two leaders regularly exchanged correspondence in order to keep lines of communication open between the two superpowers. Their letters were kept top secret until several years ago.

Toward the end of their efforts to avert the Cuban Missile Crisis, they exchanged two particularly interesting letters – portions of which follow:

Moscow, December 11, 1962

Dear Mr. President,

“... I would like to express to you my disapproval of certain things. We read now various articles by your columnists and correspondents and we are concerned that in those articles they are widely commenting on the confidential exchange of opinion and it is being

done by the people who as it would seem have no relation to confidential channels set up between us. Judging by the contents of these articles it is clear that their authors are well informed and we get an impression that this is not a result of an accidental leak of the confidential information but a result of benevolence for those people into whose hands gets the information they make public. This evidently is done for the purpose of informing the public in a one-sided way.

Frankly speaking, if we use the confidential communications this way, it will be far from facilitating confidence in those channels. You yourself realize that if your side begins to act in the way that our exchange of opinion by way of confidential channels will leak through fingers these channels will cease to be of use and may even cause harm. But this is up to you. If you consider that those channels have outlived themselves and are of no use any longer, then we also will draw appropriate conclusions in this respect. I tell you this straightforwardly and I would like to know your opinion on this matter.”

SEE KENNEDY on page 6



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For detailed information, or to enroll, contact
The Ammerman Experience at 1-800-866-2026.

www.ammermanexperience.com

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