

Advisor

The Newsletter of Effective Communication

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Allied but Angry?

The Internal "Public Meeting."

Public Meetings Training has been a staple in our shop for decades as companies seek to expand operations, get zoning variances or explain environmental risk. These meetings, usually done in the Town Hall format, can be quite contentious and may attract media attention. Furthermore, new communications technology and a media savvy public have combined to change the rules, as discussed in the [spring newsletter](#).

Another area of change is the need to educate people on the best practices for meetings with the **internal** public. This is when groups of workers are brought together to be informed of change. Stories of pension plans gone belly-up, deductibles being doubled and ranked performance reviews that guarantee someone will come in last, can create internal audiences that are often as angry as the external ones, if not more so.

Internal audiences are different from external audiences in a number of significant ways:

- **People may be tied emotionally to their property values or ancient redwood trees, but nothing outside of family defines and consumes people like their jobs. For many, a job is their income, health insurance, social life, and sense of self-worth all rolled into one.**
- **Despite a deeper emotional connection, internal audiences are generally more reluctant to be openly angry, sad, skeptical or indignant. Meeting leaders may say, "That went well!" while audiences leave with bloodied tongues and soaring blood pressure.**
- **Internal audiences have information the presenters may not know,**

continued



Quick Bites

Our wish for you this holiday season?

The same as always - good health, wonderful clients (for which we are most grateful) and the wisdom to focus on what is really important in life. Okay - and no middle seats. But for those times when you are wedged in between, we dedicate this issue's sidebar column to gaining calm and balance in your life.

For an all purpose stress portal, which includes a quiz to determine how stressed you are, therapies A to Z and some really cool designs in motion to meditate on, don't miss <http://www.stressbusting.co.uk/>

such as who is on Ebay all day, who is a brown-noser and who is job hunting on company time. These bits of gossip can become corrosive if it is perceived that things are grossly unfair.

- **The internal audience will have the chance to feed each other's unrest on a daily basis. Some will gladly share examples of how "things have gotten a lot worse around here." External audiences go back to their separate lives, generally.**

Meetings training, including specific training for internal audiences, is an increasing part of our business. Big companies have communications and HR pros on staff, but not all are conversant in the special dynamics of these types of meetings. But for anyone who wants buy-in (and isn't that the point?) **getting it right with your co-workers is every bit as important as getting it right with your clients or shareholders.**

But remember, even if you have taken the class, done the homework and prepped your people, your associates can be a very tough audience. For many people, change of any kind is very stressful and even if you see the change as good, there are those who don't believe it and expect change to be bad. Often their skepticism is justified, due to past announcements that were spun like cotton candy and ended up being bitter indeed. Winning them over requires tremendous credibility and compassion while sticking to the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. They can handle it, they deserve it and most importantly it works.

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Getting Out of The Isolation Booth

"Does that blind him to the other point of view? Yes, it does. There are very few politicians who want to hear the other side and bad news . . . I can't psychoanalyze them, but I will tell you this - they are insulated. They don't mingle, they don't get the flow and ebb every day that we get as to how people are thinking or what they're teed off about . . . They can't read as much as they should; they get summaries and they have fawning sycophants. They're not in the real world."

When Bill O'Reilly said this on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, he was talking about politicians, but we see the same thing frequently in our work. At a recent executive training, one of our people was working with a division president of an international "household name" company. When asked about protests against a project of theirs, he was chagrined to admit he knew nothing. Did his underlings decide he didn't need to hear the bad news? Was he too busy to read what he was sent? Did someone assume that, because the protests were in another country, it didn't matter? We don't know, but our concern is this - what if the questioner had been a reporter, a Wall Street analyst or even that man's boss?

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A site called [Career Intelligence](#) offers tips from eight stress professionals (who knew?) on ways to regain some calm over the holidays. Suggestions range from the inviting but pricey *"go to a spa"* to the free and immediate *"reduce your expectations."*

Meanwhile, at [Family Education](#), there are tips specifically for parents to reduce holiday stress that seem quite down to earth, such as *"be realistic about relatives"* and *"don't give in to the gimmes."*

If silly diversion is what you need, there are plenty of sites for that. For instance, the Finns take Santa as seriously as they do their cell phones. Not only does this site purport to tell you what Father Christmas does in the off-season, it has stunning video and stills of the Aurora Borealis. [Click here.](#)

We all know that the holiday season can be not only stressful, but also downright depressing for many people. If you feel the blues descending, perhaps what you need is a gratitude intervention. Researchers at UC Davis and the University of Miami report on their scientific research into the [benefits of gratitude.](#)

"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into

Isolation is extremely common, and it often extends far down the chain of command. We frequently find that we at Ammerman are the ones informing clients of what is being said about them, often to their surprise.

Communication should be bi-directional, with information going out **and** coming in, yet many people, *even some communications professionals*, are in "send only" mode. Furthermore, vast numbers of workers rarely receive anything about their employer from outside their own tribe. There are many reasons for this, from a corporate culture that punishes bearers of bad news, to simple understaffing. Regardless of the cause, the effect puts your career and your company in danger, from a PR faux pas to a foot in the mouth so deep it takes a phalanx of lawyers to extract it.

You have everything you need to combat isolationist thinking right there on your desk. Here are some tips to get started.

- If your company is publicly traded, go to Yahoo Finance <http://finance.yahoo.com/> and type in your symbol. Then check the Message Board. There, investors and others swap gossip and sometimes those claiming to be current or former employees dish dirt. Some of it may even be true.
- Other places to check are Bulletin Boards for job hunters. The Vault is huge, http://www.vault.com/community/mb/mb_home.jsp but much of the content is not free. Look for sites specific to your field, for instance <http://www.oilcareers.com/content/community/>
- Here is a list you can expand on: Lawsuit, controversy, workers, discrimination, pollution, hate, sucks. Now type one of the above words, along with your company name, into your Google window. Many are astounded after this exercise.

What you should do with your new insights, as in with whom you should share them, will vary depending on your position in the company. (And yes, we do consult on these issues.) But one thing is for certain - ignorance is bliss only in the short term while forewarned is forearmed forever.

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The Scrooge Report

Party? Hardly!

Elizabeth Weston, a lawyer in the London office of Merrill Lynch, settled out of court with her employer for \$1.3 million last summer after claiming she was the victim of sexual harassment. The significance of this case to the season fast approaching is this - it all started at the office Christmas party at a local watering hole. It seems that a senior attorney, perhaps a bit tipsy, poured wine down Ms. Weston's shirt and made lewd comments. Things went downhill from there. Despite the fact that the party took place at a wine bar, it was recognized that office parties, *regardless of location*, are an extension of the office and therefore, the workplace harassment charges had credibility.

continued

a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

Melody Beattie

"If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."

Meister Eckhardt

**Stay safe.
See you in 2005!**

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2005 Ammerman Individual Enrollment Training Dates

Effective Media Communications

January 18
February 4
March 1
April 29
June 14
August 16
September 13
November 8
December 6

Effective Presentations

January 19
March 2
June 15
September 14

Advanced Communicators

April 27 - 28
November 10 - 11

Marketing EMC

April 26
November 9

EMC Refresher

March 3
September 15

Another issue is the risk involved with serving spirits. At the vast majority of office parties, alcohol is served. Although the laws vary from state to state, it is generally understood that the supplier of drinks may hold some responsibility for the consumer's actions even after that person has left the premises. In other words - don't let the drunks drive, for issues both moral and legal.

Phyllis Diller used to say that the thing she hated most about office parties was having to look for a new job the next day. But the "**get drunk and make a fool of yourself**" party may be on the way out. Employment firm Challenger, Gray, & Christmas says their survey reveals that nearly 9 out of 10 company party budgets this year are either flat or reduced from last year and that only in certain fields, such as financial services, energy and pharmaceuticals, are lavish parties still common. Most other industries seem to be hosting luncheons and even potlucks, and parties at restaurants and bars are increasingly cash bar style. So - boogie all night is out and church supper is in. And since parties are more often held during normal work hours, this means no spouses or dates, which results in further cost savings.

A UK based placement agency, Office Angels, reports that among those who go to office parties, 55% are anxious about making a favorable impression and a full 38% think the party is a "**potential minefield of political office pratfalls.**" They may be right. It seems 92% of bosses say they remember their employee's verbal gaffes and one in four says those incidents have a lasting impact on their impression of the employee. So much for letting your hair down.

With all the career pitfalls and potential for lawsuits, why have a holiday party at all? In fact, the Office Angels survey showed that 57% of respondents say they would rather stay home. Lending support to this view is etiquette columnist Miss Manners who has long contended that places of work have become far too informal and that the most appropriate gift from boss to employee is money, either in the form of a bonus or time off with pay. Honestly now, which would you rather hear, "**Take the rest of the week off.**" or "**Here is your drink coupon.**"?

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The above schedule lists Ammerman individual, public workshops. For available dates for private (buy-out) training dates, please contact The Ammerman Experience at 1.800.866.2026.

The Ammerman Experience public workshops are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis, and are available to a limited number of attendees to ensure maximum personalized attention. To register for a course, contact our office at 1.800.866.2026.

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Our firm is a pioneer in understanding the link between effective communication and professional success. What we've learned and what we teach can improve your performance . . . and that of others in your organization.

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