

# Advisor

The Newsletter of Effective Communication

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## Kool-Aid or Cabernet?

Say good things about your company, and you may be accused of having [drunk the Kool-Aid](#). While it is meant as an insult, implying that you have lost your ability to be discerning, is it really such a bad thing?

In order to be fully integrated into your job, to be happy at work and have optimism about your chances for advancement, you have to believe. The phony enthusiast is usually sniffed out, and the grumbler is seen as a drag to coworkers or a sad-sack deserving of pity. If you don't occasionally sound like a booster, the question must be asked, Are you really happy with your job? Do you envision a good future with your employer?

Having said that - and you knew there would be a caveat, didn't you? - there is a danger in loving your work and admiring your employer to the point of Kool-Aid blindness. It is easy to become so immersed in the culture of a workplace, especially when you feel yourself on a mission, that you do become unable to discern the unfounded naysaying from the constructive criticism and legit complaints.

Should you concern yourself with the complainers? You must. Whether the complaints come from internal or external sources, or especially your conscience, you need to be able to judge which information is worthy of follow-up and which should be ignored. And that is where an outsider can make all the difference.

Have you ever had out-of-town company come for a first-time visit? Planning activities for newbies may prompt people to see their own city in a whole new way. One can gain a greater appreciation for their home turf or realize new ways that it has serious limitations.

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## Quick Bites Is Silence Golden?

For months, Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff, at the heart of the influence-buying scandal, was alleged to know President Bush and others in the White House very well. Abramoff declared he did not, but in the months of waiting for the facts to be released, speculation mounted. Abramoff told *Vanity Fair* magazine, "My so-called relationship with Bush, Rove and everyone else at the White House has only become important because, instead of just releasing details about the very few times I was there, they created a feeding frenzy by their deafening silence."

Meanwhile, Opus Dei, the real Catholic organization featured in the novel *The Da Vinci Code*, mounted a

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In business, it is often the outside consultants who bring this new perspective to your company. Not only are they able to compare your issues to their other clients' issues, they don't have any filters on, actual or mental, to their information flow. If the consultant has numerous clients, he or she isn't so dependent on your business and will be unlikely to pretend to have drunk the Kool-Aid. Pick a good outsider and you will get honest appraisal informed by broad and unbiased experience.

In our business specifically - executive development and communications training - we bring not only subject expertise, but also the ability to coach people confidentially on things that can seem extremely personal. Participants hear what they NEED to hear when it is delivered by those who have no hidden agenda and who will wish them well till next time they meet. To put it bluntly, we can say things that people will accept from an outside expert that they would be reluctant to believe or embarrassed to hear from a coworker.

So fear not. If you know your own capabilities and know when you need an outside perspective, you have matured into a wise one. Therefore, that purple liquid isn't Kool-Aid - it is a fine-aged wine, so sip and enjoy.

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## Press-Conference Clichés

Similes, metaphors, clichés and chestnuts - we all use them. They're a form of verbal shorthand that links people and offers us respite from always having to invent new ways to describe things. Just try going a day without even one cliché. It isn't easy, and, if we did talk like that, our communication might end up as interesting as an appliance manual. (Simile alert!)

Language also acts as a gatekeeper. Teens are quick to grab new expressions and phrases to signify what group they belong to, thus ensuring their place in their tribe. In displaying who is part of their inner group, it displays who is excluded as well.

But that sort of gatekeeping is hardly limited to teens. In the adult world, lawyers have long been the most common users of gatekeeping language. The Latin of law, the extreme run-on sentences of contracts - many people contend that this unnecessary language has been retained to boggle the minds of nonlawyers to ensure that we have to keep hiring them.

While lawyers may be the primary example, every profession has its own language. Try reading a press release from most IT companies. Listen in while plumbers discuss a tough job. These language divides get larger as our jobs become increasingly specialized. But these differing words and usages are useful as well, as they create shorthand for people who need to work together.

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public relations campaign headed by Juan Manuel Mora to counter the movie's portrayal of their group. *The Wall Street Journal* sub-headline read, "Plan was to ignore the book but as the movie loomed, a PR offensive bloomed." The article went on to describe Opus Dei as an organization that has been "dogged from the start by creepy secrecy." They decided on a PR strategy that was based on transparency. Mr. Mora said, "We had to get totally naked to confront this problem."

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## But My PR Agency Does That

People want to know how Ammerman is and is not like a public relations agency. First, we are not much like one at all. We don't do things for you; we teach you how to do things better. We support your communication goals. Though they are not trendy buzzwords, we are, at our heart, educators and counselors. We teach communication skills to people that they can use at every job they will ever have and in their personal lives as well. A PR agency, especially a full-service one, can do scores of tasks for you, and their work is important. In comparison, our expertise is sharply focused. We are specialists in helping you refine, deliver and market messages, making them both memorable and quotable. ***We do what we do every day***, and we never stop integrating new research and technologies into our curriculum. And, we get

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It has come to our attention that a new form of cliché use has come into play that can be quite detrimental, though it is doubtful many would think it so. These are the public-statement clichés. These are phrases that have become common due to two drivers: laziness and lawsuit fear. We all fall into word habits because we cannot always push the brain for creative new ways to say things, but often these limp sentences are used because they are believed to be safe. They are phrases often used to ensure hindquarter coverage. The fact is there are no words that can guarantee you won't be sued, regardless of how innocuous or devoid of meaning they may be.

Some of these are the "Yeah, right" clichés. For instance, a lawyer on television saying, "My client is innocent." What is your response? Or how about the spokesperson who, with cameras flashing at the scene of a tragedy, says, "Safety is our number one priority" even when attempting to show compassion, the crisis cliché can be tarnishing. Take "our thoughts and prayers are with the families." That phrase can come across as template corporatespeak if you're not able to back it up with compassion and what you are doing to support the injured, the dead and their families. If there is no substance behind what you're saying, brace yourself for the blowback.

Beware of the press-release clichés and the crisis-statement chestnuts. In the best instance, they will simply be ignored, and in the worst case, the person delivering them will be perceived as dishonest. When your soon-to-be ex says, "It's not you, it's me," you know you are being dumped for reasons the other person is unwilling to discuss. The press-conference cliché can give the same impression, that the lawyer-approved statement has been recycled because the truth is being avoided.

**So what do you say?** Give only the facts of which you are absolutely sure, and then go for honest emotion. One Ammerman client called during a crisis where customer well-being was compromised. "I don't know what to say - I am devastated," he said. We suggested he say, among other things, exactly that.

Nowadays, clichés can sound like lies, but the truth is always powerful. The added benefit, to paraphrase Mark Twain, is that you won't have to remember what you told somebody else.

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## Wake Me Up Before You Go Go

Software maker Infomersion solicited responses from nearly 400 business managers and discovered that 71 percent of respondents admitted they have fallen asleep or felt sleepy during a presentation.

That nodding out has been noticed as well, as 43 percent say they have caught other people napping during presentations.

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results. So you decide - do you want a generalist who conducts communications training as an ancillary service? training as an ancillary service? Or do you want to work with a group of professionals who have specialized knowledge into how the media, and other audiences, receive and process information? Or, perhaps do you need both? Include us in your communications strategy. Call us, because, at Ammerman, doing our best to make you *your* best has been our passion for over 30 years.

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## 2006 Ammerman Individual Enrollment Training Dates

### Effective Media Communications

August 15  
September 19  
October 12  
November 7  
December 8

### Effective Presentations

September 20

### Advanced Media Skills for Communications Professionals

November 9 - 10

### EMC Refresher

September 21

### Effective Media Communications for Marketing Professionals

November 8

The above schedule lists Ammerman individual, public workshops. For available

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The most difficult types of presentations to stay awake through were individual speeches (35%), training sessions (23%) and then general meetings (16%). Surprisingly, webcasts were said to be the easiest type of conference to stay alert through with only 11 percent saying they were a snooze. Could that be because people are actually busy doing other things during webcasts?

What made a presentation . . . caffeinated? Respondents said that the most important elements for a successful presentation were an “animated and enthusiastic” speaker (51%), followed by an “interesting and interactive” presentation (36%). A tiny minority, just 3%, thought the attractiveness of the presenter was relevant.

Need a little [presentation skills](#) touch-up?

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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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