

Advisor

The Newsletter of Effective Communication

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Leadership Communication: An Inside Job.



Fifteen years ago, when the first wave of business reengineering books called for a top-to-bottom rethink of every aspect of business, communication consistently showed up as an afterthought. Hammer and Champy's *Reengineering the Corporation*, the top change-management reference of its day, devoted barely a paragraph to leadership communication. This was a stunning omission, when you think about it, since strategic communication is essential for making anything happen.

Let's first nail down what we mean by strategic communication: *clear, specific messages delivered at specific times and places, to generate specific actions among specific constituencies, to create momentum in a specific direction.*

Even today, strategic communication is largely ignored or left to chance in organizational transformation projects and large-scale business initiatives. When it *is* addressed, strategic communication usually shows up as a calendar of data dumps, lengthy employee surveys, or "town hall" Q&A sessions where managers gamely try to have all the answers.

There are two main reasons for this. First is the astonishingly persistent fantasy that leadership communication just *happens* as a natural consequence of strategic planning, that all it takes is a reminder to leaders to "*communicate, communicate, communicate*" and all will be well.

Second, even where leaders clearly understand their role as communicators for action, very few understand what to say and how

Quick Bites

Ready for the White Water Challenge?

You have the skills, but you strive for more. Do you want to move to the next level? Would you like to challenge yourself in an environment that is both safe and tough?

Advanced Media Skills

is a special Ammerman workshop that takes place only once a year. It is an intense two days of skills building and think-on-your-feet challenges designed for professionals who must perform in critical communications arenas. This workshop tests skills and builds confidence. There is extensive simulation and role-playing supported by guided critique. Participants also have the opportunity to network with their cohorts - communications professionals quite likely

to say it. So managers tend to default either to bullying or scaring employees into action, or else shower their people with information in the hope that some good will come of it. Both approaches are time-honored and perhaps even logical, but *they inevitably fail to get genuine buy-in from the rank and file.*

So, what do successful leaders say and do that inspires people to extraordinary performance? Can it be learned? Can it be taught? Can *anybody* do it, or only a gifted few?

Working with business leaders around the world, we've confirmed that virtually *everyone* has the capacity to move, touch, and inspire others to action for the common good. What's missing in most managers is a genuine personal commitment to a vision, a willingness to declare that commitment publicly, and a real interest in and connection with those they lead.

"Inspirational" or "charismatic" business leaders tend to show remarkable consistency in three areas:

1. They know exactly where they're going. They have a clear and compelling *vision*.
2. They passionately believe what they're saying and obviously have "skin in the game."
3. They genuinely connect with the needs and interests of the people they are speaking to; it's not phony.

Along the way, these leaders show other characteristics that make them stand out:

- They are not afraid to say "*I don't know*" and trust that "the answers are in the room."
- Their language consistently emphasizes *possibility over need*, and *can over must*.
- Instead of inundating people with information, these leaders typically use very few slides, and say only what's necessary to generate the desired result.
- They make clear, specific action requests that leave no doubt as to next steps.
- And they intentionally bring up tough questions and issues, and expect others to do the same.

So what does this have to do with strategic communication? Plenty, because no matter how well conceived a business plan may be and how beautifully crafted the message, nobody is likely to come out of the stands and play for keeps unless he or she believes a leader is *worth following*.

Think of it this way: In a typical workplace, each of us willingly puts forth what we might call *obligatory* or "got to" effort. This includes the 8 or 10 hours we're expected to spend at work, a certain attention to detail, reasonable attention to safety, and a willingness to pitch in and help. This effort is obligatory in the sense that we feel we owe it to our colleagues and the business in exchange for the money we're paid.

in different businesses. You will be able to compare and share experiences and have in-depth discussions on the fast-changing world of impact messaging.

November 7 & 8, 2007

At our office in suburban Houston

Day One Focus: Media Relations

- Strategic Message Development and Delivery
- Mastering the Remote Interview
- The News Media Today
- Communicating Trust and Credibility

Hosted dinner that evening as a group.

Day Two Focus: Crisis Management

- Twenty-First Century Crisis Management
- Crisis Simulation
- The Importance of Human Services Response

This workshop also provides valuable and timely reports:

- The News Media Today
- What You Should Know about Today's Crises
- The Language of Trust
- Creating and Cultivating Media-Friendly Management

This workshop is limited to 10 participants, so please inquire promptly as to availability.

For details on curriculum and pricing, [write](#) or call 800.866.2026.

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The Full and Upright Position

With airline upgrades becoming increasingly scarce and planes packed

But difficult, large-scale change such as organizational transformation requires more than obligatory effort. Every recent model for managing change stresses the importance of positive engagement and enthusiastic participation from everyone in the organization. We call this *discretionary*, or “want to” effort. Discretionary effort includes the ideas, extra time, commitment, and enthusiastic engagement that can’t be coerced, but can only be given freely.

Say, for example, that it occurs to a maintenance operator that her unit could save tens of thousands of dollars by using off-the-shelf tractor batteries instead of expensive, imported Swedish batteries that came with the equipment. (A real example, by the way.) Nothing can force her to share that idea with a supervisor or a team. She won’t be paid more if she does, or less if she doesn’t. The only thing that will cause her to come forward with this idea, this *discretionary effort*, is her desire to do so. And communication from leadership has a profound influence on that desire.

While we believe all good managers have at least the capacity to inspire others to outstanding performance, we also recognize that most have a hard time telling the difference between their communication strengths and weaknesses. [Advanced Leadership Communication courses](#) provide a laboratory for leaders to identify, demonstrate, and be acknowledged for their authentic communication strengths, and to drop habits that may be hindering employee engagement and business performance.

Authentic leadership communication can’t be faked. If a manager only pretends to care about employees, or only pretends to believe in the senior team’s vision, his constituents will know.

It’s not about being slick, or commanding, or having the perfect message. It’s about being *real*. For any leader who wants to engage the hearts and minds of the organization, the place to start is by looking in the mirror.

Can Charisma Be Learned?

Why are some people captivating speakers and others just a snore? Why do some people come across as born leaders? Can executive presence be cultivated?

Though it is not easy to define what makes someone seem like a leader, we know it when we see it. Executive presence is a real asset because it can help you achieve your goals. People with executive presence are seen as credible. They are the go-to people for answers, and they look like leaders.

to the max, it is clear that getting there is not half the fun and may even be 98% of the stress. One way to maximize your comfort potential is to get the goods at [SeatGuru](#). As long as you know the plane you will be on, you can check out the exact seating chart, whether there are video screens, how large first class is, plus details, details, details. Did you know that on a Continental 737-500, the exit row does not have extra legroom? Now if they could only tell us who will be in the middle seat ...

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The Greener Cubicle Farm

Have you ever wondered how much electricity your always-on office computer and millions like it are using? A [new poll](#) from Sun Microsystems/Harris Interactive shows that an overwhelming majority of workers want their employers to be more green, but reducing the carbon footprint happens only when people make it happen. It seems that the energy-saving habits we practice at home are not always migrating into the office with us. While 92% of respondents are turning off lights when they leave a room at home, only 52% do at work. And those energy-sucking computers? Only 34% turn them off at the office, while 58% do at home. And 57% use their computer’s sleep mode at home, but only 44% do at work. What’s the pollution bottom line? Sun’s experts estimate that if people took their better habits to the office, it would be like taking 6.1 million cars off the road! Shame on us all. Learn to

Leaders are excellent communicators. Doing that in a one-on-one situation is not as easy as it looks, and achieving executive presence before a group is even harder. So what do these magnetic personalities have in common?

Energy: This may not feel natural, but if you are not usually a high-energy person, pump up the level by 50% during presentations. Selling an idea requires that you give the impression that you are excited about it, that you believe. A drone will not get the message home.

Everyday language: Great communicators are conversational. They speak plainly and avoid jargon or acronyms the audience may not know. They use simple words, contractions and uncomplicated sentence structure. No need to lecture - just converse.

Minimal reliance on notes: It may look as though great communicators are winging it, but that is rarely the case. Delightful spontaneity is commonly the result of careful preparation. Strive to look at your notes no more than 15% of the time. Fluid delivery comes from knowing your material cold. That means practice – preferably three times, aloud, on your feet, into a video recorder.

Tell stories: Human beings, regardless of culture, are storytelling creatures. By giving people a concrete example, the speaker makes real the formerly abstract and gives the audience something to take with them. A story with a point or punch line will be remembered long after the data is dust.

Make eye contact: What do you think of someone who does not look you in the eye? Show your sincerity through your “windows to the soul.” Great presenters have mastered the skill of sustained eye contact, and they deliver one complete thought to one pair of eyes, then move to another pair. If the audience is quite large, focus on several individuals who serve as proxies for the entire audience.

PowerPoint: Yes, you should use less. We have said that for years, and we will continue to do so. While slides are useful for the presentation of *visual* information like pictures, maps, and graphs, word slides can usually be eliminated. They are deadly boring, and they make the audience read instead of listen to you. If you are using just a few slides, black the screen in between. Better yet, plan your presentation for nothing more than a marker and a whiteboard to challenge your need for any slides at all. Remember, the slides should enhance and support you, not the other way around.

Q&A style: Want to look savvy and smart when the questions start? Then answer them before you arrive by anticipating what the queries and objections will be. Prepare for what you think they will ask, what you hope they will ask, and what you hope will not be asked. If people are silent at the end, get the ball rolling by saying something like “One question I’m asked most frequently is ...”

put your computer on energy-saver (sleep or hibernate) mode and flip those switches to OFF whenever possible. Your CFO and your Mother (Earth) will thank you.

Recommended Reading

Increasingly, our clients are coming to us for help not just with message delivery, but with message development. In other words, they want to make sure their messages will be listened to, understood, and acted on. After all, that’s what effective communication is all about.

We’ve come across three new books on message development worth checking out:

- *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, by Chip Heath and Dan Heath
- *Words That Work: It’s Not What You Say, It’s What People Hear*, by Frank Luntz
- *Your Attention Please: How to Appeal to Today’s Distracted, Disinterested, Disengaged, Disenchanted and Busy Audiences*, by Paul Brown and Alison Davis.

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2007 - 2008

Ammerman Individual Enrollment Training Dates

Effective Media Communications

October 11
November 6
December 4
January 15

It is not uncommon for us to work with people who are sure that they are good presenters and have been told they are good, but when they get to the end of our session, they are amazed at how much better they have become.

If you want to take your skills from “not bad” to “great!” and you want your presentations to help you accomplish your goals, contact us for information on our one-day group seminars or half-day executive polishing sessions.

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Effective Presentations

January 16

Advanced Media Skills

November 7-8

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.

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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