



HARVARD MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION LETTER

A NEWSLETTER FROM HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL PUBLISHING

TOOLS, TECHNIQUES, AND IDEAS FOR THE ARTICULATE EXECUTIVE

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When Words Matter Most

The speeches made by a president and a prime minister in the wake of September 11 can teach every leader about communicating reassurance and a call to action.

BY NICK MORGAN

IN TIMES OF CRISES both big and small, one of the ways that leaders can demonstrate the quality of their leadership is with speeches that clarify, heal, and point the way ahead for their followers.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, presented just such a challenge to President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair, and both rose to the challenge. Their speeches, though quite different in context and approach, both managed to accomplish all three rhetorical tasks. It's worth investigating them in detail to see what lessons they can offer businesspeople who must also respond in times of crisis with both rhetoric and action.

Praise the fallen, advise the living. Both these speeches are first of all related to the genre of funeral orations in the sense that they are the major public pronouncements to date on the tragic deaths of some 4,000 people from many nations. The ancient Greeks developed the genre to its highest rhetorical state two millennia ago, and they dictated that funeral orations have two major sections: praise for the fallen and advice for the living.

Both speeches touched upon these important themes. Bush, for example, begins with a nice reference to the State of the Union address in order to praise the fallen:

In the normal course of events, presidents come to this chamber to report on the state of the Union. Tonight, no such report is needed. It has already been delivered by the American people. We have seen it in the courage of passengers who rushed terrorists to save others on the ground—passengers like an exceptional man named Todd Beamer.

Blair dwelt more on the pain and suffering of the victims:

I believe their memorial can and should be greater than simply the punishment of the guilty. It is that out of the shadow of this evil, should emerge lasting good:

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destruction of the machinery of terrorism wherever it is found; hope amongst all nations of a new beginning where we seek to resolve differences in a calm and ordered way; greater understanding between nations and between faiths; and above all justice and prosperity for the poor and dispossessed, so that people everywhere can see the chance of a better future through the hard work and creative power of the free citizen, not the violence and savagery of the fanatic....

The action we take will be proportionate, targeted; we will do all we humanly can to avoid civilian casualties. But understand what we are dealing with. Listen to the calls of those passengers on the planes. Think of the children on them, told they were going to die.

Think of the cruelty beyond our comprehension as amongst the screams and the anguish of the innocent, those hijackers drove at full throttle planes laden with fuel into buildings where tens of thousands worked.

This is very powerful speech making indeed, but it raises the question of whether it plays too strongly on the suffering of the victims. Part of the point of memorializing the fallen is to give meaning and perspective to their lives. That is better done by stressing the active legacy the fallen will leave behind rather than focusing on their tragic deaths.

Be emotional, not mawkish. This is a time to be emotional; how emotional you should be depends on how deeply you and your audience are affected. But emotion is best revealed in restraint. The withheld tear is much more powerful than open sobbing.

Blair's rhetoric is hotter—he is a naturally more expressive man than Bush. On the page, Blair's response may seem overly emotional, but most who saw the speech were moved by it because the prime minister's reaction seemed sincere. The research of the last decade shows that charisma is created by

expressiveness, and Blair is the more charismatic speaker of the two. He is simply more comfortable expressing a wider range of emotion than the president. But part of the success of Bush's speech derived from the unexpected grace with which he touched on these deeply emotional topics. The president rose to the occasion; it is arguably his finest speech to date.

Richard Greene, a speech coach and author based in Malibu, Calif., says, "They were both very emotional speeches. In different ways, though. Blair gave more information about what they were going to do and why they were doing it. It was a very British occasion. I don't think he was too mushy. My advice to Blair would be that you want to save the climax for when it really is the climax and only have the most emphatic body language and vocal gesturing for those times when you want to drive a point solidly home. You can only have two or three major points that you can drive home in one speech or people get dizzy."

Have a clear sense of your audience. Bush's speech is very strong on this criterion. Judith Humphrey, a speech coach and consultant based in Toronto, offers these comments: "He has a very clear sense of the multiple audiences that he is speaking to. He is talking to Americans, he is talking to the Taliban, to the people of Afghanistan, to the nations of the world that he wants support from. And yet, even within that set of audiences, and that dialogue which met multiple audiences, he had something quite intimate with Americans. He says, 'Americans are asking, how will we win this war?' and later on 'Americans are asking....' So this is kind of a refrain, so he is basically engaged in this virtual dialogue with Americans as he expresses what he thinks they are asking of him. And then at the end of the speech, he says, 'I ask you, ... I ask for your patience, I ask for your continued participation.' So there is this wonderful intimacy and sense of audience that is so highly developed in this speech. Also there is humanity in it, in the sense that a

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HARVARD MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION LETTER

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Harvard Management Communication Letter presents expert insights, real-world experience, and practical applications of the latest research for managers and organizations who want to improve their persuasive power and convey important information effectively. The newsletter regularly covers written communications, meetings, electronic and other high-tech channels, presentations, public relations and the media, and specific communications issues in the life of an organization.

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lot of times, politicians and executives don't talk about people because they don't have a sense of connecting."

Be honest about the challenges ahead. Both speeches deserve high marks for not giving in to the politician's perennial temptation: to overpromise how easy the future state will

**Emotion is best revealed in restraint.
The withheld tear is much more powerful
than open sobbing.**

be to achieve. Leaders need to find a way to affirm a basic underlying hope in difficult times without being Pollyannish. Bush's description of the task ahead is a good example:

Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. It may include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success. We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest.

"The tone of both speeches was ultimately uplifting," says Greene. "Leaders, both political and corporate, must talk honestly about the difficulties ahead but, like Bush and Blair, always do so in a positive, empowering way."

Take or announce some concrete action in the speech. Presenters often forget the importance of a public speech to announce a new direction or step taken. The effect on the audience is powerful; it gives listeners a sense that something is even now being done. That helps in the healing process and gives people hope for the future.

Blair had no specific announcements in his speech, but his was an address to the Labour Party. It was a different occasion and demanded a different kind of

speech. His job was to lay out an agenda for the party to follow. Nonetheless, Bush gets the nod here for recalling that there is nothing so galvanizing as actually making something happen in a speech. Bush took the opportunity provided to announce a new cabinet-level position—the Office of Homeland Security.

Write the speech yourself—and stick to one theme—if you can. Both speeches betray the hands of a committee in the writing. They're both too long, and try to cover too many topics.

But in both we also hear the strong voice of the principal. In Bush's speech, we hear the stripped-down, simple rhetoric of President Bush's natural mode of talking. According to news reports, he worked hard to cut out extraneous material in the original speechwriters' drafts and to keep the language as simple as possible. Blair's speech is nearly twice as long; it is an address to his party's conference, and had much ground to cover in addition to the events of September 11. There is material about education, the British health system, the economy, and on and on. The result is a laundry-list approach to speech making that prevents the presentation from truly joining the ranks of the great speeches of all time. The speech sounds much more like a typical presidential State of the Union address, where many constituencies have to be addressed and placated. It doesn't make for tight, focused prose.

Greene says, "You have to give a speech in your own voice. What every executive should do is take the few extra minutes that it takes to change the speechwriters' words so they feel right. There is no other option; you have to do that. CEOs don't have time to write every speech themselves. But they can take the time to make sure it is in their own voice and their own style."

Demonstrate leadership by acting both personally and on behalf of the whole. The requirement today for

leaders to be both personal and corporate is perhaps the toughest balancing act to maintain. We have seen corporate leaders react again and again to crises in bureaucratic, undemonstrative ways that alienate the public and leave their corporate troops uninspired. For example, in the recent tire failure debacle, both Ford and Firestone did themselves incalculable damage by putting their leaders out to act as mouthpieces for their corporate lawyers. When real human suffering is involved, leaders simply must respond in real, human ways. They also have to galvanize their corporate entities to respond in all ways appropriate to their functions. Today's corporate leaders seem to have particular difficulty in handling both.

Here, Bush and Blair both get the balance right, although in different ways. From the very start of his speech, Bush shows his mastery of this balancing act:

We have seen the state of our Union in the endurance of rescuers, working past exhaustion. We have seen the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers—in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. We have seen the decency of a loving and giving people who have made the grief of strangers their own.

My fellow citizens, for the last nine days, the entire world has seen for itself the state of our Union—and it is strong.

The rhetoric here achieves a very delicate balance indeed between acknowledgement of human suffering and the assertion of the continuing strength and purposefulness of the United States.

Blair achieves a similar balance by coming at the problem from the opposite position:

Just two weeks ago, in New York, after the church service I met some of the families of the British victims.

It was in many ways a very British occasion. Tea and biscuits. It was rain-

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ing outside. Around the edge of the room, strangers making small talk, trying to be normal people in an abnormal situation.

Blair goes directly to the grief of the British families who lost loved ones, but he does so with an exquisitely chosen phrase: “it was in many ways a very British occasion.” With that one phrase, Blair reminds his listeners that British values will endure despite this body blow to the people.

Both president and prime minister, then, have managed to remind us of our larger communal purpose while at the same time acknowledging the real suffering of individuals in quite simple, direct, human terms. This is a task and a rhetorical balance that twenty-first century corporate leaders simply must learn to get right. We are not done, alas, with tragedy and crisis.

Close by giving your audience a call to action. The ending is the single most important part of a presentation, and all too often it is dealt with as an afterthought. But it is the part of the speech that people remember the best. Accordingly, it is where you need to lavish your greatest attention. How well did our two speechmakers measure up?

First, President Bush:

I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people.

The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.

Fellow citizens, we'll meet violence with patient justice—assured of the rightness of our cause, and confident of the victories to come. In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom, and may He watch over the United States of America.

The call to action is muted, but it is there: “we'll meet violence with patient justice.” Bush tells us, he doesn't ask us, and that's a rhetorical mistake. Had the call been clearer, the speech would have been even stronger. This phrasing is tenuous enough to leave the audience a little unsure as to what it is supposed to do—how are we ourselves supposed to deal out patient justice? By just waiting?

Earlier in the speech, Bush detailed a list of actions he called upon the American people to perform, including “To live your lives, and hug your children...to be calm and resolute...to uphold the values of America...to continue to support the victims of this tragedy with your contributions.” In addition, Bush asks Ameri-

You have to give a speech in your own voice. Take the few extra minutes to change the speechwriters' words so they feel right.

cans for “your patience...your continued participation and confidence in the American economy...and, finally, please continue praying for the victims.” It's both too long a list and too early in the speech to be memorable, but it strikes the right emotional note to help Americans to begin to heal, and as such it is well done.

And Blair? He gets higher marks for a clearer call to action:

So I believe this is a fight for freedom. And I want to make it a fight for justice, too....

This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us reorder this world around us.

Today, humankind has the science and technology to destroy itself or to provide

prosperity to all. Yet science can't make that choice for us. Only the moral power of a world acting as a community, can....

For those people who lost their lives on 11 September and those that mourn them, now is the time for the strength to build that community. Let that be their memorial.

Which is the better speech? In truth, they are both excellent examples of the speechmaking genre for different reasons. Humphry says of the president's effort, “Bush's speech meets all the criteria of an excellent speech of inspirational statesmanship. It was inspirational first of all because he saw a need to speak, so he created the event. He had a very strong intention he wanted to get across to the American people and to the world. So the first thing is that he took the stage. And the second thing is that he has a lot of conviction. There is, in his language, a wonderful energy and clarity.”

And Greene says, “Short sentences and simple words have the most power, and personal perspectives and moments stay in people's minds the longest. When Blair talked about his conversation with the woman who lost her only son, that was memorable.”

So they're both winners. Bush's effort is more focused and less emotional. He remembers to praise the fallen, and gives us a muted call to action. Bush's response is quite personal; one has the sense (confirmed in press reports by his closest aides) that this event has transformed his presidency into one with extraordinary focus and clarity. For its part, Blair's speech has great expressivity and a clear call to action. Thus, he leaves the strong impression that we're all involved in working out a solution to the problems created by the awful events of September 11, 2001. □

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Kicking the Tires of Corporate Reputation

How can you get an accurate read on corporate rankings and other signs to understand what a company is like on the inside?

SHOULD YOU TAKE that tempting job offer from Gillette? Should you invest in Microsoft? Should you buy that appealing new product from Sony? Ultimately, you answer questions like these based on something intangible: corporate reputation. Sure, you'll ask friends, you'll surf the Internet, and maybe you'll call the company's investor relations department—or your broker—or your cousin who works there. But whom do you trust most? How do you weigh a neighbor's anecdote about the corporation against a broker's report by an analyst who owns stock in the company?

At the end of the day, you'll weigh all the information in hand against your "gut" impression of the company. Your thoughts may go something like this: *Gillette: been in business a long time making razors. Probably stable. Microsoft: tough as nails. Look how it stared down the government. Sony: clever. The Walkman started a whole industry.* Now, you're talking "corporate reputation." If you're making important decisions based on something as vague as that, then you should at least clarify the concept. Herewith, then, a user's guide to corporate reputation—what it is, and isn't, where the experts say it comes from, and what it ultimately can mean to you.

Corporate reputation is the consensus of perceptions about how a firm will behave in any given situation, based on what people know about it, including financial performance. It doesn't change much in the long run because of public relations or other marketing ploys. "Publicity campaigns are nice short-term solutions, but companies need a total communications strategy that starts internally and conveys sub-

stance over time," says Howard G. Paster, chairman and CEO of Hill and Knowlton, a PR firm headquartered in New York City. "Messages must have real content backed by real performance. There's nothing you can do to save reputation when you're dealing with impossible financial results."

So you can trust your gut

Companies can't manipulate perception for very long through corporate branding efforts and media blitzes. They have to earn their reputations daily by consistently delivering on the promises they made yesterday and by setting realistic expectations for what they'll deliver tomorrow.

Reputation indicates the health of a company's relationships with its various constituents

But corporate reputation is not about likeability; it's about the predictability of behavior and the likelihood that a company will meet expectations. For customers, that means a product that works today and service if it breaks down tomorrow. For employees, it means paying a salary and preserving funds for retirement. For investors, it means meeting today's cash flow commitments and communicating about future cash flows.

The most universally understood measure of a corporation's perceived ability to meet these expectations is stock price. A stock price reveals everything that the market expects the company to do going forward based on all available information, including how the company interacts with all its constituents, according to Michael Mauboussin, chief U.S. investment strategist at Credit Suisse First Boston in New York City. Separate measures or ratings of

reputation are unnecessary. (See "How to Compare Ratings within an Industry," page 6) To use stock price as an indicator of reputation, David F. Larcker, Ernst & Young Professor of Accounting at The Wharton School of Business, suggests this approach:

- Identify the real drivers of a company's future economic value, such as size of customer base, brand value, creative talent, innovation, alliances, or product quality, which is what analysts and institutional investors do.
- Put reputation into some specific context, like, "The company wants to be known for treating employees well, or innovating products and practices." In context, the key measures of reputation become customer satisfaction/retention, employee satisfaction/turnover, and new products launched.
- When comparing companies based on these measures, understand how they differ. "Customer satisfaction exhibits distinct differences across firms," says Larcker. "For example, regulated firms (or firms with some type of monopoly position where there is little choice for the consumer) have much lower satisfaction scores than other firms. Firms that produce non-durable goods (such as food and beverages) have much higher scores than firms producing durable goods (cars or appliances)."

The more a company's constituents know about it, the better

Rajendra Srivastava, Jack R. Crosby Regents Chair in Business Administration at The University of Texas at Austin, says that firms in highly competitive and volatile markets use hyperactive communications strategies—press releases, earnings announcements, analyst conference calls, Web sites, and e-mail listservs—to inform their constituents of any change that might affect future cash flow, so as to avoid shareholder lawsuits like the one against Amazon.com, Inc., for allegedly making its cash balances seem larger than they actually were.

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Unfortunately, some managers need an emergency the size of Microsoft's antitrust case to fully appreciate the importance of their company's name. Institutions with weak reputations are easy targets for domestic terrorism, hostile takeovers, and market invasions because no one knows for sure what they'll do in volatile situations. That makes them risky—risky investments, risky employers, risky business partners. Even the most fiscally fit firm will stop making money when people don't know what to expect from it going forward. The argument may seem counter-intuitive; the more a competitor knows about your next move, the more vulnerable you'll be, right? But consider this: everyone knows how Microsoft behaves when threatened and that hasn't hurt it yet. It remains among America's top 100 financial performers, and the lawsuit seems but a speed bump on its road to the top of the *Financial Times*' list of the "World's Most Respected Companies" in 2000.

Awards, contests, and rankings, however tractable, can inform the outside world about the inner workings of contestants while simultaneously reinforcing employee behavior. For example, Dana Corporation–Spicer Driveshaft Division, a winner of the 2000 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in manufacturing, used the Baldrige vetting process to educate employees as

How to Compare Ratings within an Industry

Howard G. Paster of Hill and Knowlton (New York City), provides this back-of-the-envelope way to rate reputation within an industry: compare price-to-earnings ratios (P/Es), which are calculated by dividing share price by an earnings-per-share figure. Paster explains, "A consistent pattern of P/Es that are better than average for the company's category suggests that the company has a better reputation than the rest because the market consistently has greater expectations for it." For private firms, one would have to compare credit ratings (i.e., cost of capital), recruiting efforts (i.e., top talent signed), business deals (i.e., contracts awarded), and other more subjective data, he says.

well as test its own quality leadership program against generally recognized standards. Gary Corrigan, vice president of corporate communications for the Toledo, Ohio–based firm, says that the training and ultimate validation of its internal processes—not to mention the publicity—were well worth the costs of entering and competing for the prize.

To be known for something, you have to stand for something

Laura Dillon, former head of corporate communication for J.P. Morgan, says, "A company must have core ideology that guides what it will and won't do, that's well understood by everyone in the organization."

A classic example is Johnson & Johnson's Credo, a written statement of J&J's core beliefs about what it means

to be a custodian of healing. These core beliefs must be communicated publicly and explicitly, and employee training and compensation programs must model, reinforce, and reward behavior that supports the core. Nowhere is the need for this foundation more important than in mergers, acquisitions, and other periods of organizational change. During such transitions, says Dillon, companies need "shortcuts to teach people what once came naturally before"; they need ways to socialize new employees quickly so that everything they do aligns with what the company stands for. Otherwise, they can escalate into a genuine crisis. For example, when Quaker Oats bought the beverage maker Snapple, it fired Snapple's beloved spokeswoman Wendy and changed Snapple's marketing program. The outcome was disastrous. By behaving in a way that was inconsistent with Snapple the corporation, Quaker Oats nearly destroyed Snapple the brand.

The bottom line: Always read the fine print on ratings—they often reveal biases and caveats that could alter your interpretation of the standings. Smart companies communicate for the long term. And remember that the market is always right about stock price—and reputation. □

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How to Win Fame and Fortune

Twenty years ago, *Fortune* needed something to grab reader attention in its January issue, recalls L. Michael Cacace, senior list editor at the magazine. Leveraging the success of its annual Fortune 500 list, the editors came up with the idea for a list aimed at readers who were turned off by the financials in the flagship issue—a kind of Fortune 500 for Dummies. One reporter spoke with everyone she knew to come up with the key drivers of corporate reputation so that *Fortune* could construct and conduct a survey based on but not inundated by numbers. Thus, "America's Most Admired Companies" was born. Cacace is quick to point out its limitations: it's based on the perceptions of an elite group of stakeholders, namely executives, directors, and security analysts, and its winners must first appear on the Fortune 1000 (the largest U.S. firms ranked by revenues) or be among the 25 largest U.S. subsidiaries under foreign ownership.

Why Your News Releases Aren't Making News

Corporate image begins with basic tools like the news release, but few companies create good ones.

HUNDREDS OF YOUR COMPANY'S corporate news releases have crossed your desk. You've signed off on them and passed them back to the corporate communications department from whence they came, fully expecting to see them in the *Wall Street Journal* within the week.

Only it never happens. What's wrong with them? Why don't they ever catch any news heat? There's an art to writing news releases that goes beyond spelling the CEO's name correctly and repeating the name of the company a dozen times. Following are a few expert tips on how to increase the hit rate of these basic building blocks of corporate image—and how to make you a tougher consumer of what you get from corporate communications.

First, test your release against these six newsworthiness qualifiers

In their book *Public Relations Writing*, Donald and Jill Treadwell list six newsworthiness qualifiers. Does your news release meet these criteria?

Timeliness. Is your topic a current event—or at least seasonal? For example, a study on the fire hazards of Christmas lights is more appropriate for December than July.

Relevance. Editors look for topics that will have a potential impact on their specific readers or viewers. If your news release isn't relevant to a particular audience, it won't be used.

Proximity. Regional news outlets are interested in local people, sports, politics, educational issues, and so forth. If you can find a local angle for your news item, your odds of making a connection with a reporter or editor are better.

Prominence. It's a cultural reality: Celebrities get attention. A famous name attached to your cause may make your release stand out from the pack.

Human interest. People are interested in other people, their foibles, heartbreaks, and triumphs. So instead of just writing about your new technology, give an account of how the technology is helping a disabled student keep up with schoolwork.

Rarity. A bizarre or funny item will often catch the eye of an editor with space or time to fill. But be careful how you link the item to your product or company—and how it might affect the image you're trying to cultivate.

Then, resist the temptation to brag and cut the hyperbole

The news media is pretty good at separating spin from substance, so don't try to snow them. Stick to the facts and make it as unbiased as possible. Herschell Gordon Lewis, president of Lewis Enterprises and author of *On the Art of Writing Copy*, explains: "The trick is to generate information that doesn't seem to be an ad in sheep's clothing." How? By keeping adjectives to a minimum and by putting puffy descriptors in quotes. Adds Lewis, "A news release shouldn't crow; it should have the aura of dispassionate reporting." Keep it truthful, too. That's how you build credibility.

Write it well

It's obvious advice: to increase the odds that a news release will be read, make sure it's readable. A simple test is to take what corporate communications gives you and read it aloud. If it makes sense, it's probably OK. If you stumble a lot, then it needs work. Send it back or edit it

yourself. It should start with a clear, attention-grabbing headline that captures the essence of the piece and draws the reader in. It should avoid technical jargon and meaningless phrases like "systems integration solution" or "software innovation services." And many pairs of eyes should proofread it.

Above all, though, it should be short—two pages or less. Editors on deadline don't have the time or the patience to wade through multipage documents. There are rare exceptions—when a complex situation demands more detail, for example, or when a merger story requires quotes, product information, and descriptions for both companies. But as a rule, brevity and directness carry the day every time.

Put the news where it counts

Web sites like businesswire.com gather and sort a huge volume of news releases, making it easier for reporters and editors to find the information they're looking for. To get this wide exposure, find a distribution firm with good credentials, like PR Newswire, which posts releases for more than 40,000 companies worldwide.

But resist the urge to blanket every news outlet out there. Sites such as Media-Map.com let you research editors, journalists, and media outlets, so you can target a release to the right people at the right publications and broadcast outlets.

Remember too that the news media, both press and broadcast, are deadline-driven. Editors are hungry for fresh content. A good news release does more than just promote your cause—it makes an editor's job easier. Notes Lewis, "If it has genuine news value, an editor won't care if it came from the planet Mars. He'll run the story." □

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Are You Getting the Best Solutions for Your Problems?

Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your communication style and be flexible enough to consider real alternatives.

YOU GET PAID to solve problems. And these days problems come thicker and faster than ever: sustaining the stock price, deciding about layoffs, keeping the troops motivated, managing capital risk, trying to focus on a brighter future. How do you radiate sufficient confidence and authority without sounding smug or unaware? How do you paint the picture of an optimistic future without glossing over the very real pain of the present?

Most managers embody one of six leadership styles, says Christopher Hoenig, author of *The Problem Solving Journey: Your Guide to Making Decisions and Getting Results*. It's a wise manager that knows how she comes across to her employees. Indeed, the essence of leadership is communicating a vision and a purpose for action. The rest is, in fact, problem solving.

Morgan D. Jones, author of *The Thinker's Toolkit: 14 Powerful Techniques for Problem Solving*, argues that the essence of successful problem solving is to be willing to consider real alternatives. If you're too locked into a way of thinking or a communication style, you may not be able to open up enough to consider alternatives, and your problem-solving skills will suffer accordingly. Jones, who is also a former CIA analyst, says, "To solve problems...we must learn how to identify and break out of restrictive mindsets and give full, serious consideration to alternative solutions. We must learn how to deal with the compulsions of the human mind that, by defeating objective analysis, close the mind to alternatives. Failure to consider alternatives fully is the most common cause of flawed or incomplete analysis."

Hoenig identifies six types of problem solvers; the secret to good problem solving, then, is to know the weaknesses of your own style and to fight against them by cultivating alternate ideas and viewpoints. The types follow:

The Innovator blazes a new trail into the unknown; the Discoverer knows the territory better than anyone else

As Hoenig says, "Innovators view the world in a special way. They see potential where others see only pain. They envision the mountain top, even when they're in the valley." The challenge for the Innovator is to make real and practical those tempting visions.

Similarly, the work of a Discoverer is found in that uncertain new terrain. Hoenig says, "Knowing a territory—the work of a Discoverer—means acquiring the right knowledge about the critical elements of the environment you solve problems in. Discoverers ask the best possible questions and get timely information about their terrain." But they also need to keep in mind that not everyone shares their passion for the quest. Most people would rather stay in familiar territory than risk breaking new ground.

Former Visa International president Dee Hock is perhaps the quintessential Innovator. Where others saw an ever-mounting tide of bad debts in the credit card industry of the late 1960s, Hock saw an opportunity for collective action. Hock communicated a simple vision of a new order: a universal currency managed collectively. But this painfully shy man communicated largely by listening to others and enlisting them in his vision by incorporating their ideas into his own.

The result, after an enormous amount of struggle, was Visa, which has grown by 10,000% and now covers the globe and has 500 million clients.

If you're an Innovator, you need to incorporate other visions into your own—much as Hock did. Work these visions together into a story that communicates where you're headed, and you'll be on the way to achieving the kind of communicative power that Hock showed.

If you're a Discoverer, you'll need to balance your passion for knowledge with a concomitant concern for the well-being of your troops. In large part, that's a matter of knowing their strengths and weaknesses as well as your own.

Also, don't let your enthusiasm carry you away into forgetting the importance of having a thoroughgoing plan. Curb your impatience and make sure you hear from more than one expert about the road ahead.

The Communicator creates trusting relationships

Hoenig says, "Communicators know how to build, nurture, and draw sustenance from the essential fabric of human relationships. Some relationships are transitory—making quick exchanges with strangers or crossing paths infrequently with acquaintances. But long-term problem solving requires building deep, rich relationships." This relationship building is what Communicators excel at. They can forget that all the relationship building in the world won't actually build a house—or a company. You also need a plan.

The challenge, if you're a Communicator, is not to forget that process and product are as important as the team. In forming your solutions, bring in the talents of process- and product-oriented people so the goals are not forgotten.

The Playmaker makes things happen

Hoenig says, "A problem solver needs to get oriented to the choices, prioritize and select what to work on, plan and initiate action on the most urgent opportu-

nities, and guide a team through the stages of resolution. This is the realm of the Playmaker.”

Secretary of State Colin Powell’s success with America’s Promise, a not-for-profit organization launched with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to mentor young people in summer jobs, shows the skills of a Playmaker. Powell inspires, cajoles, prods, and arm twists his way through corporate America on behalf of today’s youth.

Playmakers tend to value your people for what they do, not for who they are. Playmakers are constantly trying to make the strategy work. They may become so busy using people that they may not notice that people need attention, too. Playmakers in the middle of a communications crisis over a falling stock price and messy layoffs, for example, should take time along the way to celebrate small victories with the troops that remain—or risk losing their loyalty.

The Creator designs optimal solutions

Says Hoenig, “The bigger and tougher and more competitive your problem is, the more challenging it is to design, build, and evolve solutions that will hold together under pressure and over time. This job is the province of the Creator.”

John Sawhill was a university president, a partner in a global consulting firm, and a senior cabinet official before he became the head of The Nature Conservancy. On his watch, the nonprofit organization realized that buying land to save it from development was not working, because the larger ecosystems were still suffering. And so, under Sawhill, The Nature Conservancy began to focus on the “Last Great Places,” working with many organizations to manage whole ecosystems.

That’s how a Creator approaches her work: taking stock of what assets and resources she possesses, and figuring out how best to deploy them. It’s a complicated and challenging task, one that requires the ability to not get lost in the day-to-day issues that threaten to

kill forward momentum. If you’re a Creator, your communication challenge is to help your employees stay focused on that larger picture, even though you may love getting your hands dirty in the design of the details. Your understanding of the vision is implicit, but you need to make it explicit in order to keep others moti-

“Failure to consider alternatives is the most common cause of flawed or incomplete analysis.”

vated. You also need to understand that designing a solution is not the same thing as achieving it; for that you need the skills of a Performer.

The Performer delivers practical results

“Performers are the hard-bitten, practical characters who are always willing to get their hands dirty to make things happen,” says Hoenig.

Isabelle Autissier is a Frenchwoman who has triumphed in the Vendée Globe, a solo nonstop sailing race around the world. As Hoenig says, “One of the more extraordinary aspects of the execution skills of sailors like Autissier is their ability to find simple, effective resolutions to the problems they face along the way.... They are experts at dreaming up repair schemes that are viable enough to allow them to complete the race.”

The Performer is the leader who can react on the fly, figuring out how to keep the team functioning or rejuvenate the IT system that seems hopeless to everyone else. And it’s in that ability to keep things moving that the communication strengths and weaknesses of the Performer are to be found.

The urgency of the task is always in front of the Performer, and he can sometimes forget the community around him. Moreover, while it is second nature to the Performer to understand how to keep driving toward the end result, he will at times forget that

others need to be reminded of the big picture. Performers need to remind themselves to take time to repair the team with words of encouragement and healing when a particularly rough patch has been got through.

So which are you? An Innovator who can see a future most cannot—and needs to remember to focus on the here and now? A Discoverer whose curiosity about the road ahead can lead you to push your troops hard—sometimes too hard? A Communicator whose ability to foster human connections needs to be leavened with a practical sense of focus on the task at hand? A Playmaker who sees how to put it all together, and sometimes needs to slow down and tend to the needs of his team? A Creator whose ability to find new solutions amidst the challenges of the moment sometimes overpowers her future vision? Or a Performer, who gets the job done, sometimes to his own personal cost and to those around him?

Jones says, “We settle for partial solutions because our minds simply can’t digest or cope with all of the intricacies of complex problems. We thus tend to oversimplify, hopping from one problem to another like jittery butterflies, alighting briefly and only on those elements we can comprehend and articulate.” Sometimes the only way to fight this tendency is to force yourself to speak through your weaknesses, not your strengths. □

—**Nick Morgan** can be reached at nmorgan@hbsp.harvard.edu

FURTHER READING

The Problem Solving Journey: Your Guide to Making Decisions and Getting Results
by Christopher Hoenig
2000 • Perseus

The Thinker’s Toolkit: 14 Powerful Techniques for Problem Solving
by Morgan D. Jones
1998 • Three Rivers Press

Reprint # C0201D

To order a reprint of this article, call 800-668-6705 or 617-783-7474.

How to Make Your Case in 30 Seconds or Less

An elevator pitch can help capture an investor's attention, open the door to a job, or win vital support for a new project.

IN 1994, Barnett Helzberg, Jr. was walking by The Plaza Hotel in New York City when he heard a woman hail Warren Buffett. Helzberg approached the legendary investor and said, “Hi, Mr. Buffett. I’m a shareholder in Berkshire Hathaway and a great admirer of yours. I believe that my company matches your criteria for investment.”

“Send me more details,” Buffett replied. A year later, Helzberg sold his chain of 143 diamond stores to Buffett.

Helzberg’s story is a classic example of a powerful elevator pitch. An elevator pitch gets its name from the 30-second opportunity to tell—and sell—your story during a three- or four-story elevator ride. The 30-second parameter is based on the typical attention span, according to the book *How to Get Your Point Across in 30 Seconds or Less* by Milo O. Frank. It’s one reason why the standard commercial or television “sound bite” lasts 30 seconds.

While elevator pitches are often associated with funding requests, they can be valuable every day. Job interviews, networking events, public relations opportunities, presentations to executives, and sales all demand the ability to successfully deliver a quick and concise explanation of your case.

A 30-second elevator speech quickly demonstrates that you know your business and can communicate it effectively. Yes, a lot of important facts may be left out, but today everyone is skilled at judging relevancy and making decisions with incomplete data. In fact, 15 seconds can be more powerful than 30 seconds. “The more succinct you are, the more successful you will be,” says Dr. Alan Weiss, president of

Summit Consulting Group in East Greenwich, R.I.

The secret of strong elevator pitches consists of grabbing the attention of listeners, convincing them with the promise of mutual benefit, and setting the stage for follow-up. Speak in terms your audience can relate to. And communicate with the passion that comes from knowing that this opportunity may never come again. How often do you see Warren Buffett on the street?

Key tips include:

Know the goal. The goal of an elevator pitch is not to get funding, a job, or project sign-off. It’s to get approval to proceed to the next step, whether it’s accepting a phone call, a referral to the right person, or a chance to send additional information. Says Ken Yancey, the CEO of SCORE, an SBA resource partner made up of retired and active volunteers who help small businesses: “Rarely are you closing a sale. Instead, you are opening the door to the next step.” Whatever the goal is, follow through.

Know the subject. Do you know your topic well enough to describe it in a

single sentence? It’s harder than it sounds. As Mark Twain pointed out, “I didn’t have time to write you a short letter, so I wrote you a long one.” Knowing your subject well also gives you the ability to stand out from others who might be doing something similar. The issue, as always, is less what you do, and more what you can do for somebody. “I’m a real estate agent” is not as powerful as saying “I am a real estate agent who specializes in helping first-time buyers like you buy great homes in this town.”

Know the audience. “The worst pitches come from those who don’t know my organization or how we operate. Pitching me on something that just isn’t possible wastes both my time and theirs,” says Yancey. Before going to a conference, he identifies and does research on the individuals he wants to meet. Then he tailors his elevator pitch to match his audience’s requirements. “If people don’t hear a benefit for them, they won’t listen to you,” says Yancey.

Organize the pitch. “Some people are blessed with charisma and persuasiveness,” says Dave Power, a marketing partner at Charles River Ventures, a venture capital firm in Waltham, Mass. “We all aren’t that lucky. But you can still be very effective by focusing on what is meaningful. You have to organize the flow of information to make it as easy as possible for the brain to digest.” Typically, elevator pitches start with an introduction, move into a description of the problem, outline potential benefits

Have Two—or Ten—Minutes?

Elevator pitches can also form the building blocks of longer presentations. Milo O. Frank, author of *How to Get Your Point Across in 30 Seconds or Less*, suggests looking at each of the points in an extended presentation as individual 30-second messages. “During the two, three, five, or ten minutes that your speech lasts, you’ll have an opportunity to ask—and answer—several provocative questions, paint more than one picture, use more than one personal anecdote or experience. The strategies that kept your listener alert and interested in your 30-second message will achieve the same effect in a longer speech,” says Frank.

for the listener, and conclude with a request for permission to proceed to the next step in the relationship.

Hook them from the opening. You have to make an immediate connection with the audience. This connection signals that it's worth investing valuable time to hear what you have to say. Weiss suggests starting with a provocative, contrarian, or counterintuitive statement that will rev pulses. One example: "Quality doesn't matter."

Plug into the connection. Once you have the attention of your audience, deliver your message. Clarity is more powerful than jargon. Use analogies the audience can relate to. Power once had to explain a new technology called "strong authentication." He held up an ATM card. "Every time you use this card with a PIN code, you are using strong authentication," he said. The audience instantly understood that strong authentication involved multiple levels of security. Personalize your message by relating your solution to audience needs. Emotional appeals are also powerful.

Presentation matters. It's natural to want to speak at an auctioneer's tempo. But rapid-fire delivery rarely conveys confidence and command. In fact, a timely pause is an effective attention-getter. "It gives emphasis to what you're saying. It gives you time to think. It gives your listener an opportunity to hear, absorb, and retain what you're saying," writes Frank.

Incorporate feedback. Use videotape to evaluate your own performance. Give the pitch to someone unfamiliar with your project. If she gets lost in jargon or fails to see the potential benefit, chances are that your target audience will stumble, too.

The benefits of elevator pitches extend beyond persuading your audience. They can help focus your thinking and writing. They can ultimately increase your productivity, allowing you to communicate your message to more people.

Employees shouldn't stumble when asked, "what does your company do?" or "how can we help?" An effective elevator pitch can outline win-win objectives, and establish a launch pad for a deeper relationship—converting a chance meeting into an opportunity. □

—**Nick Wreden** is the author of the forthcoming book, *Fusion Branding: Strategic Branding for the Customer*

Economy. *He can be reached at hmcl@hbsp.harvard.edu*

FURTHER READING

How to Get Your Point Across in 30 Seconds or Less
by Milo O. Frank
1990 • Pocket Books

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

BY NICK MORGAN

Should You Use a Teleprompter?

TELEPROMPTERS USED TO be out of reach for all except national politicians and CEOs. Now they're virtually standard equipment in business meetings of any size or importance. Should you use one?

An accurate answer requires that you be honest about your abilities behind a podium. If you're a nervous speaker for whom presenting is a continuous nightmare from the moment the date is set to the moment you say "thank you" and step down from the stage, then a teleprompter can be a highly useful crutch. It almost always makes weak speakers a little better. It brings your eyes up from off the page, and forces you to move your head from left to right with some regularity as you scan the two text images in front of you. Since the teleprompter screens are transparent, the audience gets the impression that you're looking at the crowd.

The downside of using a teleprompter, however, is that reading text creates a barrier between speaker and audience. Few people can read with all the life and passion that they converse. And a teleprompter traps you behind the podium. Unless you're a politician at a rally, with supporters looking for reasons to leap to their feet and scream their enthusiasm, it's very difficult to connect with an audience in a visceral way when you read from behind the podium.

So it's your call. If you're a confident speaker, you're better off without one—unless you're accepting your party's nomination for president. If you decide to use one, here are a few tips to make the experience better:

- 1 **Rehearse.** Reading a teleprompter is not a natural human activity. Give yourself some time before the day itself to practice and get used to it.
- 2 **Learn from President Reagan.** Reagan varied the pace with which he rotated his head, thus giving the impression that he was looking at the audience spontaneously.
- 3 **Vary your pace and pitch.** Don't fall into a monotone, unvarying rhythm as you read. Speed up. Slow down.
- 4 **Be ready with a backup.** Occasionally the teleprompter breaks down—it happened to President Clinton during a State of the Union address. Keep a printed text on the podium and keep your place in it. □

We've scanned the latest publications for information you can use to improve your communications skills.

Making your verbal message stick

WHEN YOU SPEAK, you want your words to be memorable. The key to crafting a message that sticks lies in three simple words: *wax*, *power*, and *fuzz*.

- **Remove the wax**, those excess words that aren't essential components of your message. Choose your words carefully and use only what you must.
- **Increase the power**, the verbs that propel your message forward. Use active words rather than passive ones and avoid such verbs as *make*, *take*, *give*, and *have*, which dilute the force of your message.
- **Cut the fuzz**, those phrases that convey uncertainty and weakness. Say it straight—no “it seems to me,” or “it appears”—and if you can't, then don't say it at all.

Heather Johnson, “Wax, Power and Fuzz,”
Training ♦ Vol. 38, No. 10, October 2001

Boost performance through empowerment

MANAGERS WHO SHARE POWER and information are rewarded with employees who are more innovative, more productive, and more sensitive to customer needs and generally more satisfied with their position. To encourage empowerment throughout your organization, try the following:

- **Share information** up and down the chain of command.
- **Set clear boundaries** in such areas as policy and process, budgets, prioritization of goals, etc.
- **Support** self-managing teams and respect the decisions they make.
- **Be a coach** by supporting your employees, serving as a resource, and helping them to grow in their positions.

Seth Silver, “Power to the People,”
Training ♦ Vol. 38, No. 10, October 2001

Employee communications 101

MANY SENIOR MANAGERS lack a clear understanding of what an internal communications program can do. Remember the following:

- **Employees are the key component of any external communications initiative.** If they can't, or won't, sell the organization, nobody will, but *senior management is your most important internal audience*.
- **Employee communications are different from HR communications or interpersonal business communications.** You're not worried about explaining benefits or making sure the staff writes good memos. Your task is to keep employees in the information loop so that they're more creative, committed members of the organization.
- **Employees want leaders who are present; communications that are formalized, yet flexible; guidelines that are straightforward; and the freedom to make a difference.** All these factors build morale, which is essential for success.

Brian A. Kilgore, “What Management Should Know About Employee Communication,”
Journal of Employee Communication Management ♦ September–October 2001

Employees can be your best brand builders

NIKE, MARTHA STEWART, DISNEY—those names elicit certain images and expectations about the look, feel, and quality of the products each organization produces. But scores of employees are often unaware of the corporate identity, or uninterested in perpetuating it. Management must make sure that employees are well versed in the company's identity, its makeup, and its importance. Staff at all levels must understand how to promote the corporate identity and know who the ‘go-to person’ is on the subject. And finally, employees must feel a sense of pride in the identity and be devoted to protecting it on an ongoing basis.

Sue Westcott Alessandri, “Turn Employees into Fierce Defenders of the Corporate Identity,”
Journal of Employee Communication Management ♦ September–October 2001



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