

A PR communicator must be a voice of authority

Features Marketing

by Bong R. Osorio - August 17, 2015



‘HOW people talk to each other absolutely determines how well the organization will function,’ said Larry Bossidy, chairman of Honeywell International. Indeed, it’s imperative for every company, association or group to have an efficient PR communication system in place to ensure functional divisions and purposeful team members working toward a common goal, especially during tough times.

In a financial slump, as with any situation, awareness as a result of consistent communication is an imperative. If you assume, therefore, that an economic crisis looms, you must examine your place in the industry with jaundiced eyes, and see how your organization will get affected. The question that comes up relates to the appropriateness of doing PR communications at this time.

Is better PR communication the wisest way to go? Would it be prudent to take a breather until the downturn is arrested, and the economy bounces back to health? The answer is no, for you would believe that when the times get tough, the tough keeps communicating. It would be practical to review the basics and keep them in mind as you move in a more difficult situation. You can heed the call of Dianna Booher in her study, "The Voice of Authority," as she shares some communication strategies every leader needs to know. You can look at these fundamentals that you might have to go back to.

Reality checking for correctness

TO ensure correctness, it is advisable to translate your values, beliefs, behavior, mission, or goals into concrete language. You may want to hold others accountable by setting goals and standards, communicating the criteria or what you plan to count in measurable and quantifiable terms. Reward those who make good or penalize those who don't make the grade. Measure perception as if it were reality by following the smoke. Wise PR communicators do reality checks often so they quickly realize that where there's smoke, there's usually a spark. The goal is to stomp on the spark before it becomes a conflagration.

Telling all you know

WHEN confronted with issues, your power as a PR communicator often depends on two choices: To give easy answers or to provide truthful, more difficult answers. Should you skimp on details, have the power of being the only one “in the know” and promote the “leave-the-thinking-to-me” mentality? Or should you be an information sharer and adopt the habit of filtering down critical data and invite people to get involved in finding solutions to problem or propagate ideas that work?

You must conquer the fear of giving bad news and handling negative reactions. They are expected occurrences in any organization. It is best to learn how to face the risks of broken limbs, busted promises or the “I hear you, I hear you, I hear you” syndrome. Consider the “tell all you know” strategy by explaining your rationale behind decisions, focusing on the “how,” not just the “what.”

This way you can be relevant rather than resented. You may mention the measures you are tracking and designate the go-to-person coordinator to follow up details or questions. Hiding behind technology like e-mail, intranet and text messaging is not sensible. You have to look people in the eye and have a face-to-face interaction. As one author declared, you can't fax or e-mail a handshake or a pat on the back.

Pursuing clarity

CLEAR messages start with clear words. Clear words lead to clear action. Fussy words result in fuzzy action or no action at all. In any communication, use plain language, start with a punch line, avoid the template tease and provide context. Make sure your nonverbal cues don't contradict your words and adapt your style to the person and purpose. Remember that words alone never carry the complete message. Messages come from context, relationship, timing, tone of voice, what was said, what was not said and body language. All these things together comprise the total message that people “hear.”

Modeling words and values

GOD is in the details, and our attention to detail reflects an attitude of quality, commitment and consistency communicated to your audiences. When somebody says, “I’m not a detail person,” start to sweat. You’ll rarely hear this statement from chief executives. They’re always “detail persons.” The issue is which details merit their attention. They dive for details—the significant details—because they know details can sink or save an enterprise.

You must also deliver on your promises. They have to synch somewhere. If you say you’ll send the report, send the report. If you say you’ll call, call. If you say you’ll arrange a meeting, arrange a meeting. If you say you’ll approve the funds, approve the funds. You are a credible PR communicator if you follow through with what you promise. If you can’t follow through, then stop promising.

Rating credibility

THERE are five things that can either contribute or detract from people’s inclination to believe you. First is appearance and physical presence such as dress, grooming and body language. The rule is to dress to feel confident, to be comfortable and to get appropriate cover. Look successful at what you do. Second is language—the words you choose and how well you think on your feet to express yourself. Third is the likability factor—your personality and the chemistry you create between yourself and others. It is not bad to show your vulnerability, and even preeminent to display courtesy, share a sense of humor and show humility. Fourth is character—the values you live by and the integrity you keep intact. Fifth is competence—your skill and track record of results.

Persuading with your ears

LISTENING is key. One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears. It is imperative that you acknowledge that you hear what others communicate to you—both verbally and nonverbally. Rather than interrupting or telling your own story, communicate concern through your words and your body language—good eye contact, appropriate facial expressions, focused posture. And as people react to what you write or say, consider the context. Is their workload mind-numbing at the moment? Are deadlines looming large? Are they dealing with a personal problem that's adding stress to their workload?

Revvng up

EVERYDAY operations need speed. Waiting should not be your favorite pastime. Delayed information typically means decisions are placed on hold, because nobody knows for sure which projects are in “go” or “no go” status. Send information at the point of relevance—or not at all. When delayed, productivity takes a nosedive, morale decays and competition overtakes.

In times of crisis, delay can turn crises into disasters. And if the delay doesn't kill, maim or destroy, at the very least, it infuriates people. When it comes to bad news, tell all and tell promptly. Never underestimate the importance of the two-minute warning, and find a way to frame negative news positively when you can do so honestly. It can do wonders if you develop more than a “we've always been lucky” crisis plan. Prefer substance over shine in a crunch. And when faced with a time crunch, make it a habit to get the information out right here, right now in a less-than-perfect form rather than wait until tomorrow for polished prose.

Make your facts tell the story

THE fact is that facts can be false, wrong, misleading, or misinterpreted—purposefully or accidentally. Choose to be true, that’s the right way to go. Create impact with facts and how you tell them by using analogies and metaphors to drive emotion and deepen understanding. Take a point of view and hammer it home with humor. And as you bring out your solid facts, strengthen them with sound logic, straightforward language and a strong structure. Use circular communications—up the chain, down the chain, across departmental lines, from the day shift to the night shift, feedback from the boss to the staff and vice versa, conversation with customers, feedback from customers, customers talking to other customers.

Success in your business or in anything you do during this tough time will depend highly on it. Communicate efficiently and effectively and be the voice of authority. If you do, people will be buzzing with inspiration, ideas and innovation.

PR Matters is a column by members of the local chapter of the UK-based International Public Relations Association, the world’s premier organization for PR professionals around the world. Bong Osorio is the communications consultant and spokesman of ABS-CBN Corp.

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