

March / April / May 2010

FILE: Management Communication

TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, *ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA*
Chairman

RE: Contrast Analysis: A Tool for Strategists to Get Management's Attention

This is one of my favorite tools for discussing serious problems with management. It is simply a side-by-side comparison of the assumptions we make about a given situation, and the realities of that situation in the words of victims, employees, those indirectly affected, and critics. The dialogue is based closely on a conversation I witnessed with one of my hospital clients not too long ago. The situation being the death of a child and the hospital trying to explain its way out of the problem it had created for itself.

The question this method of analysis answers is, "Which matters more, our assumptions or the perceptions and realities of those whose lives we affect?"

Do I need to tell you which answer is correct?

Test your assumptions and theories against victim, survivor, family, and community realities.

| <i>What We Assume / Say</i> | <i>What Victims, Families/Survivors, Employees, Communities Really Care About</i> |
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| 1. Deaths of this nature are very rare. | 1. "So, my son's death doesn't matter?" |
| 2. We asked your son to be more vocal about what the procedure actually was supposed to be. | 2. "So, it's my son's fault that you removed the wrong organ?" |
| 3. We donate millions of dollars of charity care and research each year. | 3. "It didn't prevent my son's death, did it? How many others had you killed this way?" |
| 4. It's a very complicated procedure that was explained to you and your son, and we told you there were going to be risks. | 4. "I don't recall your talking about your own negligence and callous carelessness. You don't care, do you?" |
| 5. Our staff saves thousands of lives every year. We are one of the most highly ranked hospitals in our market. | 5. "So, you should get to forgive yourself because so many are luckier than my son?" |

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The Lukaszewski Group Inc. ■ 100 South Bedford Road, Suite 340, Mount Kisco, NY 10549
Telephone: 914.681.0000 ■ Facsimile: 914.681.0047 ■ tlg@e911.com ■ www.e911.com

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| 6. On the scale of problems and tragedies hospitals can experience, and while any death is one death too many, on the whole, we are very proud of our medical practice excellence. | 6. “He was my only son.” |
| 7. We are so very sorry for your loss, but your son’s situation just doesn’t merit the kind of settlement you are looking for. Even if we gave you 10 times what you’re asking, it wouldn’t bring your son back and it would ruin the reputation of a top physician. | 7. “True, but it would hurt you badly enough that you’ll think long and hard before you make the same mistakes that took my son’s life, and murder someone else’s child. I’m not doing this for me; I’m doing this to protect others from you.” |
| 8. We don’t believe it was our fault. | 8. “It happened in your hospital, under your care, with your award-winning staff in charge. Who else is there to blame?” |