

ENGAGEMENT: THE CRUCIAL COMMUNICATION SUCCESS INGREDIENT

Behavior is always the credibility test for communication on issues and questions that matter, i.e., about victims or career-defining moments. Affirmative action assures completion of the communications connection where reputation is threatened or adversely affected. It is the sender's responsibility to make certain the receiver has opportunities to anticipate, accept, or at least take in the messages being delivered.

Failure to include credible action steps, which brings key players together in a communication strategy, triggers – with virtual certainty – the prediction of, if not real trouble in, a variety of important scenarios.

- Virtually all mergers fail in some respect as the result of intentional or unintentional under-communication combined with lack of action.
- Anti-corporate activists are successful primarily because they capitalize on the weakness of non-communication and non-engagement by the target of their activity.
- Major corporate and public projects fail because those opposed unconditionally commit themselves to communicating and bringing life to their opposition every hour of every day of every week until they are successful. In other words, their desire to defeat exceeds the commitment of the target to survive and succeed.
- Communication without action is the definition of “spin.”
- Communication without any intention of action is deceit.
- Communication that cannot be acted upon is stonewalling.

Where communication is preceded, accompanied, or followed by appropriate action, credibility can be established and the opportunity for trust to develop is possible. In most cases, the feeling of empathy – so necessary in adverse situations – will be evident without using any empathetic words or language. That's because actions do speak louder than words. Words are often very helpful, but it is what is done, acted out, or completed that assures communications success.

In a communications context, empathy, which is a crucial success ingredient, is the process of constructively projecting useful emotions into a situation. Depending on the circumstance, those emotions can range from expressions of concern to enthusiasm and excitement. Anger and irritation are generally counterproductive; often destructive or uncontrollable emotions subtract from the ability to effectively connect through communication.

There is a **model for an effective communications strategy** that addresses the five crucial fundamental issues that urgent situations present; victims and those directly or indirectly affected expect, and other inter- dependent elements. This model is powerful because it is structured and delivers on the fundamental issues audiences and those directly or indirectly affected expect.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James E. Lukaszewski (loo-ka-SHEV-skee) advises, coaches, and counsels the men and women who run very large corporations and organizations. He is an expert in managing and counteracting tough, touchy, sensitive corporate communications issues. The fastest growing portion of his practice involves civil and criminal litigation. He is one of the few who can and truly does coach CEOs.

He is a prolific author (several books, hundreds of articles), lecturer (corporate, college and university), coach, and counselor. He is quoted in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Miami Herald*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and industry trade journals. He is a columnist, advisor, or editor for almost every major public relations periodical. His 1992 book, *Influencing Public Attitudes: Strategies that Reduce the Media's Power*, remains a classic work in the field of direct communication. He is an internationally recognized speaker on crisis management, ethics, media relations, public affairs, and reputation preservation and restoration. Visiting his Web site, www.e911.com, is like attending the University of Crisis Management.

An accredited member of the International Association of Business Communicators (ABC) and the Public Relations Society of America (APR), Mr. Lukaszewski is a member of the PRSA's College of Fellows (Fellow PRSA) and Board of Ethics & Professional Standards. He served as a crisis communications advisor to the International Disaster Advisory Committee, Agency for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance from 1989 to 1992, and is a civilian advisor to several other federal agencies. He lectures annually at the U.S. Marine Corp's East Coast Commander's Media Training Symposium and was the second recipient of its Drew Middleton Award. He is the recipient of both Ball State University's 2004 National Public Relations Achievement Award and the 2004 Patrick Jackson Award for Distinguished Service to PRSA, and is among the winners of the 2005 *PR News* Lifetime Achievement Award. His name appeared in *Corporate Legal Times* as one of "28 Experts to Call When All Hell Breaks Loose," and in *PR Week* as one of 22 "crunch-time counselors who should be on the speed dial in a crisis."