8 Rules of Effective Communication

Effective communication – getting your point across – is no easy task amidst the media barrage we endure each day. There are, however, eight rules of the road that can help keep your efforts on course. They can be the difference between communication that achieves a measure of success and communication that falls short or falls flat.

1. **Connect the Dots.** A disjointed, unorganized communication effort sorely lacking in cohesion is doomed to fail. Communications initiatives – whether they are internal or external, barebones or megabucks – must be easy to follow and quick to grasp. That doesn't mean they can't be sophisticated, clever or creative – the messaging just can't be all over the place. If your audience can't connect the dots sufficiently to understand what you’re trying to convey, you lose.

2. **Stand Out.** There are a multitude of voices in every media – new and old, virtually every hour of every day. Don’t say what they're saying, only louder. Say something else. Differ in tone, in timing, in attitude, in approach. If you strive to be noticed, you must do something noticeable. Think of communications campaigns you remember. What made them memorable?

3. **Consistency Counts.** Surprising as it may be, people tend to remember what you say and what you do. When they don’t, the Internet is there to remind them. That makes consistency a virtue. Organizations remaining consistent (but not rigid) in portraying their values and services, and their approach to the work they do, score points with the public. Consistency is a currency of success.

4. **Surprise People (in a good way).** There are pleasant surprises, and surprises that are unsettling or disappointing. Be certain that when you surprise people with your message, or how it is delivered it is not confusing, bewildering or disconcerting – causing them to turn them away.

5. **Stay Nimble.** Be ready, willing and able to seize opportunities and react to events. Don’t develop a communication strategy so rigid that you are paralyzed by the unexpected and can’t take advantage of a situation that presents opportunities you couldn’t have predicted.

6. **Pay Attention.** Stay in touch with your target audience – what is happening in their world (individually and collectively) that could influence or impact their ability to respond to the message you’re attempting to convey. Lack of attention will likely lead to a lack of action on your message.

7. **Pick Your Spots.** You likely do not have the budget to be everywhere, or to be all things to all people. That’s okay. You can be just as effective – perhaps more effective – when you pick your spots. Target your efforts. Pinpoint what you say and where you’ll say it. If you have a message that resonates, delivered at the right time and place, you won’t need to be everywhere to succeed.

8. **Messenger Matters.** It is not only what you say, but who says it. The old line “don’t blame the messenger” should provide sufficient warning. People do consider the messenger as well as the message. It is unavoidable. So carefully consider who delivers your message. It matters.

This is not a comprehensive list of do’s and don’ts, but an outline of eight clear-cut considerations essential to an effective communication strategy.

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