

Chapter 1

Learning the Essentials

Early in my career, I remember wishing there was a resource or some type of guide with answers to the strategic, yet “in the trenches,” questions and answers that a communication professional faces on a daily basis. There are a lot of good books on the subjects of PR, marketing, social media, and how integrated communication affects a business. But, where are the essentials, or the “do this” and you better not “do that” guidance to survive as a modern communicator today? Do you have all the answers you need to your most pressing questions?

Sometimes you have questions and you don’t know how to phrase them or you don’t know who to ask. What about the dreaded “stupid” question? Did you ever have one of those? A question that is considered outside of the normal scope or just doesn’t fit what someone would expect you to ask? People have asked me publicly and privately, and pretty much daily, the questions that run the “communication gamut” and beyond. Now, I am sharing them with you. In my experience there are no stupid questions; maybe just “stupid” answers when people don’t really listen to what you’re saying or truly understand what you need.

Asking questions helps you to learn the essentials of your profession. The answers are critical to your role as a successful modern communicator. So, don’t ever stop asking your questions. Simultaneously, you need to gain access to many crucial practices and to have personal stories at your fingertips. When you are on the job, on your feet, or faced with an urgent situation, you’ll want to have quick answers to essential questions on hand and in an instant. No time to think or to research on Google. You have to move forward and know how to get your job done. One of the best ways to tap into the essentials is by learning through another professional’s experience.

Being a student in the physical classroom gave me a great foundation of knowledge. I wouldn’t trade my years at Glassboro State College (now Rowan University) or my MBA at Fairleigh

Dickinson University (FDU) for anything. But today your classroom is everywhere, and you should take advantage of this ... in person, online, and through social media. At the same time, it was my positions with different companies, the experiences and interactions with supervisors and my peers, and the wisdom of colleagues and mentors, that truly guided me. It all started with many, many questions. They say curiosity is a sign of leadership. Perhaps this is why many parents believe that their kids, by the age of three, will be natural leaders. The answers to those questions help carve the path to career development and personal growth.

Based on all my own questions over the years and the many questions I have been asked, here is a set of essential questions and answers for you to use and practice. These answers are the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), on the job and in the trenches. Now, you don't have to worry about the stupid questions or wait for someone else to ask what you really need to know. Best of all ... no more guessing.

Question 1. Why Should You Learn Your Company's Business Inside and Out?

Absorb as much information as you can about your own organization and your marketplace. Learning the business, and really showing an interest in your company beyond your own responsibilities, leads to more opportunities and will make you stand out.

I applied this advice early on in my career. As a result, I was invited into the boardroom with the senior executives at my agency. Did I enjoy reading those financial newspapers and industrial equipment trade publications? Well, not in the beginning but they certainly grew on me in time. Why did I read them? Because professionals who want to excel must know their own businesses and/or their clients' businesses as if they were their own. These pros can speak intelligently to any audience, especially the media. You can become a valuable resource for a journalist/blogger just by being able to answer company questions directly and in less time.

Here are a few ways for you to learn the business inside and out:

1. Scour the company's trade publications or magazines related to your industry.
2. Watch the news program for a worldly view of what affects your company's industry and the marketplace.
3. Set up your Google Alerts to know when your company is mentioned online and in the news.
4. Ask to receive marketing and sales bulletins and other internal department publications at your company.
5. Find out what your CEO reads from his/her executive assistant, then add those publications to your reading list.
6. Find out what your supervisors are reading and take the time to get a subscription or set up an RSS feed.
7. Listen to podcast shows that focus on topics related to your industry.
8. Learn from the well-known bloggers in your industry and engage in any online events and conversations for more knowledge.

When you learn your company's business, you will also interact on a much higher level with executives, customers, partners, and other important constituents.

Question 2. Why Is It Important to Speak Less and to Listen More?

I know many communicators who have the gift of conversation. They are incredibly interesting, but there is never a moment of silence when you're in their presence. You must always know when to stop talking. The best communicators try to curtail their own communication to listen more to the people around them. It's not always about what message you want to communicate. Your time to share will definitely come.

Whether you're in the personal or professional setting, you should not be "listening" just to formulate your next sentence. How do you know when someone is really paying attention? Here are a few signs of the true listener:

1. Active listeners will make eye contact with you.
2. Active listeners will be able to repeat back what you say in their answers.
3. Active listeners will ask follow-up questions.
4. Active listeners will engage with their interest and their intellect.
5. Active listeners turn out to be the best conversationalists.

At the same time, you can also tell when someone is not listening. They give you a vacant stare as they are framing how they want to present their own information. Plus, their responses are representative of some kind of pre-set agenda.

Instead of focusing on your own points and getting your message across, practice speaking less, and listening more with an acute ear. If you do, then you'll be absorbing critical information that you can use and, better yet, act upon. With this approach, you will gain a greater understanding of what people need from you, and why they take the time to share information with you in the first place.

When the time comes, you will share your messages. And, if you listen first and share second, then the chances of what you say being well received will increase tenfold. Why? The reason is simple. The knowledge you gather and what you have learned from listening will show in your own communication.

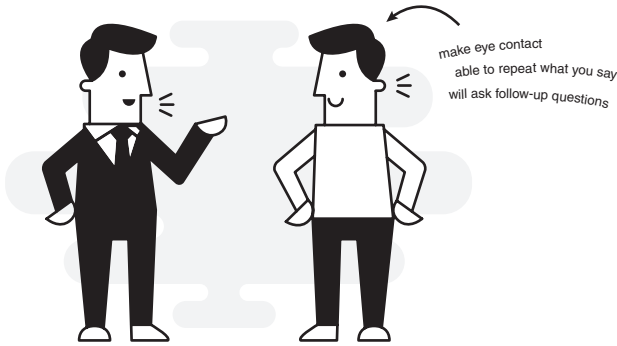


Figure 1.1 Active Listening

Question 3. If You Practice PR, Then Are You Considered a Marketer?

If you don't understand how or why PR fits into a larger marketing framework, then you can only be partially effective in your role. PR has become a crucial part of any marketing program. PR builds the brand awareness, trust, credibility, and advocacy through media and relationships with key constituents. PR helps to optimize the company's marketing efforts, including your advertising, promotions, digital marketing, social media, etc.

If PR and marketing are working together, then all your communication is consistent in messaging, design, and experience. Your consumers want to receive the same great brand experience, at every touch point with your company. This can only happen when PR and marketing are on the same page and operating in synch with one another. The customer doesn't ask, "Who sent me this communication? Was it PR or was it marketing?"

Working together as a team of communicators is not a new experience. Back in the days before digital and social media opened up new communication channels, PR and marketing had to coordinate together. For example, at my old agency, marketers and PR pros worked on the precise timing of messages in their print feature stories and product reviews, balanced out by brand and product advertising in trade publications. You would see the same consistent messaging show up in editorial stories as you did in advertisements, although the third-party endorsement was far more powerful. Plus, PR paved the way to credibility so that advertising would help maintain awareness and drive sales. What started back in the days before the Internet is even more pronounced today.

PR and marketing should be shoulder-to-shoulder and arm-in-arm, as comrades. You can't have one without the other. Embrace your togetherness as a communication team. If you're in PR, then you're in marketing too.

Question 4. Why Should You Keep Ethics Top of Mind?

Trust your instincts. If you feel you're going to communicate news or company information that is causing you to take pause, then stop and speak up. Ask yourself, "Is what I'm about to disclose lacking truth, fairness, or accuracy and does it benefit all of the people I'm trying to reach?" Even if it is your boss or a supervisor who has given you a directive, go with your gut feelings. At times, you may have to challenge other professionals, and change the communication, or make the decision not to participate in a program.

Skilled communicators understand the serious ramifications of unethical communication including the legal ramifications. You have to be familiar with the meaning of ethical conduct. Organizations, such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), share a Code of Ethics to help break down ethical communication for you. The International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) also has a Global Standard, which includes the highest standards of professional behavior.

My friend and colleague, Kirk Hazlett, APR, Fellow PRSA, summed up the importance of ethics in a blog post discussing PRSA Ethics Month. He said,

September is traditionally the time of the year when the Public Relations Society of America observes "Ethics Month," and PRSA chapters nationwide are encouraged to present special programming. A comprehensive set of resources is available to assist in this effort. While I support and encourage this educational emphasis, both on a *personal* and a *professional* level, I would prefer to see it a year-round, continuous initiative.¹

The bottom line—ethical conduct is an everyday practice because every day it is your reputation that could be at stake. Professionally and personally, no one can demand you do something that makes you feel uncomfortable. You create your own actions and you are

ultimately responsible. At the end of the day, all you have left is your integrity. If you put yourself in a compromising situation, then you risk tarnishing your own reputation and your credibility as a professional.

Question 5. Do You Have to Audit Your Communications?

Moving forward with more precise and meaningful communication means you understand what has been done and what has worked well in the past. Knowing the history gives you a better chance to achieve success, and to avoid any failed efforts. Before you communicate, ask yourself, “Do I have a comprehensive understanding of the big picture, and what has worked well and what has not?” Having the answer to this question is a “fix it to move forward” approach. After all, why move forward with problems from the past that will just continue to hinder your progress?

Here’s where auditing your communication initiatives and uncovering your strengths and weaknesses come into play. You should be asking questions about what you’ve said and done in the past, and whether your efforts have been effective or not.

These questions may include:

- Are your communications aligned with your organizational goals?
- Are you integrating your marketing efforts across your organization?
- Are you taking full advantage of your communication channels?
- Are your communication channels operating efficiently and effectively?
- Who are your different target audiences and do you have communication tailored to each group?
- Have you developed consistent, clear and concise messages for all audiences?
- Do you know how your audience wants to receive information from you?

However, two more important questions, which should always be top of mind, are: “What do your customers think of your communication?” and “What would make your communication with

them more effective?" These questions are frequently overlooked, but lead to more precise communication and achieving your goals. If you can learn what customers want from you, then you will be able to help them much more in the future.

Best of all, today, you don't have to wait until your program is over to audit and then apply the fix part to propel forward with a greater purpose. You can gather information and feedback from your customers through data in real time and at different intervals. Social media data, website analytics, performance analytics, and automated CRM (Customer Relations Management) software help you to fix what's broken and to adjust quickly and accordingly.

So, yes, audit your programs for background information and extract what did and did not work. Then, fix your issues and move forward with your customers' needs at the forefront. These are the key steps and they provide a better way of learning and increasing the effectiveness of your communications.

Question 6. Why Is Knowing the News Always Your Business?

Reading about current events is a must for every communicator. My mentor shared this advice with me 25 years ago, and I'm still practicing it daily. At the time, he told me to select one or two publications and read them every day. Perhaps you might choose *The New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, or CNN.com, or you may prefer USA Today. Make local, national, and international news your business.

At the same time, read the PR, marketing, advertising, and social media publications to stay up to date with industry news and challenges facing the profession. *PR Week*, *PR News*, *Adweek* and *Advertising Age* are good, go-to sources. Top blogs with the latest news and helpful marketing and PR tips include Spin Sucks, PR Expanded (personal plug, this is my blog), PR Daily, PRSay, CommPRO, Convince & Convert, and Social Media Examiner. There are far too many to list. You can find more of the top marketing and PR blogs, for example, at Alltop.com, under "Topics" and "PR." Bookmark these blog sites.

Then, for the communicators who are constantly on the go, and want the quicker highlights on current events, there are daily quick news fixes. For example, the Skimm gives you just the right amount

of information every morning to get you through the day, with links to more details on a variety of news stories. The Huffington Post also has daily news briefs, with links to national and world news, keeping communicators well versed in business, politics, media, tech, and entertainment topics. What about news apps on your smartphone? From cable TV and network news apps to curated and customized headlines from Newsbeat or Flipbook, your news can always travel along with you. Or, maybe you're listening to your favorite news podcasts including For Immediate Release (FIR) with Shel Holtz and The BeanCast with Bob Knorpp.

Communicators have to be well rounded. You can't expect to sit with the executives at the boardroom table if you're not up on your news and industry information. Plus, in my experience, you never know when small talk at events or social gatherings on important issues can open doors to exciting new relationships and opportunities in business.

If you are trying to be a part of the business or helping to grow the business, then you have to make the news your business.

Question 7. What Exactly Is PR and How Does It Bring Value to a Business?

As a modern communicator, you have to know and be able to explain public relations. Here's one of my most frequently asked questions: "What do PR people really do?" My best friend's mom, who's known me for almost 20 years, just asked this question. She's not the only one. Most industry definitions of PR discuss how professionals build "mutually beneficial relationships" through strategic communication.² True, but a broad definition.

What does PR mean to me? How do I use communication to create meaning? How does my outreach lead to value for different groups of people and, most of all, build relationships? In the business world, when you make PR a part of your communications program, you quickly learn the real-world definition. The "P" stands for "Personal" and the "R" translates into "Relationships" that are built by sharing targeted, meaningful communication and becoming a trusted source. Words like "mass" or "broadcast messaging," "spin," and "hype" should not be a part of your vocabulary or your thinking.

At the same time, PR helps to interpret how different groups perceive, and respond to, your communication. When you're in PR

you also evaluate what actions result. A career in PR means you will be instrumental in creating the communication that:

1. shifts an opinion;
2. changes behavior;
3. builds reputation;
4. builds the bridges of understanding between the people you connect.

Of course, if you don't deliver meaning and value with your communication, then you will not reach the best part of PR; what it is like to be the trusted source, creating strong relationships with many different constituents, including the media.

Now that you know PR, you can help spread the word about the meaning and value of PR.

Question 8. How Do You Score High on the Ethics Test?

Companies are in the news daily and they are called out on social media as a result of their unethical conduct. Not just the big companies, from a specific industry, but companies of all sizes and organizations doing business in every market. Scandals range from diversity issues and sexual harassment to fraudulent accounting practices and communication missteps via social media.

What would you do if you were asked to provide counsel on a matter that you believed was unethical? Would you want to be on the PR team if you knew about a potential "cover-up," with a deliberate lack of openness about a situation that negatively affected your customers? What would you have done if you were the communicators on the job when Enron, Arthur Andersen, AIG, BP, etc., were under scrutiny and not completely transparent in their communications? What about the political campaign surrogates in the 2016 Presidential election who went on TV for all the world to see and said anything to support their candidates? Would you stand behind someone if you knew that they were stretching the truth or outright lying? These are all ethical questions that only you can answer.

Your answers will depend on whether you believe in the behavior that has occurred, and if you feel you're representing the truth. Ask yourself, "Am I representing the *truth*?" If you know

there is a cover-up in play, or you suspect the company's actions are unethical (or a political candidate's actions for that matter), then as an ethical communicator you don't want to further the dishonest conduct.

Always review all your accounts, cases, opportunities, support/volunteer work, and communication carefully. If you remain aware, objective in nature, trust your instincts, expand your perspective, and err on the side of caution, then you will score high on the ethics test. Hopefully, you will influence others to do the same.

Question 9. Should Training Stop When You Are a Seasoned Pro?

Sure, younger professionals need different types of training: speaker, presentation, diversity, management, and leadership. However, so do the seasoned pros. Executives need coaching too. For instance, even the best public speakers require constant practice and critique. Most professionals don't recognize their own poor speaking habits. For example, they're usually the last to figure out that they favor certain pause words. For years, I said the word "again" far too many times, which was a difficult speaking pattern to break. Someone else had to help me kick the habit!

Think about your own speaking and presentation habits when working with different groups. Do you know your annoying pause words (um, wow, so, absolutely, again, to name a few)?

Here is another test for you (or your executives) who think they don't need training:

1. Do you know if your physical stance is uninviting or highly approachable?
2. Would you be able to tell if your communication paints a clear picture or if what you say is confusing?
3. Would you recognize whether your body language was friendly or told a different story?
4. Do you know how to establish a connection with your audience even before you speak?

Be honest ... chances are you may not. Training at intervals in your career helps to make your communication more targeted, vivid, and meaningful to an audience. They say, "Practice makes perfect." But, it should be "practice and frequent training make perfect."

Question 10. Do Executives Need Media Coaching ... Even If They Don't Think So?

Right up there with the important training is ongoing media coaching. Even the most poised and well-spoken C-level executives need help. Sharing information with a journalist for a print or online story is completely different than a TV appearance or a media Skype interview. Then, when crisis strikes, the friendly questions disappear, and issue-related questions become rapid fire. Your executives will be the first to say they don't need training, or "I've been trained in the past." Stand firm on why they do need training (because situations and the media constantly change) and don't back down.

Can you ever be fully prepared for what the media or the public will ask? It's unlikely, but good media training sessions will better prepare you or your executives to answer questions on point and succinctly, in good times and bad. The goal is to deliver the most important and accurate messages in a polished and credible manner. At the same time, it's better to test your media skills before the crisis strikes and not in the midst of a full-blown crisis.

Unfortunately, I've witnessed too many interviews "gone bad." I can immediately tell the difference between the trained company spokesperson and the one who didn't take the time to get more professional practice. You have one shot in an interview to deliver information that will set the record straight, or impart valuable information on behalf of your company.

Remember, when it comes to the media ... there are no do-overs. Please get it right the first time. Good coaching always helps.

Question 11. How Do You Maximize Earned Media Opportunities?

Among all the ways you can create awareness, earned media is considered the most credible. The power of the third-party endorsement carries far more weight than a message crafted and placed in an advertisement or in a digital promotion. When someone else recommends your company, especially someone you trust, the endorsement carries influence, much more than anything you would read directly from the company. Consumers know that advertising, promotions, and other forms of owned and paid media are all carefully orchestrated to capture attention and to create impact.

There are so many opportunities to maximize your earned media efforts through any number of channels today. Third-party endorsements come in many different forms, from your editorial placements and social media comments from fans, to online reviews and customer testimonials on your website. Today, earned media can also be the conversations customers are having about your company and your products in their social media communities—including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Yelp, and Reddit—when you're not around.

However, maximizing earned media starts with the company's actions. Businesses have to show they care and that they're focused on serving customers and their other stakeholders. Becoming a better employer, partner, vendor, provider, etc., is the best way to get people talking positively. At the same time, businesses are built on great people. So, it becomes everyone's job to help the business operate at optimal performance. Then, their favorite journalists, bloggers, friends, and customers want to talk favorably about them or recommend their product and service offerings.

When the company does its part internally, then you will see the interest and appreciation grow through earned media with external audiences. When this happens, there is a ripple effect. Other people are much more likely to pay attention and act on the recommendations of the people they trust.

When working from the inside out, you are maximizing your earned media opportunities.

Question 12. Why Is It Important to be Recognized Outside of Your Silo?

There are communication challenges across your entire company. Make it your business to know what keeps the executives up at night. Perhaps these challenges relate to low productivity or poor customer satisfaction. Working in a silo, sectioned off from other areas in the company:

1. will not help you to understand and solve issues; or
2. get you noticed outside of your respective department.

Your ability to work with other teams propels you into new and interesting work. The more you can engage with other areas, including HR, Sales, Legal, Customer Service, etc., the more you'll

understand the challenges from a different perspective. You'll be able to offer more realistic solutions to organizational problems. At the same time, sharing, collaborating, and innovating with other groups is the key not only to your own growth and development but also to moving your company to greater success through the synergy of diverse people and teams. Working beyond yourself and your department results in career growth and recognition.

When I interviewed Samantha Paxson, CMO of Co-op Financial Services, on my podcast show, *Women Worldwide*, she shared a story with me about her career growth. Samantha didn't wait for anyone in her company to anoint her as the person to solve problems affecting different departments and ultimately improve delivery for the client. She proactively did this on her own. Samantha knew that if she worked with areas outside of marketing, such as Operations and IT, she would not only immediately stand out, but also solve problems more quickly. She believed that "business happens in the spaces between functions." Long story short, this is how Samantha, by the age of 30, earned the title of Vice President and now is CMO of her company.³

If you want growth and recognition, then you have to be comfortable outside of your silo. Remember, there is no "I" in TEAM and you also have to realize that your team today goes far beyond your own department.

Question 13. What Is Your Best Form of Research?

Listening. Over the course of your career, you'll do a great deal of communicating, both written and spoken, offline and online too. But, regardless of the form of communication, you always have to listen first. Listening leads to truly understanding your audience needs. The information gained from listening can be used in different ways. For instance, feedback can be placed back into your product development cycle to make a better product, or information you uncover internally can educate management on how to better manage employees for smoother processes and operations. Listening helps you to personalize or customize customer communication, and it can also lead to more innovative pitches with the media.

Sometimes, when you are too close to the situation, you cannot "see the forest for the trees." You either have to step back and do some more listening, or get an outside perspective to shed some additional light for you. The bottom line is that listening will always

be an important form of research and should continue throughout the duration of your communication programs (and your entire career).

Michelle Bacharach, the founder and CEO of FINDMINE, shared how listening helped to launch her business. After seeing consumers ask about 600 million questions a day through search engines, she founded her startup company. FINDMINE helps retailers to customize a consumer's shopping experience. Michelle's research and listening to people online helped her to solve their wardrobe issues. She created a tech platform to offer retailers the opportunity to cross reference and pair together different articles of clothing that looked good together, based on consumer preferences. Understanding the customers, their needs, and making it personal are the best ways to build loyal fans and lasting bonds.⁴

Go ahead, put on your big listening ears and keep them on as your best form of investigation and understanding. Your organization and your customers will thank you. Your own professional and personal growth will be your reward.

Question 14. How Curious Should You be About Your Competition?

No matter how big or small your company, be curious about your competition and watch them closely. You have to monitor the competitive landscape. Take a good look at what your competitors are doing and saying; don't be "boxed in" by what they do or how they are positioning themselves. The goal is not to be like them. You want to stand out and apart from them. When it comes to being curious about the competition, it really means you want to be different.

A word of caution ... there is always competition. Don't accept the boss, client, or teammate who says there is no competition and that "no one is like us." There will always be competitors on some level, but you will have to determine some of the differentiating factors. In all my years in marketing, I have always managed to find a competitor for comparison.

Here is my short list of questions to help you be more curious about your competition:

- What is your competitor's positioning and messaging?
- What is the perception of your competitors in the industry?
- Has there been recent positive or negative communication about them?



Figure 1.2 Curious About the Competition

- What are the media and influencers in the industry saying about the competition?
- Where and how often do they communicate?
- How are they represented visually?
- What is the competitor customer experience like? Do some “mystery shopping” by getting a demo of their services and speaking with their sales representatives. You can also ask people to do this for you.
- How are your competitors doing financially?

Be curious and know your competition. Keep your eyes on them. Then, absorb what you learn to build your own unique brand. Deep curiosity is the characteristic of not only an avid learner but also a strong leader. Being curious will also help you to know what you do better and to capitalize on your strengths.

Question 15. Is PR Best Suited for the Small Marketing Budget?

PR can be implemented on the tightest marketing budget, as long as the commitment to building a relationship exists. Remember, with PR, you’re paying for the time it takes you to build awareness, credibility, and relationships for a company, service/product, or to change audience opinion and maintain/protect a reputation.

Thankfully, you can do this with the tremendous amount of research and data at your fingertips through media audits, sales data, website analytics, customer service, and social media analytics. As a

result, your programs can be much more targeted, which translates into less time wasted and not as much money spent. Today, it can take you a fraction of the time to reach the right audience with the information they want and need from you.

Here is an example. Your media pitches can be extremely hard hitting and attention grabbing based on the information you capture and analyze, and the intelligence you glean. There is no excuse for not knowing who, when, where, why, and how to build a relationship, by sharing information that's newsworthy, timely, and, most of all, of interest to your recipient and the members of their media community.

When Kingsford Charcoal wanted to call attention to coal at Christmas (for reasons other than black coal in your stocking), they found the right partner and worked efficiently and quickly to make some noise. They teamed up with Sysomos, the social media intelligence and data analytics company, to find the nicest person on social media. Sysomos analyzed over 100 billion tweets to learn that Clifford Brown, a resident of Waukesha, Wisconsin, was the nicest person on social media because he:

1. didn't use profanity in his tweets;
2. used words like "please" and "thank you" the most on Twitter;
3. was an avid griller, even in the wintertime.

Because Mr. Brown was immediately placed at the top of Santa's "nice" list, Kingsford awarded him a year's worth of coal, a Kingsford Kettle Grill and some grilling essentials. By using Twitter data to find the nicest person on social media, the story landed in a number of publications, from online grilling to social media publications, raising the awareness of charcoal and grilling at Christmastime.⁵

So, get your team ready for some data sharing and brainstorming (with your partners too). Pitch the newsworthy information that's at your fingertips. Your programs can be small and targeted, yet really effective, when PR is implemented on a shoestring budget.

Question 16. Do You Need a Straight or a Dotted Line to the C-Level?

Your best opportunity as a communicator occurs when you have direct access to the CEO or the senior-level executives in your company. Of course, being in this position takes a tremendous

amount of trust. You're not only privy to sensitive business information and company growth strategies, but you are also relied upon to make important company announcements and to represent your organization.

Unfortunately, if you don't speak directly to the executives, and other professionals are communicating for you, then "layers of interference" may get in the way. In this case, the communication moving through layers can be diluted or weakened and you clearly won't have the executive insights and face-time you need. Plus, having a straight or dotted line to C-Level secures your seat at the boardroom table. Your relationship with executives should be a part of your career growth strategy.

Earlier in my career, I worked in a New York City branch of a PR agency. There were financial publications lying around the office, from the *Wall Street Journal* and *Barron's* to *Investor's Daily*. I would take a publication and read it at lunch and also take one home on the bus, making the commute time pass by a little more quickly. I made a point of asking questions about what I read to make sure I understood how some of the information related to our financial clients. I would also cross my name off of the small printed sheet at the top of these publications (they were inter-office reading materials) and always hand deliver a financial publication to the next executive on the list. I wanted to make sure he knew I was keeping up on my financial reading. Could I have handed it to a manager on the list? Sure, but I knew better.

My interest in the financial side of the agency's business and my constant curiosity allowed me to create that dotted line to a senior executive in the office. Why did he take an interest in me? Because I took an interest well beyond what was expected of my role, which helped me to get recognized much more quickly. Whether you're a young professional looking to be noticed or you're a little more seasoned, always take the time to further your interest and create that straight or dotted line.

Question 17. How Can You Make the CFO Your Best Friend Forever (BFF)?

If you want to get the CFO's attention, then think like one. Better yet, if you want to make a Best Friend Forever (BFF), then demonstrate how what you do every day delivers valuable outcomes. Share the business side of your communication results. Let your

CFO know that your focus is not on the clicks, likes, views, hits, and impressions. You are much more than HITS, describes Katie Paine, who says that's "How Idiots Track Success."⁶

Of course, sharing the volume of your stories and media coverage is part of the equation, but you must also make sure you can clearly show how these stories drive traffic to the company's website, and how people behave from there. These are the "trackable" outcomes favored by senior leadership. You want to uncover how people behave on your website or what actions they take on a specifically designed landing page in your campaign. Then, from click to conversation, you can demonstrate lead generation, which is very close to the CFO's heart.

Other outcomes appreciated by your CFO include how your work helps with brand health by averting negative issues and fostering positive public opinion, how the art of storytelling optimizes a marketing program, and how your communication helps to produce happy and more satisfied customers.

One of my best, and early, examples as a younger professional was a news story about an architectural client that I placed on the front page of a north Jersey publication. The story led to my client receiving calls about the design of a new school building. Several months later, they were signing a contract. One front page story turned into a lucrative project. We scored major points with the CFO and all the executives at the company.

Your CFO also wants news stories to reflect the growth of the business and to attract the interest of the business media. If you can achieve these activities and outcomes, then you'll have a BFF at your company in the form of a C-level friend.

Question 18. Will PR Ever be Your Sales Pitch?

Although PR and marketing work closely together and the lines continue to blur, there are still distinct differences. PR is considered the softest "selling" approach, unlike advertising, promotion, and direct selling. Yet, it is considered highly credible in the eyes of consumers. For this reason, your PR should not come across as sales or what's referred to as "marketing-speak." If your PR does cross the line, then you will hear about it quickly.

For example, every time you write a byline article for a publication, share a blog post, give a television interview, or commit to a speaking engagement, you would not use these opportunities as a direct sales

pitch or an infomercial for yourself or your company. In fact, these forums require your thought leadership and sharing of your expertise and advice. However, you can use these types of platforms to be positioned as the expert, which, in turn, results in clients/customers and other stakeholders inquiring about your business.

In PR, the credibility you build through thought leadership will eventually become an instant gateway to getting the big “sale.” PR implemented correctly means you can help to generate sales without ever having to cross the line into the really “salesy” territory.

Question 19. How Do You Become a Trusted Change Agent?

Believing in change, rallying for support, and implementing a transformation can be one of the scariest, yet rewarding experiences you can have. When you’re a change agent, you believe in yourself and you step out of your own comfort zone. Through new experiences, you can apply your leadership, knowledge, focus, and courage, to develop and implement what needs to get done.

Creating change is never easy, especially in an organization where infrastructure may be rooted in an older and, sometimes, more “traditional” framework. However, just thinking about change and creating change are two entirely different animals. If you’re a change agent, then you really want to spark action, which starts with finding others who have a similar goal or vision. You need a coalition, small or large, that will communicate the urgency to help make change happen.

At the same time, the change agent knows that communication about the change is paramount. If you can educate and guide others, then participation around the change will increase. Growing your army of change agents, who will rally for the change, will also be instrumental in the endorsements and small “wins” that you share. When these small winning moments occur, others may take notice and join your cause. You’ll also see the naysayers slowly fade away.

Back in 2007, I started writing about the concept of PR 2.0 and the hybrid PR approach on my blog. For me, PR was becoming more integrated with marketing, and I noted how the practice of PR was changing as a result of social media. I received a lot of pushback from PR peers and colleagues. By 2008, when I attended the PRSA International Conference in San Diego, I had educators on the university level approach me about my views. Many of my

colleagues felt I was blurring the lines too much. However, I saw the bridge to marketing and I started breaking down the silos between marketing and PR earlier and was vocal about the changes in my book, *PR 2.0*.⁷

I never stopped believing in the tremendous opportunities resulting from the blurred lines. There was, and still is, incredible potential for communication professionals to do more as integrated teams work together. Today, we see this collaboration and innovation in full force. Change can be daunting and sometimes a slow process. Be ready to face resistance, which is a sign that people are taking notice. However, the change agent never stops believing in herself and moving toward the transformation end goal. Be the change agent and the role model. Others will naturally take your lead and follow.

Question 20. How Can You Prove to Executives Your Communication (PR) Is Tangible?

PR is the hardest of all of the marketing disciplines to “sell” because the tangible results may take months or sometimes years to produce. What’s the immediate value of building relationships? The value is often realized over time. However, there are tangibles you can quickly point out. The easiest is media coverage, which now extends well beyond print to online and social media endorsements. Another easy tangible is benchmarking the traffic and the sources that drive visitors to your website as a result of your PR outreach programs. Also, added to the list is hearing and showcasing testimonials from happy customers, from your case studies to what people share about on Facebook and Twitter.

Customers will always let you know how they feel. What about solving issues that could tarnish your brand? When you address a potential issue bubbling up on your blog, and turn a negative situation into a positive learning experience, then you’re saving time and money. This, too, is tangible PR.

But, don’t stop there; continue to watch what actions your customers take as a result of your communication. You should focus on their actions and dive deeper into their behaviors. Here are some of the important action-based questions to ask:

1. What do people do on your website and where do they spend the most time?

2. On social media, what do they like to do with you and what do they like to do on your behalf?
3. What important messages do people share the most about your brand and how often do they share them?

If you begin to identify and showcase the different tangibles, then you will experience how good PR can “sell” itself.

Question 21. Should You Participate in Pro Bono Work?

Throughout my career, professionals have shared how increasingly difficult it has become for them to participate in pro bono work. Reasons include the economy being in a recession and their scarce resources. Unfortunately, there will always be excuses. However, when you take the time and resources to invest in pro bono, your work is an excellent way to help a non-profit organization or a company with limited resources. At the same time, you can gain attention for your work and your give-back culture through the media exposure you generate.

Participating in pro bono work also positions your company as altruistic and one that cares about the community. After all, pro bono work is not just reserved for a certain size or type of company. Giving back to the community is important for all companies and all their professionals. The rewards clearly outweigh any excuses that might hold you back. Plus, the companies that pursue pro bono receive experience in different areas that may help them to build additional business opportunities in the future.

When you want to pursue pro bono work, here are a few ways to make the most of your participation:

1. Look for mutually beneficial opportunities so it’s a win-win for all parties involved.
2. Make sure you have the skills and competencies required to participate in the pro bono work.
3. Put the terms of the pro bono work in writing so everyone is in agreement over the work and the deliverables.
4. Meet beforehand and talk often before accepting and beginning your pro bono work.

New experiences and giving back through pro bono work can make a difference and outweigh any of the excuses.

Question 22. How Do Creative People Help You to Increase Your Creative Quotient (CQ)?

In any profession, surround yourself with brilliant, creative people and you will thrive in your career. Regardless of your role, you can't afford to stop exercising your creative muscles. By surrounding yourself with very talented, artsy people, you will continue to learn, grow, and advance your own skills. Some of my favorite years in PR and marketing have been working with the designers at my former marketing communications agency. I would like to believe that some of their creative genius rubbed off on me.

As a rule, interact with the professionals who will motivate you to a higher creative plateau, whether they work with you directly or you're engaging with them remotely in your communities. Three ways I have taken advantage of creativity outside of my PR and marketing role include:

- attending social Meetups focused on the type of creativity you would only find outside of your own professional position and skillset. For example, Meetups with artists, designers, and tech visionaries really opened up my frame of reference;
- taking a group tour of an art museum and participating in the discussion with your group can be a deeper learning experience than just walking around the museum on your own;
- having your own dinner party or even a company get together will stimulate great conversation and creativity. But, be sure to invite guests who are from different cultures, careers, and geographies.

If you take advantage of new creative learning experiences by tapping into the knowledge and gifts of your artistic peers, then you will see your own Creative Quotient (CQ) rise.

Question 23. Why Should You Get More Intimate with Your Customers?

When you know your customers, it shows in your communication and in their actions. They engage with you on a deeper level and praise you for a more rewarding experience. Studying customer behavior will help you to understand their motivations, perceptions,

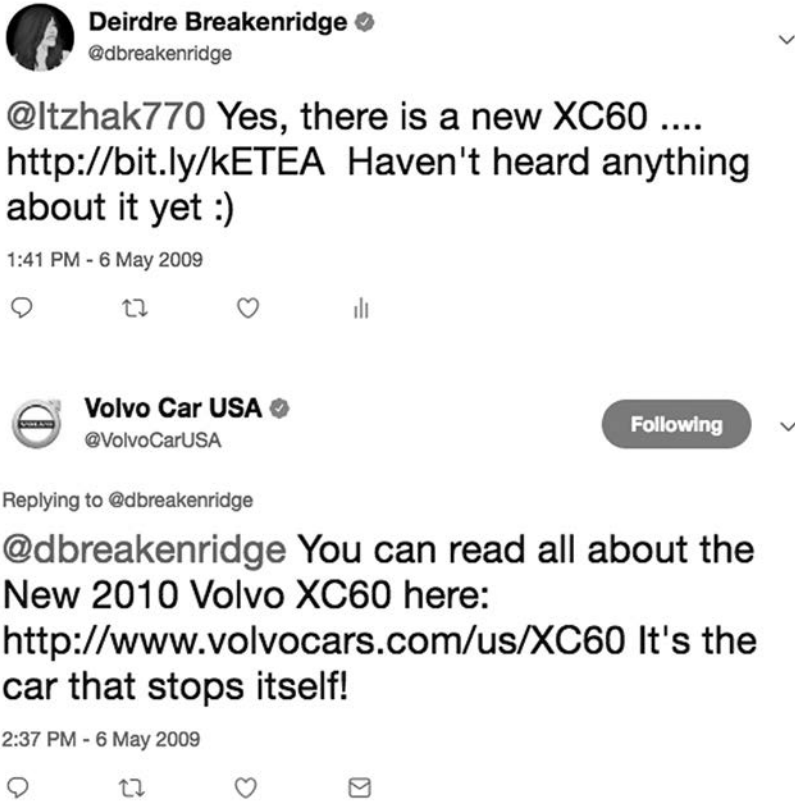


Figure 1.3 Brands Listening and Helping

Adapted from Twitter

influences, opinions, and purchasing patterns. Primary research is a great way to dig into audience habits and needs. Different methods include focus groups, surveys, polls, one-on-one interviews, usability studies, and even situations that warrant researchers to be placed in the business setting with audiences to monitor their behavior. You are gathering information first hand.

At the same time, uncovering social media conversations and data intelligence about your company and industry will tell you how your audience feels and what they like, and don't like, about your business. You should be monitoring your company's keywords to uncover important discussions about your company or your industry. At all times, you have to be listening closely and then use the feedback to show customers how much you value what they say.

I remember having a conversation on Twitter about one of my favorite car brands ... Volvo. I consider my family to be a Volvo family. There are three Volvos in the driveway as proof of loyalty. In a Twitter conversation, a friend and I were discussing the Volvo XC60. I was shopping for a new car. I shared how I didn't know much about the XC60. Within a couple of minutes of my comment, @VolvoCarUSA jumped into our conversation, offering me more information on this new model, with a link to find out additional information. They also offered to answer any of my questions about the model I mentioned or any other model that might be of interest. This is the perfect example of a brand listening and being there to help me out in the decision-making process.

Being intimate with customers is an investment in them; your research, online and offline, when used wisely in your communication, shows your customers that you truly care.

Question 24. Why Do You Need a Contingency Plan for Every Situation?

This is an easy answer. Always have a contingency plan set in place. You may be thinking that the back-up plan only applies to a few scenarios. Think again. It's Murphy's Law that whatever can go wrong will, at any time. It didn't take me very long to realize that the concept of the contingency plan was critical to the success of my communication activities.

Here's why ... your media tours will start later than expected; you will encounter Town Hall meetings with really tough questions for your executives; partners will face deadline issues affecting your campaign activities and timelines; planes will be delayed right before important events; and your team members have personal lives and their own problems. They get sick too. There are so many more scenarios that could negatively affect weeks of planning. During these situations, your contingency plan would have to be ready to kick into action.

When my agency was working with a client at a large media event in Las Vegas, I learned the value of a Plan "B". It was the day before our news media event at the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). My Vice President (VP) was too ill to travel on a plane. I was left to handle all media activities at the booth and the press event ... alone! Through excellent relationships I had forged with members of the client's product and marketing teams, I was able to enlist some additional help and delegate work to others that would have required me to be in two

places at once. At the same time, I shifted members of my company who were on our client's advertising team, and also attending the conference, to the PR side. They, too, jumped in to assist with the event.

To this day, I'm ready for any scenario. My motto: If not Plan "A" then move to Plan "B." And, if you are really ambitious, then you'll have a Plan "C" in your back pocket as well.

Question 25. Is Your Communication Planned or Spontaneous Spaghetti Thrown Against the Wall?

The popular phrase, "throw it up and see where it sticks" is definitely not a phrase well-liked or embraced by communication professionals. Personally, I think it causes unnecessary anxiety. In this respect, I know I'm not alone. There's too much at stake for a company or an executive's reputation to leave anything to chance. For those of you who like to fly by the seat of your pants, you'll find that your company's communication is a serious business and only the strong, focused, and steady will survive. From day one, you have to be proactive and plan ahead, using research and intelligence to build a solid strategy; the exact opposite of the "throwing-the- spaghetti-on-the-wall" approach.

Planning and research should be at the heart of your communications. The effort you put into your marketing communication plan shows in your program results. Take the time to plan appropriately by figuring out your communication goals and objectives and appropriate messaging for target audiences. You will need to uncover the right channels to reach your audiences and build in a measurement program with benchmarks to prove that you're successful. Most of all, make sure everything you plan can be implemented because you have the resources—time, budget, and the people—to see the plan all the way through its execution.

If, by chance, you find that you only have some spaghetti on the wall, then please peel it off and start over with research and planning.

Question 26. Do You Really Need to be Ten Steps Ahead?

As a modern communicator, you need to be ready for the unexpected. But, how do you plan properly? You can be ready by constantly monitoring the business landscape and industry climate. Your job is to keep on top of the pulse of the marketplace and what

economic, social, cultural, political and technological factors affect your company and your stakeholders related to these areas. By monitoring and understanding these areas and the constant changes, this will keep you abreast of the overall state of the industry.

Other ways to be ten steps ahead include understanding and articulating market size and growth, the scope of the competition, the level of product or service differentiation, and the rate of potential profitability.

At the same time, it's important to understand any hostile environments and threatening moves by competitors. If you can constantly access and keep this information current, you're much better prepared to handle any communication situation that may arise. At the same time, you'll also be able to hang out at the boardroom table and engage in more than just small talk with the C-Level executives.

Understanding the business of communication, going far beyond the planning of your pitches and media outreach, really helped me (and my clients) to always be ten steps ahead.

Question 27. Can Good Communications Solve All Your Company's Problems?

You may be incredibly organized and connected to the best media contacts or partners in your industry. Perhaps you're extremely proficient at what you do and it shows in your work. But, great communication can only go so far. If your company does not live up to the standards you're setting, then the result of your efforts will be useless. You can't say one thing and then do another. In the end, your hard work may end up highlighting all the negative behavior surrounding your organization, rather than accentuating the very positive information you set out to share.

Regardless of your ability to build relationships with different groups, secure great interviews with major media outlets, or motivate people inside your company and external audiences too, your company has to make sure it delivers on all of its promises. People who believe in your brand promise will evaluate you on whether they have a great experience each and every time they interact with you.

Excellent PR and great communication will not cover up a lousy product, crummy customer service, bad employee behavior, or deceitful practices. You have to fix what is broken, starting on the

inside first. Then, when you're back on the right track, you can use PR to accentuate the positive and highlight what really stands out about your company.

Question 28. Why Should You be Patient and Never Lose Your Cool?

If you're a modern communicator, then you may work with anxious customers, annoyed executives, frustrated employees, and short-tempered journalists. Situations can be tense; it's the nature of any fast-paced business. However, if you lose your patience your attitude is a direct reflection of your company; the people that you represent or your own personal brand. Losing your temper once can immediately send red flags to the party who is on the receiving line.

Unfortunately, people remember great communication less often and are quick to point out what they don't like and their less-than-pleasant interactions. Depending upon the situation, it's best to thoroughly hear the complaint, nasty comment, or unpleasant remark. Step back, count to ten, breathe, and formulate a response that is not based on your own personal emotions. Try to remove yourself from the situation. You need to become an observer of your own self. Then, coming back with a clear head will certainly help.

When I was feeling out a story with a media outlet, I came across a journalist who was very unhappy with my pitch angle. Back in the days of extensive pitching by telephone, after I delivered the quick story idea, the journalist snapped at me. He called me uninformed, and a "not well-read PR person." He also told me that I wasted his time. I was shocked at his reaction, especially when our client and my internal team had come up with the angle together. We had all read numerous issues of the magazine and did our homework extensively on the journalist and his publication.

Being a young and sensitive professional, I really wanted to fire back, just to let this cranky journalist know we worked really hard on this story. However, a *big* voice inside told me to *wait, breathe* and just *listen*. I kept my cool and told him that I would take his comments back to my team and that I appreciated his candor. Well, he didn't know what to do with my very nice and sincere response. Quickly gaining his composure, he told me he was having a bad day. After the call, we ended up tweaking the angle for this journalist to fit into a piece he was already working on for his magazine. And, so the story goes, it was a win-win for all involved.

What I learned through the experience ... be patient, because losing your cool may frustrate you more, and will not solve any of the issues at hand. Plus, you definitely get more bees with honey.

Question 29. Why Should You Create a Strategy and Then Implement Your Tactics?

If you don't take the time to create a strategy, then don't bother with your communication tactics. The strategy part is your roadmap or your approach. Your strategy is knowing your goals and objectives (specifically what you want to achieve), understanding your audience because you have done your research, and identifying how you will reach them with different messaging through the appropriate channels. When you have a strategy in place, you also set your measurement benchmarks and the budget that will be required.

Developing a communication program takes time. You don't want to rush the strategy and planning part or skimp on your research. Your research helps you to fully understand your audience and the situation. Some companies formulate their plans every six months and some construct their plans more frequently. And, now with social media, planning can actually be done in real time because of the instantaneous feedback loop from your customers and other stakeholders. Regardless of the timing, strategy always comes first.

At the same time, every part of your roadmap has to be realistic, with the right resources in place. A good plan, with a solid strategy, lets you roll out and easily manage your communication tools and tactics, which may include your news releases, blog articles, emails, social media posts, etc., through different channels. If your strategy is really good, then you'll be measuring significant outcomes as a result of the activities you put into place.

For your program's success ... always think strategy first and then communication tactics. Also, because you're in real time, remember to evaluate often and make adjustments as needed.

Question 30. What Is the Best Way to Brainstorm?

Brainstorming is a great way to open up a wider canvas of creative ideas. In my experience, the best brainstorming teams are made up of individuals in marketing/PR, as well as those outside of your own department. When creating the brainstorming team, you should select people in your company who are uninhibited, unbiased, and

can step outside of their comfort zones. These individuals should be among the team members who do not have “preconceived” notions or feel restrained by any prior marketing knowledge.

When you set up your winning brainstorm team, you can also set a few parameters in place for a more creative session, including:

1. making people feel it is okay to share their “far out ideas”;
2. helping teammates to feel comfortable about articulating what they like and what they don’t like about an idea (always sharing why they don’t think an idea will work);
3. playing the devil’s advocate approach to every idea—to hear the pros and cons;
4. demonstrating how to build on a concept, sharing different approaches and options.

At all times, try to get away from the usual boardroom setting for these meetings. Take the team into a different and more relaxed area of the company or go offsite altogether to get the creative juices flowing. If you only incorporate typical brainstorming into your process, then you will only generate typical ideas.

Question 31. Is It Important to Take a Proactive Approach for Yourself?

Being proactive really counts for your company and for you too. Many of the larger brands, such as Coke, Pepsi, Wal-Mart, Google, Apple, etc., clearly have a media edge. Their reputation and size in their industries afford these companies the steady media coverage they receive. The media knocks on their doors for information constantly. They are always in the news, with the feel-good stories and sometimes the negative coverage too. If you are not the “media darling” in your industry, then you have to think of creative ways to get in front of the media.

Remember, the media need executives who can provide valuable insight on hot topics and pressing issues. You should always be thinking about creative ways to tell your story, tied to what is going on in the news, affecting your industry, or even your local community. Opening up the PR opportunities to other areas of your company allows your internal subject-matter experts (SMEs) to share a different perspective or something unique that you may not even know. You can also try sharing some fresh statistics with the media about your market or your customers using creative visuals or in a

more interactive way. Lastly, you can talk to different departments in your company to find out what they are doing differently, and what is new and interesting in their work.

You would be surprised at the variety of topics and stories that result from being proactive and from asking different questions from untapped sources that are right within your own four walls.

Question 32. How Do You Identify Your Partners and Create Opportunities Together?

You can't be all things to all people. Working with partners, skilled in areas that you're not, will allow you to focus on what you do best. The most rewarding relationships exist when there is a clear delineation of responsibilities and functions. Partners are complementary to your service offerings. Finding these partners will open up your business and products to their networks and vice versa.

As a small marketing communication agency of about 40+ people, we had realized that we could not be everything to everyone. It was a hard lesson for entrepreneurs who wanted to do so much to serve our clients. We tried to build everything in-house, which was an expensive proposition. We hired a pool of copywriters, increased our design staff, and even began hiring programmers to build out our web development capabilities. What we learned quickly ... the best resources are highly paid and you don't want to skimp on your clients' work. At the same time, hiring people meant an incredible amount of overhead, from the square footage of the workspace to the workplace insurance for all these new employees.

As time went on and there was more acceptance about the remote work teams, we realized that we didn't need to have everyone be onsite. We also didn't need an employee to fill every single marketing role. In great partners, we found excellent copywriting services, web designers, and programmers (beyond just a core few). We didn't need big departments filled with creative people, but we did need big pools of creative people who we could trust. Relying on industry friends and associations and our ability to constantly network, we built up a strong partner base.

Of course, every partner has to be a trusted resource. You must do your homework and screen your partners carefully. A partner is an extension of your brand and one that has, at times, access to your customers and employees. When you're aligning your brand, always be sure your brand is in very good company.

Question 33. What Is the Best Way to Exercise Your Creative PR?

Creative PR is matching your creative and interactive storytelling with the messages you need to communicate, while being able to measure your great results. The right side of the brain meets left side; creativity unites with analytical thinking. The key is to always be creative with purpose.

You may have the responsibility of maintaining and protecting your brand's public reputation or maybe even the company stock price. However, this does not mean you cannot stretch the imagination to make your communication more passionate, human, and attention-getting for all the right reasons.

I remember working with a regional medical center in Florida. They really needed a creative way to increase awareness nationally about their hospital community—from their physicians and administrators to their staff. They creatively raised the bar by sharing more human and intimate details about the key physicians at the hospital. Doctors are real people too. They employed world-renowned doctors on staff, but they were also just as human as the guy or gal next door.

Videos on the site showed the doctors in action ... from doing their rounds and surgical procedures to discussing very complicated procedures. At the same time on the hospital's website were videos of these same doctors doing what they loved in their free time. One doctor was playing the guitar and singing along to his own handwritten music. Reaching into the depth of their own people and sharing something different definitely raised this hospital's creativity bar.

Here is a good rule to follow ... your communication, regardless of the industry, does not have to translate into mundane, routine, or even boring information. Creative PR lets you deliver communication that's more interesting, visually pleasing, and highly informative and meaningful. But, most of all you should be able to show how your creativity impacts and grows your business.

Question 34. What Do You Do When a Situation Looks Grim?

You may be faced with some tough situations that need to be handled delicately. Even when things get rough, you should keep a positive attitude as you push forward to solve the challenge or

problem and neutralize negative issues. Research says our brains are wired to be in survival mode and often project the worst possible scenarios. Yes, it's true, as a modern communicator you may have to think of all of the worst-case scenarios and how they may play out.

However, there are more reasons for you to remain positive both for productivity and your own health benefits, as well as for those around you. As a matter of fact, studies show that being negative or pessimistic can lead to depression and other health issues. Staying positive and calm as a communicator, even when the situation looks grim, is not only a quicker path to a solution but also the key to helping others around you to keep their composure in a trying situation.

When the situation looks grim, here's what you can do:

1. Step back, take a deep breath and gather all the facts quickly.
2. Listen and hear from different sources to gain valuable perspective.
3. Don't fear communication, but use it as a way to be transparent and inform the people who matter.
4. Step outside of an emotional situation and be a clear-headed observer who can respond appropriately.
5. Use your words carefully and understand just who they'll impact, and how.
6. Never let them see you sweat. You can fall apart when the situation is back under control or headed in a better direction.

Dale Carnegie wrote a well-known book, *Stop Worrying and Start Living*.⁸ When it comes to a situation that looks grim, do what Dale Carnegie says ... ask yourself what's the worst that can happen and then face that reality. In the end, it may not be as horrible as you think.

Question 35. What Is Better, Being an "A" or a "B"-type Personality in Communications?

Type "A" personalities are known for moving quickly and conquering tremendous tasks in a short amount of time. However, if you ever find yourself wrapped up in doing a lot and just going through the motions without a clear picture, then take a moment to step back. It may be time to incorporate some Type B perspective into your regimen.

Type B personalities are more likely to step back, think clearly, and connect the dots. When you remove yourself from your crazy cycle of busy communication tactics, you can visualize the big picture and

strategically move toward your goals. Suddenly, you're able to connect the dots. As a communicator, it's the difference between being tactical in your approach and strategically planning for what you want to achieve and then moving toward the success of your program.

Avoid jumping from dot to dot, or randomly skipping from stone to stone. See how and why these dots strategically tie together and map your course with greater purpose and a clearer understanding of your situation. At times, you'll want to harness your "A" tendencies to get a lot done, but not before you've capitalized on being a "B" type by connecting the strategic dots.

Question 36. What Does It Mean to "Command a Presence" in the Room?

Don't just enter the room; you need to command the room. You can make your presence known by standing tall with great posture and with the tone of your voice, right down to the clothes that you're wearing. Now, this doesn't mean you have to run out and spend thousands of dollars on fancy outfits. But what it does mean is that you have to show you care; from how you communicate to your physical appearance and presence.

When you take the time to care about your presence, you come across as someone who is polished and interested in serious discussions. Even the strength of your handshake and how you make eye contact will let people know that you mean business. The way you come across with your first impression will help to determine:

1. if your information is well received; and
2. whether new doors will open, leading to more successful interactions and relationships.

Have you ever noticed how performers in a theater production enter onto the stage? They almost glide with grace and physical prominence. What about members of the military; how do they stand when they are in a formation? Even when they're "at ease," their stance is strong and ready.

Here is one of my favorite tips: When you enter a room, whether it's a meeting room or you're on stage for a presentation, it's important to keep your feet firmly planted about a foot or so apart, almost as if you are assuming a military stance. Then, as you speak, you open your arms wide in a welcoming fashion, drawing your audience right into your discussion.

Of course, these tips take time and practice. When you learn to command the room, everyone will know you have arrived!

Question 37. Can You “Control” Your Own People?

I’ve prepared executive speaking points for years, whether they were for company announcements, one-on-one interviews, or news conferences in a Q&A setting. Speaking points keep executives focused on the key messages. Prepared executives can work these messages into almost any interview response. However, no matter how many points are discussed and prepared prior to the delivery, a couple of situations can occur.

For example, your executive may appreciate having the points on hand. However, she doesn’t take ample time to review them. Then, there’s the executive who prefers to “shoot from the hip,” which is the more preferred and natural speaking style, but could prove to be the worst-case scenario for you, the communication expert.

I remember preparing a high-profile athlete for a news conference at his annual charity event. The PR team felt very well prepared for any journalist’s questions that came our client’s way. Feeling very confident, it was time to make our way into the conference. Just as we were walking into the room where the media were waiting, I asked our client if he had any questions about the messaging points we had prepared. He stopped, looked me squarely in the eyes and said, “You mean what you sent me? Uh, thanks, but no ... I think I’ll just wing this one.”

Ugh. Not exactly what the PR team wants to hear. Let’s just say this news conference was not the best one during the tenure of this athlete’s professional career.

The Experts Weigh In

Sandra Fathi, President, Affect

Lead by Example

When I was 19, I volunteered for the Israeli Army. I was born in the U.S. and attended New York University my first year of college. When I decided to go abroad for my sophomore year, I chose Hebrew University of Jerusalem because I had some family in Israel and thought it would be an easy transition. I had

a wonderful roommate from New Jersey who was a true Zionist (someone who believes in the Jewish nation) but more than her love for Israel, she had a keen understanding that all the cute guys our age were in the army. Essentially, every Israeli, men and women, serves in the Israeli army. Men serve for three years and women for two. We were clearly missing out. Together, we dropped out of school and volunteered to serve in the army.

My time in the Israeli military taught me about the true meaning of leadership. My experience was nothing like American movies about the army—with a sergeant or veteran officer standing on the side lines barking orders at soldiers to march, run or drop for 50 push-ups while he stared at a stop watch never breaking a sweat. In the Israeli army, your commanders are only about six months older—sometimes a year or two. They barely have a few minutes more experience than the soldiers they are leading. In addition, Israelis are known for being fiercely independent, feisty, and completely defiant when it comes to authority. There is no respect for rank or power in the military—soldiers talk back to commanders, they disobey orders, they don't fear military jail. So, how do you lead a group of soldiers in this environment? You lead by example. You lead by earning their trust. You lead by demonstrating that no one is willing to work harder, no one knows more about the mission, and no one cares about them more than you.

That is the only way to get soldiers to follow you into battle—and in Israel, with enemies surrounding the state, and a looming threat of war literally a few miles from their homes, the struggle is real. An Israeli commander is at the front of his squad, not at the back, the first to risk his or her life, the first to encounter danger, the first to take a bullet. You would never ask a soldier to do something that you as a commander would not do yourself. And they know it.

Although public relations never rises to the intensity of going to war, the same principles apply when it comes to leadership. For the past 14 years, I have run my own agency and I've never asked a team member to do anything that I wouldn't do myself. I am continuously learning new skills and acquiring new tools to improve my craft and impart that knowledge on my team members. I am unwavering when it comes to the quality of my work, and anything that leaves the walls of our agency. However, at the same time, my employees know that I have their backs—I

won't ask them to sacrifice their principles for the sake of a paying client. I won't ask them to work 80-hour weeks because I believe they too should spend time with their families. I'll do what needs to be done to protect them, to provide them with the compensation, skills, and the tools they need to accomplish any mission, and I'll lead fearlessly into any battle.

Heather Whaling, President, Geben Communication

Partnering and Connecting Are Your Competitive Edge

Did you know there are PR agencies that offer “networking” as a paid service? Meaning, they'll open their contacts, facilitate introductions, and make meaningful connections—for a fee.

For some, that's a business model that works. For me, I've found that creating partnerships and making those connections isn't a service ... it's my competitive edge.

How can that be? And, why would I willingly give away something that other people are monetizing?

A few years ago, we were working with a local government agency that was preparing to launch a new service. Young professionals who live and/or work in downtown Columbus were a key target demographic to reach. Our scope of work with this client was narrow—limited to social media community management. But, we had a very strong relationship with the local Yelp community manager and saw an opportunity for our client to partner with Yelp to reach this audience. So, we facilitated an introduction and scheduled a lunch meeting. From there, we stepped out, but the partnership that evolved turned into a win-win for both parties. That client renewed their contract with us and the Yelp community manager continues to be an excellent advocate for that client (and many of our other ones).

As communicators, it's our job to build trust and improve relationships (it is *public relations*, after all!). Instead of hoarding connections, open your network. Look for opportunities to make meaningful introductions or to facilitate mutually beneficial partnerships. That's how you build a strong network, with yourself in the middle. A mentor once told me that the person in the center of the network owns the network. Instead of viewing networking as a necessary evil, shift your perspective. Embrace it as your competitive advantage.

Karen Freberg, Assistant Professor at the University of Louisville and Adjunct Lead Instructor at West Virginia University's IMC Graduate Online Program

Train Like an Olympian

Being proactive and successful in the communications field does not happen overnight. I have this conversation many times with students coming in and out of my office or sending me a late-night tweet about what they need to do to be successful in the PR, social media, or communications field.

My short answer is: You have to embrace the mentality of an Olympian and train like one. As a former student athlete in track and field, I ended my athletic career as a four-time All-American in the shot put, University of Southern California shot put school record holder, two-time SEC champion, and a 2004 Olympic Trials finalist.

Working, teaching, and practicing in digital media taught me a lot of life lessons I still share with my students. To be successful in the PR and social media field is very similar to being a track and field athlete, such as:

You are expected to perform and be on your "A" game if you work in social media and PR: The field is changing so much, you have to make sure you have your hand on the pulse of the industry. Each pitch, meeting, performance, and presentation you make you have to be at your very best. Everyone will be looking at what you are doing while tweeting, snapping, and sharing your insights for the world to see.

Know how you compare to other athletes (professionals) out there in the industry: Like athletics, you want to make sure you are preparing the best you can for the upcoming competition. You always want to see what everyone else is up to and have a few cards up your sleeve to pull out at any given time. Do your research, see what other professionals in the industry are doing, and make sure you address your strengths and work on your weaknesses. You can learn something from everyone—educate yourself and see what you can do to bring something new and unique to the table.

Train like an Olympian with your work in PR and social media: I used to work out 7 to 8 hours a day back as a collegiate athlete. From

weightlifting to throwing, I was trying to master my sport and event to the best of my ability. There were days where everything worked and you had the best possible conditions to compete and practice. Then, there are days where everything goes wrong and the last thing you want to do is pick yourself up after not performing well. How you react to failure defines how you will prepare to achieve success. The same can be said about working in social media. While I am no longer throwing things, I am still “training” in my work ethic in social media. You have to do a little bit each day and set time aside for studying, reading, and practicing your work like an athlete. There are days where you are on top of the world, and then there are days where you have to advise clients who are experiencing a crisis. You don’t become an Olympian (or influencer/thought leader) overnight. It takes time, persistence, and dedication.

Every PR pro (or athlete) trains differently: Everyone has a different approach they like to take when it comes to educating (training) for their craft. You want to see what works best for you based on the way you approach the field even to deciding what times of the day work best for you to write, brainstorm ideas, and create content in social media.

Embrace your own brand as a pro (athlete): Never feel like you have to be like everyone else. You want to be your own person and make sure you are communicating this yourself. You are your best PR professional—no one else knows you better than you. Same thing as an Olympian, you never want to feel like you have to be like everyone else in your event (or industry). I wasn’t the typical shot putter competing and I tell my students all the time I am approaching being a professor in a different way. Don’t try to be like everyone else. Do what works for you. Showcase your personality and embrace your brand, and be the strongest advocate on why you are unique compared to others. You sometimes have to be your own best PR person.

Notes

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