

calypso

Calypso Communications

TRANSITION NARRATIVES



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LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS

COMMUNICATION COUNTS

The COVID-19 global pandemic has had far-reaching, still-to-be-discovered implications for business leaders around the world. The abrupt lockdown of half the earth's population has triggered economic and emotional turmoil the world over.

Leaders of all types — start-up founders, CEOs of multinational companies, executive directors of NGOs and non-profit organizations — are grappling with existential questions about the future of their organizations. Their decisions have profound impacts on employees, customers, and other important constituents.

One could argue that every company is an impact company, and every leader is, in some way, a "start-up" right now. Additionally, every CEO, founder, and executive is a chief communications officer as it is their responsibility to communicate clearly, concisely and with conviction about the future forward.

There is a big difference between managing a crisis and leading through one. Crisis management focuses on the logistical operations of events. Leading means you inspire and hold your teams together. Fundamentally, leadership through a crisis is based not only on sound and swift decision-making, but on communications.

Effective leadership is based on thoughtful communication. It is the difference between providing information and inspiring people — giving out versus getting through.

The severe and disorienting shudder of our business-as-usual is testing even the most steady and resilient leaders. This guide offers some insights on how you can create new narratives as you navigate and lead others through the evolving landscape.

INFORMATION IS
GIVING OUT.
COMMUNICATION
IS GETTING
THROUGH.

Sydney Harris

SHORTEN THE STAGE

When Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella was preparing for his first public appearance in his new role, his team had arranged for an intimate setting with a few journalists and Microsoft employees. He was in Silicon Valley, about to make a partnership announcement.

Events like this take months of careful planning, and he knew it was important.

The morning of the announcement, however, the team was focused not on what he was about to say, but how. He had requested that the two-meter high stage be shortened, so that he could be closer to the audience.

He understood the importance of connecting with the audience and wanted to create an impression of collaboration and intimacy, rather than lording over his followers.

Effective communication creates connection with your audience. In this time of massive transition, people look to leaders to help them make sense of it all.

William Bridges, the author of "Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes" distinguishes between

"TO FEEL AS THOUGH EVERYTHING IS 'UP IN THE AIR,' AS ONE SO OFTEN DOES DURING TIMES OF PERSONAL TRANSITION, IS ENDURABLE IF IT MEANS SOMETHING—IF IT IS PART OF A MOVEMENT TOWARD A DESIRED END. BUT IF IT IS NOT RELATED TO SOME LARGER AND BENEFICIAL PATTERN, IT SIMPLY BECOMES DISTRESSING."

WILLIAM BRIDGES, "TRANSITIONS: MAKING SENSE OF LIFE'S CHANGES"

change and transition. Changes are the external factors — the closure of a production facility, a new management team, a pivot in the business. Transition is the internal, psychological shift necessary for successful change.

As leaders consider how the pandemic may force changes in an organization, it is essential that they offer their teams context of purpose. They need to develop and deliver a narrative that provides meaning and guides teams toward a collective transition.

PERSUASION 101

A PARTICULAR CALLING

Under normal circumstances, communication has three main objectives, in varying degrees:

- **To inform, educate or enlighten**
- **To persuade a point of view**
- **To motivate an action**

These are not normal times.

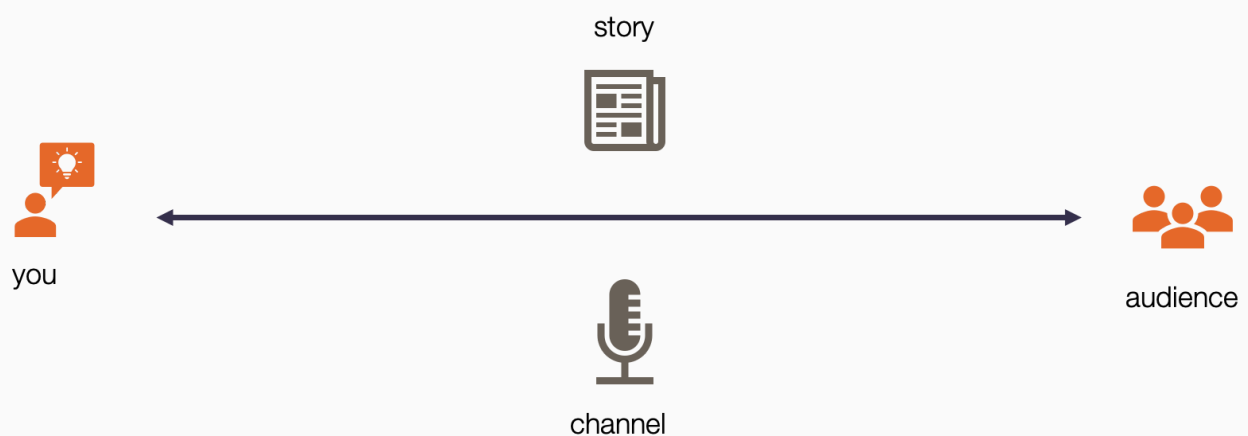
Extraordinary times require extraordinary communications. Leaders face a particular responsibility to their people at this moment: guidance. In times of uncertainty, during major change or shifting situations, a leader's primary objective is to inspire cohesion by providing a sense of purpose.

THE ELEMENTS

Communication has four basic elements:

- **the communicator** (you)
- **the recipient** of the information (your audience)
- **the content** (the story) or information
- **the channel**, or method, you use to reach your audience

Each of these, and how they work together, requires consideration.



The elements that are part of all communication efforts.

THE PEOPLE

YOU

Aristotle emphasized the importance of the character of the speaker in persuasion. At this time your character is on full display. This means your vulnerability and authenticity.

In her book "Dare to Lead," author Brené Brown reminds us that "The courage to be vulnerable is not about winning or losing, it's about the courage to show up when you can't predict or control the outcome."

We are often asked about body language and voice. These are important in terms of how you are perceived. However, no amount of physical choreography can replace authenticity. If your words communicate one message, but you are fidgety and restless, or your voice is flat, this "cognitive dissonance" will be what your audience remembers. Your words, voice, facial expressions, and body language are all part of your message.

FIVE RULES FOR SPEAKING

GENEROSITY

GRATITUDE

CONNECTION

SERVICE

HUMOR

BRENÉ BROWN

YOUR AUDIENCE

Understanding the condition of the people with whom you communicate is a critical factor in your ability to connect with them. This is when a leader's emotional intelligence and empathy are on full display.

As you prepare what you will share with your audience, frame it with gratitude, generosity and a sense of service to both your teams and customers.

A word on humor. Few people find the current situation funny. Be cautious. That said, lightness, appropriately expressed, can go a long way toward relieving stress for everyone.

THE NARRATIVE

STORIES STILL MATTER

The story you tell at this moment, and throughout a transition, will have an important long-term impact on the people you rely on. Your role as a leader will help them create their own narrative about this time, and also about *you*.

VALUES-BASED MESSAGES

Your values are your compass for decisions ahead, and they provide a basis for explaining how decisions are made. Any message should be held under this lens.

CONNECT THE DOTS

Explain what is happening and how the organization is addressing or will handle it. Connect the steps ahead and the collective action needed to achieve anticipated results. Cause-and-effect explanations can help people connect the dots between the what and the why.

ACKNOWLEDGE AND RECOGNIZE

Remember to highlight what individuals or teams are doing to help solve issues. Research suggests that people are more likely to engage positively when they feel part of shared action and purpose. If they see others "stepping up," they are more likely to do so themselves.

EMPHASIZE CONNECTION

Emphasize how your teams are interconnected and dependent on each other. Minimize boundaries and differences. This helps create a sense of shared purpose.

ADMIT WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW

Don't make the mistake of thinking you have to have all the answers. This leads to anxiety over any question-and-answer session, or the temptation to guess or predict. If you don't know, admit it. Then suggest how you might approach getting an answer.

FOR MORE
INFORMATION OR
HELP IN CRAFTING
AND DELIVERING
YOUR NARRATIVE,
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