

### **“Using Communications to Lead” by John Baldoni**

When Mother Teresa gave her acceptance speech for the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize she commented that when people asked her if there was a heaven she replied that she certainly hoped so, especially since she had to spend so much time generating publicity for her missions. While there is levity in her words, Mother Teresa was giving credence to a fundamental truth about leadership. If you want to get something done, you better tell somebody. And Mother did! She built her missions first in India and later around the world in order to take care of, as she put it, “the poorest of the poor.” But Mother knew, as does everyone in social service that if you want to reach the poor, you need to tap the richest of the rich – or at least those better off than the indigent. So Mother took to giving interviews with the media and opened her missions to film and television journalists. Only by raising awareness would she be able to get her message out that her people needed help and that donations in dollars or in personal service were welcome.

#### **Purpose of leadership communications**

The way leaders communicate says a great deal about the way they lead. If they give directions that are clear and direct, chances are their people will understand what they are supposed to do. At the same time, if they are patient and take time to listen, people will feel more involved and take a greater sense of pride in their work. Why? Because they will feel their contributions matter and they have a stake in the enterprise.

There are many types of leadership communications. Each of them emerges from a leadership action that is communicated from the point of view of the leader – i.e., doing what is beneficial for the organization and the people in it. They are designed to engage the listener, gain commitment, and ultimately create a bond of trust between leader and follower. They also do something more: drive results, enabling leader and follower to work together more efficiently because they understand the issues and know what is to be done to accomplish their goals. Specifically, leadership messages do one or more of the following:

- *Affirm organizational vision and mission.* Lets people know where the organization is headed and what it stands for. General George C. Marshall lived and breathed the core values of the U.S. Army. His penchant for preparation prepared the nation for fighting the conflict it did not want to fight – World War Two. By giving detailed briefings to Congress, developing a cadre of superior officers, revamping military training, and supporting President Franklin Roosevelt, Marshall mobilized the armed forces to go overseas and defeat the tyrannous powers of the Axis. And later as Secretary of Defense, he helped Europe recover economically, socially and politically through a comprehensive aid program that eventually bore his name, the Marshall Plan.
- *Drive transformational initiatives, e.g. change!* Gets people prepared to do things differently and gives the reasons why. Rich Teerlink, former CEO of Harley-Davidson, spent much of his years at the helm enkindling a passion for the company among dealers, owners, and employees. Part of this passion was rooted in the need to transform Harley from an old-line manufacturer into a modern enterprise where employees shared in the voice and vision.

- *Issue a call to action.* Galvanize people to rally behind an initiative. It tells people what to do and how to do it. Rudy Giuliani, as mayor of New York City, inherited a city whose citizenry accepted as fact that high crime, social service failures, and city hall ineptitude were part of the social contract. Through a combination of daily meetings with city agencies, public proclamations, and holding people accountable, Giuliani reduced crime, reinvigorated social agencies, and raised citizen expectations for public servant performance. Giuliani also prepared himself and his government for prompt response to the horrible events of September 11 in which New York City served as a proud example of civic and individual and collective heroism, stoicism, and eventual healing.
- *Reinforce organizational capability.* Underscores the company’s strengths and is designed to make people feel good about the organization for whom they work. Katharine Graham, publisher of the *Washington Post*, relied upon the people in her organization to build a world-class news organization. Her public comments in the face of the publication of the Pentagon Papers, the Watergate investigations, and nasty labor struggles at the paper, demonstrated her undying commitment to the paper.
- *Create an environment where motivation can occur.* Provides reasons why things are done and creates a path of success for people to follow. It also describes the benefits of success, e.g. a more competitive organization, more opportunities for promotion, increased compensation. Joe Torre, manager of the New York Yankees and winner of four World Series in his tenure, believes that everyone on the team has a role to play. His quiet demeanor, coupled with supportive words and actions, creates an environment where players feel they can achieve and strive to do so.
- *Promote a product or service (and affirm its link to the organization’s vision, mission and values).* Places what the organization produces within the mission, culture and values of the organization; e.g. we create products to improve people’s lives. Shelly Lazarus, as CEO a leading advertising agency, makes her living using communications to promote the virtues of internationally known brands like IBM and Ford Motor Company. She applies the same commitment to promoting her agency’s (Ogilvy & Mather) brand as a place where exceptionally talented people can succeed.

### **Building trust**

Communications can be a leader’s greatest asset in achieving organizational goals. Effective leadership communications enable the leader the opportunity to set the course and because by nature communications are two-way, enable followers to communicate their ideas and in the process enable leader and followers to get the results that benefit individuals and organizations. It is a lesson that leaders from the beginning of time have learned and put into practice on a daily basis.

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John Baldoni is a leadership communications consultant who works with Fortune 500 companies as well as non-profits including the University of Michigan. He is the author of 4 books on leadership, the newest being *Great Communication Secrets of Great Leaders* (McGraw-Hill 2003), upon which this article was based. His website is [www.johnbaldoni.com](http://www.johnbaldoni.com).

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