



WARNING: Focus on Crisis Communications

Rhoda Weiss, APR, Fellow PRSA and the national chair and CEO of the Public Relations Society of America, reports that organizations are on alert with respect to possible improvements in their crisis plans. Of particular importance is how to address and integrate new media to advise stakeholders of crises or emerging situations in progress.

According to Weiss, key strategic communication elements that all managements should bear in mind include the following:

New media and communication technologies. These are widely embraced by populations of all ages, said Weiss, and therefore they represent a highly effective means for first alerts. "It is now a growing public expectation for all organizations to utilize these technologies in crisis plans and to build technology and database infrastructure to utilize these means quickly and effectively."

The importance of a communication plan. Weiss observed that operational crisis contingency plans (i.e., safety/security measures, evacuation routes, access to supplies and infrastructure) aren't enough.

Organizations need communications plans (including information provision and relationship management directed to both external and internal stakeholder groups as well as media).

The Lost Discipline: Are You Leaving Big Money on the Table Every Day?

BY JAYNIE SMITH

Most companies suffer from loss of a critical discipline. They no longer concern themselves with competitive advantage and its impact on their bottom line.

I have asked over 2,500 CEOs what their number one competitive advantage is. The results have been astounding. Only a handful—about five—could state accurately their company's differentiator.

Reviewing the replies, here is what I have found:

Many organizations don't have a competitive advantage. There are thousands of companies that have painted themselves into a commodity corner by not having a competitive advantage. They, therefore, allow price to be the "deadly" tie breaker. It is deadly because these companies will often be racing their competition to the bottom of the margin ladder.

Companies too often mistake "strengths" for competitive advantages. When executives are asked what differentiates their company from others, usually they offer one of ten responses like: good quality, reputation, knowledgeable employees, responsiveness, great customer service, flexible, innovative, and trust.

These are just needed to be in business, a company's ticket to play. They only put a company at parity with its competition.

Organizations don't use metrics to support their competitive advantages.



You can often turn the above subjective claims into meaningful competitive advantages with use of some metrics based on competitive analysis. For example, instead of saying "We

are very responsive to our customers' needs," you might state, "We respond to all calls within 30 minutes and will have a technician at your location within three hours, four times faster than our nearest competitor."

Companies don't consistently communicate their competitive advantage. Asked their company's competitive advantage, a group of 25 executives from the same organization will identify 25 different advantages. What does this suggest?

Internal and external communication is seriously lacking. If you don't internally agree on your competitive advantages, how can the marketplace know what it is and what your organization is known for?

Companies don't have an internal process for ongoing evaluation of their competitive advantages. In these fast moving, information-intense times we live in, companies must consider having a Chief Competitive Advantage Officer to ensure ongoing evaluation of customers' needs and wants as well as what the competition is offering.

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Creating a Culture That Drives Innovation

BY TED SANTOS AND DEBORAH BROWN

Innovation is a practice that can be divided into parts and learned.

As a first step, your organization has to create an innovative culture.

Signs That Your Company Is Lacking an Innovative Culture

A problem is evident by the following:

■ Your CEO spends more than 10% of his or her time solving problems. Top leadership needs to challenge the CEO to bring such challenges to them.

■ Your company is content with the status quo. Without risk, innovation becomes happenstance.

■ Your company's top line is growing while your bottom line is shrinking. Your products or services have become a commodity. There is nothing to differentiate you from your competitors.

■ Employees are afraid of failure. But learning and innovative culture embraces failure; a project that fails can still be valuable to a company's larger goals.

How to Create an Innovative Culture

Creating an innovative culture incorpo-

rates three very important steps:

1. Lay out the problem clearly, with a definite objective.

2. Make sure people have the tools they need to solve the problem you or your CEO needs to see addressed.

3. Get out of the employees' way as they solve it. Empower them to innovate.



When people are empowered to be innovative, their commitment increases. When people are allowed to take on problems themselves, cost efficiencies, new products, and new services are created.

Strategically Position Your Company

Once you have created a truly innovative culture, it's important that you, as a leader, facilitate a communication structure and strategically position your company as an innovator in the marketplace. After all, if your company is highly innovative,

but prospects and customers don't know it, do your innovations exist?

It's critical that companies understand how to position or reposition themselves in their industry. This involves developing a position statement that clearly differentiates an organization from competitors, underscores its strengths, and explains how its products/services provide a solution to a customer problem.

Employees need to be aware of that position statement, for it keeps them focused on a common goal.

Risk and Reward

You can't have reward without risk. And nothing holds greater risk—and reward—as creating problems in order to create new products and markets and become a recognized leader in your field.

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Words of Wisdom for Executives

Successful leaders will tell you that talent isn't enough. John Maxwell, internationally recognized leadership expert, has identified 13 qualities of a successful leader—a talent-plus person.

In his book *Talent Is Never Enough* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), Maxwell notes that talented people leverage their talent with the following:

1. **Belief in themselves.** Lack of confidence in one's self can be a self-imposed limitation, according to Maxwell.

2. **Passion makes things happen.** Passion enables someone with talent to make things happen.

3. **Initiative makes use of the talent.** As Maxwell writes in his book, "talent-plus people don't wait for everything to be perfect to move forward."

4. **Focus to direct talent.** Maxwell

makes this comment: "Having talent without focus is like being an octopus on roller skates."

5. **Preparation positions talent.** Without preparation, not only won't things happen that you want to happen, but things you don't want to happen may happen.

6. **Practice, practice, practice.** Practice sharpens the talent and increases the likelihood of it being successfully used.

7. **Perseverance sustains talent.** In other words, writes Maxwell, top leaders have staying power, taking an idea through implementation.

8. **Courage tests leaders.** A talent-plus person accepts the fact of failure and moves forward with an idea regardless.

9. **Teachability extends talent.** It

may be hard to believe but not everyone recognizes the worth to their career of further development. But, as Maxwell writes, "When leaders stop learning, they stop leading."

10. **Character makes a difference.** "Talented people are often a gift to the world. Character protects that gift," according to Maxwell.

11. **Relationships add value.** Think about your own relationships. How have they influenced your career?

12. **Responsibility maximizes opportunity.** As Maxwell suggests, it is a matter of self-discipline. Without it, you won't have follow-through.

13. **Teamwork multiplies your talent.** When you partner with others, you close gaps in your capabilities and maximize your results.

Renaissance Leadership—Explorers for Future Success in Business

BY JIM JENKINS

Today's leaders must possess a powerful set of skills to survive the rapidly changing global marketplace. To succeed, you must have a rigorous command of your analytical and strategic mind while also properly leveraging your intuition and interpersonal skills.

Thus, to excel in business, you must become a Renaissance Leader.

Introducing the Renaissance Leader

The term Renaissance means rebirth, re-awakening, or revival. It describes a period between the 14th and 16th centuries where there was a wide-ranging cultural rebirth in Europe. While most of us think of the Renaissance in terms of the flowering of the arts, it is also known for innovations in science, banking, and technology. Figures like Galileo and Copernicus overthrew old dogmas, and explorers such as Cartier, Columbus, and Drake discovered distant new territories. Boundaries between fields became irrelevant, and innovators like da Vinci and Michelangelo made daily use of multiple intelligences.

Today, our changing world also demands explorers who question accepted truths, develop a wide range of skills, and bring into reality what had seemed to be impossible. Today's Renaissance Leaders use both their analytical faculties and their intuition. They are as comfortable and skilled at developing relationships as they are at crunching numbers. They understand how to balance their head with their heart.

To navigate the seas of change, you must cultivate the whole mind and stay alert with all of your abilities. At times the waters may seem calm, but hidden obstacles like icebergs or sandbars can cause a wreck if you don't watch for them, and storms or strong currents can pull you off course. You'll drop an anchor from time to time to explore new lands and assess what's needed in the next leg of the journey.

As a Renaissance leader, your own career and your company's success are not destination points because you must always be charting a new course toward fresh horizons. Remaining in one place means you end up nowhere.

The qualities for a Renaissance Leader include:

Strategic and Intuitive Thinkers

Renaissance Leaders are adept at creating a shared vision across all areas of their organization. They view change as a developmental process that requires understanding where they want to take not just their company but also their people, creating a holistic model for



future success. Renaissance Leaders also take the process of strategy development a step further than usual and consider the ramifications of national and international developments in their thinking process, as today's world is truly a global marketplace.

Vital Communicators

A Renaissance Leader recognizes the value of communication and can create dialogue throughout the organization at all levels. Renaissance Leaders constantly work on their ability to manage their relationships with employees and customers and strive to become skilled conversationalists, great listeners, and adept storytellers who approach situations with an openness that allows others to influence them.

Talent Developers and Attractors

Renaissance Leaders value diversity in their organizations and recognize that people offer a wide range of competencies and skills. They approach succession planning as a continual process and pro-

actively look for the next generation of leaders among their ranks.

Renaissance Leaders also place a high value on both education and coaching, and look at employee development as a vital responsibility.

Innovation Enablers

Renaissance Leaders are never satisfied with doing things as they've done them in the past. Instead, they encourage creativity and innovation at all times and at all levels.

Renaissance Leaders embrace change and allow themselves to take risks, using every situation as an opportunity for professional and organizational growth.

As more and more new technologies arrive in today's marketplace, Renaissance Leaders look especially for those that allow for improved communications.

Ethical and Grounded Implementers

Renaissance Leaders are concerned with ethics and engage their companies with the utmost of reverence for diversity, inclusion, and integrity.

Renaissance Leaders also remain grounded and engage in some form of personal reflection as part of their daily regimen.

Global Entrepreneurs

Renaissance Leaders realize the economy is the major engine for creating change throughout the world and devote their energies to improving the world around them.

In conclusion, developing the skills and abilities described here is actually a journey where you continually devote time to your own self-development while you chart a course for future success in your organization.

Jim Jenkins is founder and president of Creative Visions Consulting, a change management consulting firm that supports CEOs, mid-level managers, and front-line supervisors in developing their leadership potential. Jenkins is also the creator of Innovative Play, a training program and team building process that makes use of improvisational techniques to foster leadership skills and team building dynamics. For more information, visit www.cvc-inc.com



Here's what you'll find on the
AMA Members-only Website www.amamember.org

HR/TRAINING

Hire or Train: The Growing Conundrum. Historically, there have been two primary choices when it comes to talent: make or buy. The right choice depends on an organization's industry and culture. Either way, businesses need to start planning today to deal with the predicted talent shortages of tomorrow.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Anger Management 101. Is on-the-job stress making you feel angry and unable to cope? Help is on the way. These tips from a clinical psychologist will help you determine your anger level and then show you how to overcome the stress triggers that are at the root of the problem.

MANAGEMENT

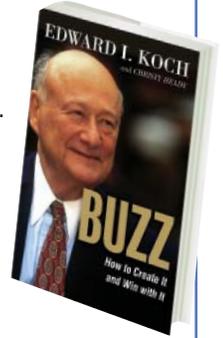
Why Middle Management May Hinder Diversity Initiatives. Because middle managers focus on long-term strategy and maintenance of the status quo, they are often at direct odds with diversity practitioners, says a new report from The Conference Board. Here are strategies to obtain middle management buy-in.

LEADERSHIP

Looking Toward Tomorrow: The Succession Planning Imperative. While many CEOs understandably flinch at the thought of ceding their power to someone else, enlightened executives understand that succession planning needs to be incorporated into every director's DNA.

Book of the Month:

Buzz: How to Create It and Win with It by Ed Koch, with Christy Heady. Legendary former New York City Mayor Ed Koch rose up from relative obscurity to reign over the Big Apple for 12 years, transforming the City and himself. In *Buzz*, he reveals how anyone can become a master of self-marketing.



For more information about this book and AMACOM's extensive catalog of business titles, visit www.amanet.org/books

AMA Conferences/Special Events Calendar

JULY 11, FREE WEBCAST • Wake-Up Call: Aggressively Develop Your Talents or Disappear. It's already the middle of 2007 and you've been scrambling just to get your job done. Whatever happened to those New Year's Resolutions and development goals about becoming better at some role, skill, or competency? Spend one hour with a world-class, talent development coach for ideas on jump-starting your personal action plan.

JULY 25, FREE WEBCAST • 8 Secrets to Building Win-Win Alliances and Partnerships. This Webcast will focus on crucial elements that anyone entering into or managing a strategic alliance should know. Case studies will be presented illustrating "best and worst" practices.

AUGUST 1, FREE WEBCAST • Handling Problem Employees: Avoiding Lawsuits and Investigation Disasters. Managers are often called upon to investigate allegations of employee misconduct. An investigation can lead to a lawsuit if the investigative procedures or results are mishandled. This Webcast will explain the steps required to conduct a proper investigation of a problem employee to assure that the investigation is both fair and has the appearance of fairness.

OCTOBER 3, FREE WEBCAST • Discover How to Spot Winning Acquisition Targets! In this exciting Webcast, participants will learn how to spot the ideal corporate merger or buy-out that can drive profits and help meet growth goals. Targeting the right acquisitions should be a vital, ongoing component

of every company's growth strategy: the right tactics (and their well-timed execution) can be the best way to grow quickly and efficiently. This fast-paced webcast will show you what to look for—and what to avoid—when hunting for the "perfect" acquisition.

OCTOBER 10-11, NEW YORK, NY • World Business Forum. The World Business Forum combines a learning experience with outstanding opportunities for networking with top executives, thinkers and business decision makers from all sectors of industry. This year's gathering includes presentations by Alan Greenspan, Jack Welch, Herb Kelleher, Carl Icahn, Patricia A. Woertz, Michael Eisner, Rudy Giuliani, Scott McNealy and Al Gore, among others. Special discounts are available for AMA members.

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