

January/February/March 2002

TO: Executive Addressed
FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR, Fellow PRSA
RE: Getting the Boss to Listen

An all too common refrain from our profession is that bosses don't listen. When I ask senior execs why they will do something on the advice of an outside consultant but ignore the same advice repeatedly given by someone in-house, their response often is, "My communications people don't have a management perspective." Like it or not, this is a very valuable insight for practitioners who wish to be management counselors, coaches, and strategists.

The price of credible admission to "the inner circle" is a management perspective that drives your attitudes, actions, and advice. Developing a management perspective means essentially four things:

1. Putting yourself in the manager's shoes operationally and non-operationally.
2. Asking different kinds of questions before those you normally raise.
3. Providing sound managerial reasons for communicating or not communicating.
4. Avoiding many of the usual pro-press arguments that have no credibility with management, make little sense from an operating perspective, and are virtually irrelevant anyway.

Putting yourself in managers' shoes means evaluating and assessing crises in a business context first. Approach problems from a management point of view. Use the SWOOT technique. Evaluate: Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Options, and Threats. Develop options for addressing the situation that take into account the factors that most concern managers.

Reporter and media attitudes rarely dominate management problems initially. Ask managerially relevant questions, first:

- How does the current situation affect strategy?
- Are management mistakes changing the strategy they've laid out?
- Can we gain employee commitment to the changing circumstances that are causing the problem we're now facing?
- What strategies are available to us to keep shareholder interest aligned with our goals?
- Can management make the tough decisions and act quickly enough to turn a problem situation into an opportunity, or at least into a mitigatable circumstance?
- What resources can management allocate to deal with the issue at hand or to resolve matters in ways that move us more towards our strategy?
- What have peer companies, in similar circumstances, done?
- How will the present circumstance affect our ability to research and develop new products, services, and ideas?

- Is this a situation that requires adaptation or dramatic shifts and changes?
- What non-financial factors are of greatest concern? What about the direct financial factors?
- Will customer satisfaction be adversely affected?
- What are the compliance implications of the current situation and what remediative steps will be necessary?

Talk of risk/threat reduction and prevention needs to be quantified in terms of future damage control, or limitation of current collateral damage. Make it measurable, and you'll get more attention. Avoid the usual approaches:

- Trying to explain how the media work or reporters' top concerns.
- Explaining why we have to give reporters something special or more than we share with our own employees.
- Trying to write the news release in the first 10 minutes of your encounter with the senior management team.

Strive to tell executives something they don't already know. Once you're able to consistently provide a management perspective to communication, management meetings of any consequence in your organization will wait until you arrive.

Copyright © 2002, James E. Lukaszewski. All rights reserved.

The Lukaszewski Group Inc. ■ Ten Bank Street, Suite 530, White Plains, NY 10606-1952
Telephone 914.681.0000 ■ Facsimile: 914.681.0047 ■ tlg@e911.com ■ www.e911.com