

April/May/June 1991

**TO: Executive Addressed**

**FR: James E. Lukaszewski, APR Chairman**

**RE: The Realities and Lessons of Labor Communications**

The confrontational character of present day American labor negotiations often creates a negative perception that management's postures and attitudes prolong negotiations, damage the healing process, and continue the separation between management and worker. To counter this perception, management is communicating more during negotiations. Here are some common sense guidelines to keep in mind during negotiation communications:

1. Disciplined, focused, responsive communications:
  - Keep the focus on getting a contract
  - Keep negotiations out of the ditch
  - Reduce wild goose chases
  - Control visceral response to emotional language
2. Responsive communications recognize the emotional nature of labor communication and respond to it effectively. It means understanding the vocabulary of the labor conversation. Key words in that vocabulary are: security, freedom, dignity, fear, equality, justice, self esteem, liberty, employee rights.
3. Only sticks and stones really break bones . . . words shouldn't, but often do.
4. Even the most benevolent management often shoots the messenger . . . communicators need to wear bulletproof underwear.
5. We assume they know how weak our resolve is.
6. They assume we are as committed to winning as they are . . . our ineptness is a surprise.
7. Neither the public, the media, nor government can force a settlement . . . only employee opinion and willingness will.

One of the great lessons in labor negotiation communications is that if you talk about war, act like you're going to war, and then get ready for war . . . there will be war. There are more important internal messages than war. Don't get sucked into war . . . wage peace.

- Confrontation can't be eliminated but it can be modified, controlled, and mitigated.
- Negotiation face-to-face by a handful of people is the only way a contract will be ultimately achieved: reporters, editors, politicians, and activists don't sign labor contracts.
- Healing must begin from the moment the contract confrontation and adversarial environments begin to develop.

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