

OVERCOMING DESTRUCTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR

When we analyze those things that cause management programs to implode, explode, derail, self-destruct, slide into the ditch, or fall significantly short of expectations, we find identifiable negative communication behaviors and activities that precede or predict disaster and cause negative collateral damage. Many of these negative behaviors are identified below. If any of the destructive behaviors, attitudes, and approaches on this list are a routine part of your management's communication behaviors, many past failures can be better identified and future failures forecast.

One useful way to bring unhelpful behaviors and attitudes to management's attention is to label the behaviors, describe them, and then distribute these descriptions widely so that others can recognize, point out, and discourage these negative behaviors as they occur. But there are some important caveats to overcoming management's destructive communication behaviors. Keep these five precautions in mind:

1. ***Remember who's driving the bus:*** It is, after all, management's prerogative to move the organization in the direction it wishes, with the tools and methodologies it chooses.
2. ***Staff functions have limitations:*** Public relations, law, finance, human resources, and other support services are staff functions. Quite often, there are severe limitations on just how much behavior change a staff function can actually foster. After all, the staff's function is to help those who run the organization run it better rather than to substitute their own operational judgments.
3. ***Change the changeable, do the doable, know the knowable:*** There are many times when even an interesting list, like the one below, won't really be all that much help. Be prepared to move incrementally and as directly as possible. Work with the most problem-plagued executives, but first coach and train those around them. Manage the issue up.
4. ***Understand the limitations of leadership:*** The CEO's position is often the loneliest one in the organization. When it comes to serious managerial and leadership problems, the CEO may have only one or two people to talk to, and sometimes no one. Most very senior people operate at an altitude where the air is extremely rarified and politicized, and the politics are titanic. There may be little opportunity or incentive to change. Sometimes senior executives tend to measure each other by the kinds of negative behaviors you are about to explore.



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James E. Lukaszewski (loo-ka-SHEV-skee) advises, coaches, and counsels the men and women who run very large corporations and organizations. He is an expert in managing and counteracting tough, touchy, sensitive corporate communications issues. The fastest growing portion of his practice involves civil and criminal litigation. He is one of the few who can and truly does coach CEOs.

He is a prolific author (several books, hundreds of articles), lecturer (corporate, college and university), coach, and counselor. He is quoted in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Miami Herald*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and industry trade journals. He is a columnist, advisor, or editor for almost every major public relations periodical. His 1992 book, *Influencing Public Attitudes: Strategies that Reduce the Media's Power*, remains a classic work in the field of direct communication. He is an internationally recognized speaker on crisis management, ethics, media relations, public affairs, and reputation preservation and restoration. Visiting his Web site, www.e911.com, is like attending the University of Crisis Management.

An accredited member of the International Association of Business Communicators (ABC) and the Public Relations Society of America (APR), Mr. Lukaszewski is a member of the PRSA's College of Fellows (Fellow PRSA) and Board of Ethics & Professional Standards. He served as a crisis communications advisor to the International Disaster Advisory Committee, Agency for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance from 1989 to 1992, and is a civilian advisor to several other federal agencies. He lectures annually at the U.S. Marine Corp's East Coast Commander's Media Training Symposium and was the second recipient of its Drew Middleton Award. He is the recipient of both Ball State University's 2004 National Public Relations Achievement Award and the 2004 Patrick Jackson Award for Distinguished Service to PRSA, and is among the winners of the 2005 *PR News* Lifetime Achievement Award. His name appeared in *Corporate Legal Times* as one of "28 Experts to Call When All Hell Breaks Loose," and in *PR Week* as one of 22 "crunch-time counselors who should be on the speed dial in a crisis."