

TRANSFORMATIONAL COMMUNICATION: WORKING THROUGH PERSISTENT BAD NEWS

Crises in most organizations are few and very far between. Among the most difficult communications problems facing management, and the communicators who advise them, are long-term, often transformational situations. This is where many players and audiences, with a wide variety of issues, questions, and problems, need change to occur both from the inside out and forcibly from the outside in, over extended periods of time.

Deregulation of large companies, like mergers and acquisitions, present interesting communication problems and are management behavior laboratories because so much of what occurs is understandable, predictable, manageable, but often ignored or minimized.

When the news is constantly negative and problems persist, the need for management action must be recognized first, so that remedial, competitive, or pre-emptive strategies can develop. Then, communication becomes the mechanism for signaling change, explaining change, teaching change, recognizing barriers to change, acknowledging when change occurs, and explaining the new organization to those directly and indirectly affected.

The analysis in this newsletter is designed to help illustrate the longer-term patterns to be expected and strategies required to overcome problems, friction, resistance, and especially management timidity and hesitation.

When change is occurring, resistance develops. One of my favorite concepts comes from Price Pritchett, the organizational and cultural development guru from Dallas, Texas. When it comes to resistance, he reminds all of us of the 20-30-50 Rule: 20 percent of your employee base and managers are change friendly; 50 percent of your employees and managers are sitting on the fence waiting to see which way the debate, structure, and management survivors go; and 30 percent are active resisters trying to stop what's happening to bring back or stay locked in the past.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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."