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# *Executive Action*

*Urgent Information for Executive Decision making*

FILE: Community Relations & Grass Roots Campaigns

TO: Executive Addressed

FR: James E. Lukaszewski, ABC, Fellow IABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, BEPS Emeritus  
President

RE: The Lexicon of Control . . . Helping Communities Control Their Own Destiny, Providing Higher Likelihood That You Will Gain Permission, in Some Form, for What You Propose to Accomplish

The *Lexicon of Control* is a set of powerful communication and behavior intentions that very publicly commit an organization to broadly known public expectations that everyone can monitor and that are self-disclosed. The approach helps calm public concerns, answer the public's questions, reduce the power of critics and opponents, and put in place a variety of watchdog functions, all designed to keep organizations within the parameters the community expects and, through prompt disclosure, to reduce surprise and collateral damage when permits, rules, or regulations are violated or ignored.

This approach can also reduce the need for establishing local political support and advocacy groups. If the advocacy group approach is taken, such groups can gain additional credibility using the *Lexicon of Control* while you are controlling their script, power, influence, and personal agendas. Remember, when such groups are established, these groups may have other expectations about the power you confer on them and their individual members.

Public Officials will be more comfortable because you have taken responsibility for all the tough stuff. Critics will have a harder time gaining traction. Those most directly affected locally will have a better sense of control, because they will have better control; and you'll have to be more a supplicant than an economic miracle worker, which few if any believe will be true anyway.

## **Optimism Management**

Too often, companies and organizations with agendas and project proposals come into a community with such optimism and confidence in the worthiness of what they have in mind, that they are surprised by the immediate, often vicious resistance they experience. On the surface, the new idea, professionally presented, seems helpful, useful, and perhaps even crucial. Private meetings with public officials and community leaders are deceptively optimistic. Count on resistance, reluctance and, sometimes, confrontational or contentious public reaction. Rather than building confidence, the proposer's enthusiastic presentation, which often reveals prior briefing or apparent collusion of public officials, raises flags of concern, fears, doubts, and even resentment. This is because these presentations, which may please the bosses in charge or a sponsoring organization, tend to frighten the audiences by the appearance that

everything is set to go, already decided . . . meaning the community sees itself more as a victim than a beneficiary of what is being “proposed.”

### **Communicate Publicly From the Beginning**

An effective and realistic three-part strategy for managing expectations, as well as reducing contention and concern, is to first adequately and continuously emphasize outside controls over the program early; restrict and monitor the proposing organization’s ideas, concepts, or operations even as ideas are initially evaluated and explored by the community. This approach is even more critical than over-touting supposed benefits to the host community. Benefits talk should never exceed 15 percent of any presentation, explanation, or proposal. Second, answer all questions about concerns, fears, and rumors, especially those that come from critics as well as from the news media. The beneficial talk of project proposers often generates more questions than there are answers. Be ready with as many answers for as many questions as possible, from the start.

Third, begin publicly briefing the whole community as promptly as possible, coincidentally with public officials and community leaders. Publics are increasingly sensitive about, and will punish, public officials who appear to collude with powerful interests before the community is aware of what is going on.

### **Prepare for Resistance**

Community resistance to most outside proposals today is virtually automatic. Therefore, being the first to emphasize restrictions and acknowledge negatives becomes essential to building community trust and slowing the opposition down while reducing the explosiveness of any issues.

Nationally, many industries are now encouraging the development and placement of government and independent overseers, as well as the imposition of controls or laws that allow the public to feel more in control and comfortable. Examples include the toy industry seeking safety legislation in 2008; the fresh food industry suggesting increased regulation; Food and Drug regulations that can speed up approvals; and rigorous and often voluntary ethics and oversight programs U.S. military contractors are imposing on themselves, just to name a few.

### **Build Trust**

In changing times trust is especially fragile. When a trust relationship with others is damaged or becomes suspect, and you must find ways to reestablish or rehabilitate the relationship, I often recommend using a *Lexicon of Control* and taking actions to make the lexicon dominate discussions. The concept is about acknowledgement and, sometimes, empowering others to look over your shoulder, control your actions, or be responsible for monitoring what it is you will be doing. This new behavior and language is powerful, obvious in its intent, and reassuring and clarifying to those who are concerned. about you, your company, products, or circumstances. Here are the key ingredients of the *Lexicon of Control*:

1. **Certification:** A formal procedure and process analysis established, conducted, and constantly monitored by publicly trustworthy independent parties. Examples exist in many industries—forestry, petroleum, clothing and toy manufacturing, especially in locations outside the United States where regulatory frameworks have yet to be effectively developed. Certification is usually dominated by critics and those often associated with the opposition. This is one of the reasons this approach has such extraordinary credibility, once established. It is expensive, onerous, and grindy, and the source of some friction and ongoing irritation. But the off-setting benefit is an environment of trust, speedy identification and correction of errors, problems, mistakes; and a muting and silencing of most other outside criticism and opposition.
2. **Controls:** Procedures and requirements, put in place and publically scrutinized, that force proposers and implementers to tow the mark in measureable or observable constrained ways.
3. **Independent Monitoring:** Increasingly frequent use of outside groups or organizations, sometimes law firms, to independently oversee what is going on and report the results of their observations.
4. **Laws:** Often a very powerful tool for putting in place, with penalties, control, oversight, and regulatory structures.

5. **Licenses:** Government notice of and formal restrictions of operations upon an organization and its processes that generally triggers many of the oversight and monitoring activities.
6. **Monitoring:** Both in terms of “looking over your shoulder” and, increasingly, developing dashboards on Web sites so people can, 24/7, constantly read out the data, processes, and outcomes being monitored.
7. **Oversight:** Using some independent individual or organization, which has ongoing and sometimes day-to-day responsibility, to look over your shoulder and report back to a wide variety of audiences and constituents on what is being observed. Reports and funded independently.
8. **Permits:** Generally, specific activity and authority limits—building permits, excavation permits, emission permits, vibration, air and discharge permits; instruments that limit more than they allow.
9. **Regulatory Structure:** Helping a public authority develop a framework of regulation and authorization, and oversight, where few, weak, or no structures currently exist.
10. **Regulations:** Procedures and processes imposed after permission to operate is given. There may be, as in the utility industry, full-time, permanent regulators who will require and review observance, compliance, and execution of rules and regulations.
11. **Requirements:** Demands made by independent authorities or organizations that must be met as a condition of operation.
12. **Restrictions:** These are definitive limits applied on operations, opportunities, and perhaps even products and services manufactured or delivered over and above what happens in permits, licenses, and regulatory activities.
13. **Rules:** Hard and fast guidelines, or bright lines, that help the public or those being protected readily understand the limits of your power, authority, and span and reach. Violations can be reported and may incur penalties.
14. **Variances:** Related mostly to zoning or existing rules and structures. At first glance, variances may seem like weak control mechanisms or perhaps clever exceptions to existing zoning. Because they raise red flags, they are extraordinarily difficult to accomplish, often require public meetings and hearings, and can prove contentious. Variances usually add more layers of regulation, control, restrictions, and requirements than they eliminate, modify, or alter. Always stress the additional controls and restrictions that variances tend to require.

If you'd like more information or equally interesting views, ideas, and concepts, contact the author's website at [www.e911.com](http://www.e911.com).