

Bianchi PeRpectives

Special Issue: "Dealing with the Downturn"

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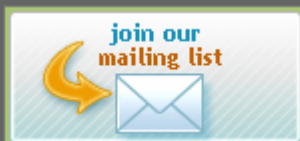
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WORD NERD

nay*slayer - one who shoots down negative thoughts, provides an optimistic outlook or finds a way to resolve problems and reach agreement. Arch nemesis of the naysayer.



It seems almost every business news story you see today uses the word "crisis" when depicting the current scenario. And a crisis it may be ... perhaps primarily a crisis of confidence. Or better yet, a crisis caused by the lack of confidence.

I'm told the Chinese ideogram for the word "crisis" is made up of two characters, one for the word "danger" and the other for the word "opportunity." In a crisis like this, we all see the danger of the situation, but how many of us actually open ourselves up to recognize the opportunity?

As individuals and companies, we can't control the economy. We can only control how we respond to it. We can choose to panic, to make choices driven by fear or to sit paralyzed with indecision. Or we can choose to keep plugging away, to keep focused positively on the big picture and to take advantage of the opportunities that can be found out there, if we only look for them. Either way, the choice is left for each of us.

There's no doubt the economy is in turmoil. There's also no doubt that we'll eventually get through this crisis. It won't be easy. It probably won't be pretty. But eventually the crisis will pass. And when it does, some companies will be better positioned for success, because they refused to let fear alone drive their choices. They decided to stay focused on the long-term objective and seized the opportunities that others failed to recognize. They pro-actively worked toward a vision, rather than reactively conceding to a situation.

It's easy to follow the path of panic. But if you choose the path less taken - the road to opportunity - eventually, as poet Robert Frost said, it will have made all the difference.

Together, let's look for opportunities to make a difference in the days ahead!

Best wishes,

Jim Bianchi



Guest Viewpoint: Tips for Internal Communication Success

by Manley Ford

Given the current environment, how can communicators cope with the

internal communications challenges and help their company leaders keep the workforce joined together in the common enterprise?

Long-time organizational communications guru, Roger D'Aprix, offers a strategic approach in his latest book, *The Credible Company* (\$32.00 at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)). Internal communication has taken on unprecedented importance in these turbulent times, and D'Aprix sets forth a process-grounded formula based on his years of experience. Almost by definition, a process approach has no quick fixes, but based on Roger's book and my own experience, here are some steps to consider.

It's a war - you need a battle plan: These are desperate times. A war mentality can be a good thing. It can focus efforts on the most important, hasten the grieving for the difficult changes and losses, make it easier to jettison non-essential baggage, and rally the efforts of the survivors.

Revisit strategy - both the company's business strategy and your communication strategy: A proactive communication strategy must be based in today's market reality and your company's survival plan. If you don't have that articulated, get it. No matter how tough the message is. You must have that. There is a market. What is it? What is the plan for capturing that market? What are the implications of that plan in terms of what must people at all levels do? Finally, and most important - what are the business outcomes of the successful deployment of that strategy?

Free up resources: Dump all non-value added work, even the sacred cows. All resources must be fully engaged in the battle.

Clean house: Many communicators' offices are littered with the avalanche of projects we all manage to juggle day in and day out. If it's really not serving the war effort, dump it. "Nice-to-do's" don't make the cut. Clean your workspace of all distractions. Let the customers for those projects know that until further notice, there's a new criterion in town, as articulated by those business outcomes.

Visible Senior Leadership: The most critical audience need, especially during troubled times is visibility of senior leadership (duh). Badger them, cajole them, inspire them, do what it takes, to get them out there and communicating in one form or another to every employee, and make it two-way. Show them how your strategy depends on that. Give them Roger's book.

What are the best media? Nothing beats live, of course, but CEOs who've never done a video before are discovering it's not that difficult to do a "fire-side" chat, or an interview, or a "taped" town-hall meeting - whatever fits his or her style best. Then get it distributed however best you can.

Subjects? For starters: what caused the crisis, what impact is it having on the company, what is the strategy for surviving, what are the immediate actions, what are the mileposts ahead? CEOs don't know all the answers, of course, and should admit it. Employees aren't stupid. They can relate and can rally around that. What they can't handle is silence. What they can't abide is powerlessness. This is a great time to launch an internal CEO blog and invite employee questions and suggestions.

Get the rest of the management team involved and committed: The CEO can't do it alone. Prepare a roadmap of face-to-face communication responsibility and a schedule for the entire leadership team. Put it on a very simple one-page grid. If the CEO is doing his or her part, they'll be quick to want their subordinates to do theirs. Your roadmap is their marching orders.

Put news in context: The lack of context is what tends to create unnecessary speculation. News events must be explained in the business context as defined in your battle-plan strategy.

Step up first-line manager face-to-face communication: Feed managers information in ready-to-deliver form keeping pace with the actions the company is taking - for example - to help its customers, get new customers, create new products and services, support its suppliers, carve out new markets, shift capacity, etc.

Get positive images and stories out there: Another key audience need is being part of a winning team. Keep getting the word out about how the organization is coping with today's challenges. Your ad budget has probably been slashed so focus on "earned" media. There's a story to tell. Tell it. When you get external coverage, plaster it all over your internal media.

That's all the space I have in this issue. I invite your comments and examples of how your company is coping with the new reality.

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PR ROI: Opening the Door at C-Level

We all know that positive media coverage can lead to increased awareness, recognition and goodwill for a company. For companies that sell products or services to other businesses, media coverage can help open the door for your sales professionals. And sometimes, lightning strikes ... and media coverage directly generates sales in a big way.

Take the case of one of our early business-to-business clients, an auto supplier that we'll call Company B. As part of our PR efforts for Company B, we convinced the bureau chief of a leading national business magazine to spend a few days on a productivity project in one of Company B's manufacturing plants. Several weeks later, the bureau chief wrote a two-page article for the magazine on his experience.

After the article was published, we were told the CEO of a major automaker brought that magazine article to his vice president of purchasing and said: "Who are these guys? Do we do business with them? Get them in here." And the rest is history.

Although Company B had sold products to this automaker for years, it wasn't until this article appeared that the door was really opened for CEO-level discussions and bigger opportunities that transcended the price. A close relationship between the two companies developed, and Company B ultimately tripled its annual sales volume with that automaker within three years ... adding millions of dollars to Company B's revenue stream.

To measure the ROI of this PR, you could look at the cost of equivalent advertising space in the magazine - which might be \$50,000. But if you asked the CEO of Company B about the true value of that story, he'll say it was **priceless**.

And that's the kind of ROI we all want to experience!

