

Communication for change

How to devise communications that drive action and change

8 rules for enabling action

1) Spotlight a hero

Hero stories create optimism and prove that change is possible. At their best, they illustrate how-to lessons that people readily learn from.

Check: Are you telling a human story that causes curiosity, amazement or admiration? Is there a role model your actors can watch and learn from? Can they dream "I wish I was that person?"

2) Choose an authentic voice

Communicate using voices that are real and trusted by the audience. No one trusts the disembodied voice of reason or authority anymore. Instead people want to hear the unfiltered, passionate voices of real people.

Check: Are you sharing the voices of grass roots role models who are similar, passionate, respected, known, connected and powerless?

3) Shake people up (gently)

Unpredictability grabs people's attention and shakes up their worlds, opening minds to new possibilities. Tell stories that surprise, break stereotypes and expectations. Use styles and media that are unexpected. But don't shock - that does the opposite!

Check: What's surprising about your story and the way you're delivering in?

4) Focus on one do-able action

Start by knowing precisely what you want your actors to do. Don't ask people to do several things - they'll just be overwhelmed (and so would you). Settle on one action per campaign and throw all your resources at it.

Check: have you chosen a single pivotal action to focus your resources on?

"Actors" vs "audiences" We use the word "actors" instead of "target audiences" because they are the ones have to *act* for your efforts to be successful.

Beware of reasons, facts



Beware of relying on reasons, facts, costs and benefits, or logic. When intended to persuade, reasons and arguments cause denial and resistance. They make us feel good but imply that our listeners are being bad. No one likes being made wrong and so people push back to protect their dignity. Those people who are likely to act on your message already the "whys". Adding more "whys" won't help. If you notice you're arguing with people, stop now and do the things on this page instead.

5) Depict exactly how it's done

Show your actors *how* to act. Remember that even simple actions seem onerous and scary to those who haven't done them before. Familiarity is the key to reducing that fear. This is vital!

Check: Show people exactly what to do, visually, with such clarity that a person could look at your communication and say "I could do that."

6) Make it about community

Social connection enormously reduces people's perceptions of risk. Make your effort feel like a movement or club. Let it bring people closer together.

Check: Is it sociable? Will they meet enthusiastic companions or leaders? Will they feel part of a community?

7) Actually care for your actors

Show you care for your actors' wellbeing, happiness and dignity. Empathy and caring is 50% of credibility*. If you care for people, they'll likely trust you.

Check: Do your words and efforts demonstrate genuine concern for your actors' hopes and frustrations? Do their lives improve in multiple ways?

* Covello V 1992, [Risk Communication, Trust and Credibility](#)

8) Have you listened enough?

Meet your potential actors and listen intently to them. You'll always be thankful for the insights you get when you sit down and talk with real people.

Check: Have you listened to your intended actors for long enough to understand their personal frustrations and hopes? Have you listened long enough to have your own assumptions challenged?

Arrange your info in layers

The headline and the image grab attention. Human faces convey emotion. The top layer of text connects to people's passions and interests. The call to action and details follow. Make sure the source is credible.



The Iceberg Theory of Communication

Good communication is more than a collection of words and images. It's about conversations and relationships. What's below the surface makes all the difference.



Surprise: the part that people notice

Information: the part that people hear or read

Source credibility: Do I trust the 'voice'?

Values: Does the sender care about me and what I care about?

Stuff that works



Pleasure

People love games, puzzles, fun, and food. Oh, did I mention food?

Humour and quirkiness

A great way to lower resistance, even for difficult requests or directions.

Social proof

Humans have "a sort of instinctual response to overvalue something when we see that others want it". For example:
 "57% of Cardinia homes have rooftop solar."
 "No one smokes here anymore."

Praise and recognition

Thank people for the good things they've done and celebrate each step into their future.

Urgency and scarcity

"Must register by 20 April."
 "Just 20 places available."

Stuff that doesn't work



Slogans and tag lines

They're so lame.

Advertising

We all know they're trying to persuade us. There are way better ways to spend your money.

Bad news

People don't need more bad news - it's depressing and disabling. It makes them turn away (go into denial). Instead, offer hope.

Prizes and rewards

Really, if bribe people you're actually telling them that you don't think they care.

Thinking your audience are stupid or bad

You're wrong and eventually they'll figure out that you don't respect them.

Changeology training with Les

Devise projects to change the world.

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Next workshop
3 and 4 May 2023

in his fun and engaging Zoom style.