

The Ultimate Business Weapon

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YOUR COMMUNICATION IS CRITICAL

What if you had the ultimate business weapon?

What if you could truly use the silver bullet?

What if I could show you how you could double your sales in the next six months?

What if I could show you how to have greater growth?

What if I could show you how to gain the ultimate competitive business advantage?

The Situation

Today most businesses spend time creating financial strategies, operational strategies, and marketing strategies. Very few companies take the time to create a communication strategy and process. Companies hire marketing firms to create and design collateral about their companies. They design and create information that doesn't make sense to the marketplace, the company, or the employee!

One of my favorite business books is *Why Business People Speak Like Idiots*. The authors open with this: "This is just the kind of synergistic customer centric, up sell driven, out of the box, customizable, strategically tactical, best of breed thought leadership that will help our clients track to true north. Let's fly this up the flagpole and see where the pushback is." This is the rhetoric we hear from most companies and salespeople about customers. Companies do product training; they do sales methodology training. But very few companies teach communication skills. No one teaches how to communicate clearly through the sales methodology.

The Problem

Here's the problem we all face when we can't communicate, no matter how successful we are, how big our companies are, or how much market share we have: the competition will catch us and pass us if we don't stay on the communication cutting edge. The problem is that we sound like everybody else, no one remembers us, and there is no consistency.

Statically 40-60 percent of your communication is forgotten. Let's just take the average: 50 percent of the information communicated in your last meeting is forgotten; 50 percent of the information you shared in your last sales call is forgotten; 50 percent of your presentation/speech is forgotten!

The Benefits

There are three distinct benefits to good communication.

1. mental real estate in the minds of your listeners and customers
2. greater influence, i.e., increased market share, greater recognition, instant credibility reduced mind share competition

The Question

So the question is, how do I create greater memorability, impact, and influence in my communication? HOW DO I MAKE IT STICK? How do I turn the art of communication into the science of results? How do I turn my communication into REMARKABLE results?

The Stake

I believe we need a communication strategy to create REMARKABLE results. Most people leave communication to a whim. On the contrary, it should be your number one priority. Individuals and businesses “make it or break it” based on their ability to communicate. Throughout history, successful people have been the ones able to articulate their goals, dreams, and ideas effectively to others. Their message and their life are seamless, one in the same. Successful people are people who let their lives speak! Successful companies are companies that have *people* who let their lives speak. These are remarkable people! These are remarkable organizations! We can be the best, have the best products, but if we can't communicate that information, *we have nothing!*

As you think through your organization or the personal message you need to communicate, ask yourself if you are creating memorability, impact, and influence. I encourage you to take the “**Bart Communication Challenge.**”

Select five people across your organization in *various positions*. The “Bart Communication Challenge” consists of four questions for non-executives and two questions for executives. Ask them the following questions. Each answer should take less than thirty seconds!

- What does your company do, for whom, and why?
- What are the top three benefits of your company?

- What are the top three benefits of your product, solution, tool, or service brings to the table?
- What are the top three key differentiators?

Next take the **Executive Communication component of the “Bart Communication Challenge”** with your management team. Ask the executives to articulate the following in less than thirty seconds.

- What is your mission statement?
- What is your vision statement?

Every member of your organization should be able to answer these five questions consistently. If they can you're doing great! If they can't, I truly believe you need a communication strategy!

I have been in the spoken communication field for over twenty years, and I see on a daily basis how people and organizations fail to achieve their goals and results because they cannot articulate their values clearly. They need a strategy!

There are three keys ideas you must put into place to have a successful communication strategy.

1. the communication process
2. the communication foundation
3. the communication template

All three are critical to your success. Leave one out, and you lose!

Key One: The Communication Process

The first key is looking at the communication process. There are four steps to the communication process.

1. develop
2. deploy
3. deliver
4. sustain!

Each of these key steps is critical to each other.

The **develop process** is the one very few people or organizations are willing to do. It involves walking organizations through a *message development* process. The result of the process is three strategic documents: a *message matrix* based on the specified

audience, a *reference document* that explains the details behind matrix, and a *set of slides*. These three allow any individual in the organization to craft a consistent, clear, concise message. This enables everyone in your organization to communicate the same information.

The **deployment aspect** has two considerations. What kind of a deployment tool do you have in place? Do you have a communication crafting tool that works well with the message matrix? Communication deployment tools must be easy to use. Most folks resort to PowerPoint, but this is a visual tool to enhance content, not a deployment tool. The second aspect of deployment is event based: conferences, meetings, sales calls, one-to-one scenarios. In each of these aspects the deployment tools should be consistent

The delivery step in the process is where most individuals and organizations spend their time and dollars. This is mostly a reactive position not a proactive position. I get calls every day from executives needing help with a presentation or speech they are doing in less than a week. Preparing for a communication event is no different from preparing for an athletic event. I constantly stress “behavior change” not “knowledge transfer.” Good communication is skill. Yes, for some the skills may come easily or more naturally. For others we have to work at it a little more. Make sure you have a clear distinction between communication skills and style. They are two different things!

The last step is to sustain. How do we keep our information updated, current, and relevant? By using the message matrix format to review information every six months or every year. By design, the message matrix makes this easy. It allows you to add and/or delete information in a matter of moments: update the reference doc, adjust your slides, and you’re off and running. No more inconsistent information, no expensive marketing expenses to craft your message. This allows you to update Web sites, collateral, white papers, or any company documents with confidence, clarity, and consistency.

Now that you have strategically developed listener focused content we can move to the communication foundation.

Key Two: The Communication Foundation

The communication foundation is basis for all your communication activities. There are three simple concepts to the communication foundation: **strategic goals, focus areas, and filters.**

In my experience teaching these skills and working with executives all over the world, all kinds of sales organizations, and technical individuals, *everything* must lead to these **three strategic goals: build trust, build relationship and build engagement.** If you’re face to face communication or virtual communication does not map to all three of these goals your missing the bull’s eye.

The first strategic goal is to build trust. People buy trust before they buy any products, services, tools, or solutions. People buy trust before they buy the provider.

Say you were planning to make a major purchase like a car. You have done your homework, checking consumer magazines, talking to friends or family, or researching on the Internet; and you walk onto the car lot cash in hand, financial papers in your pocket, ready to buy!

But the car salesperson hasn't seen you before and you're wearing a casual outfit; you just don't look the part of a prepared, committed buyer. The salesperson comes across slick or strong, or blows you off. So, of course, you choose to go to a different dealer, where the salesperson positions him- or herself as a *resource*, not a salesperson. Your trust goes up!

If you're in sales your closing percentage just went up! Our goal with our families, colleagues, customers, and friends should be to build trust. I encourage you to make trust one of your core personal and corporate values.

The second strategic goal is to build relationship. It mystifies me how many executives miss this one. I see this every day as I coach executives speaking at conferences or holding a keynote position. You may recognize this as a listener and as an individual to whom this has happened.

Say you're up on stage speaking to a large group of folks. Your company has spent thousands of dollars to get you in front of your customers, prospects, or employees. Up to this point you're okay, but here is where everything fails: there are a ton of lights glaring into your face so that you are blinded by the light and may be only able to see the front row. Then, the whole room or auditorium is darkened. Think of the number of times you've been in a business meeting or at a conference in which the lights went out and the PowerPoint slide came up. I myself have been in scenarios where it was so dark I couldn't take notes on a white pad!

Now answer this question: How do you build a relationship with your audience if you can't see them? Because the emphasis typically is on the slides, the room is darkened. But the focus should be on you! You're the expert. You're the gift to the audience. If nothing else, never let them turn the lights out again.

Do you sit in the dark and talk to your children? Do you sit in the dark in your office to discuss something with an employee? Do you sit in the dark to discuss an important relationship or financial matter with your spouse or significant other? Do you sit in the dark when you attend a religious service of your choice? Do your children sit in the dark in school to learn? *No* to all of the above!

The key to remember is that people buy you first, and then they buy your tool, service, or product. Time after time I watch salespeople sell. And typically, this is the order in which they sell: the company, the product, then themselves.

Think of the order we buy in: people, product, then the company. Building a relationship with your listeners is critical to your success.

The last strategic goal is to build engagement. Here is the gold standard definition of engagement:

“Engagement is the ability to get the listener to respond, listen, and interact!”

If you can accomplish this you will win every time. You have thirty seconds to one minute to engage your listener. If you don’t, you’re out!

Here are three examples of things people do everyday that kill engagement. I encourage you to avoid what I call the “**Three Deadly Sins.**”

- “Hi my name is...and I am here to talk about...”
- “In summary or conclusion...”
- “I forgot to tell you...”

Just avoiding these will help keep engagement higher. Make *engagement* your goal, not a data dump.

Focus areas are the second concept of a communication foundation. The three focus areas are **the content, the delivery, and the interaction** with the listener. As you study other communicators make sure to evaluate them on all three areas. With the political process just being completed we have seen a huge amount of focus on these areas!

Most people may use PowerPoint to begin to craft their message. Very few people think about how they are physically coming across, the things they are doing or not doing. Have you ever listened to someone speak and counted their “ums” by making chit marks on a piece of paper? You didn’t listen to what they were saying. The bottom line is this. Your delivery and your content must be congruent and consistent. If not, your listeners will not hear you. Your **delivery** should enable listeners to pay attention to the content alone. Your delivery should punch up your content!

The second focus area is the **content**. Remember, people don’t care what you know until they know how much you care. You have two choices when you are sharing information. You can try to impress people or you can try to empower them. When you try to impress, it’s all about what you know. When you empower, it’s all about how much you care and what you’ve learned. Change up your content from the typical data dump to a story or and experience. *CEO* magazine stated that CEOs want a story, not a PowerPoint presentation. Your content must be organized. It must be easy to follow. It must be concise. The most difficult skill is to be concise and not verbose. Even as I write this chapter I struggle with how to say more with less.

The third focus area of a strategic communicator is **interaction**. Two examples of interaction would be Q & A and Visual Aids. The University of Illinois found in a study that people who use visual aids are 85 percent more effective than people who do not. The question is not whether to use visuals but *how* to use them to be most effective.

If you want to be a polished speaker and communicator that *interacts* with your audience, someone who is perceived as an expert and who stands out from the crowd, do this one thing. You must *preview the slide* for your listeners.

The skill of previewing the slide sets you up to lead the listener through the conversation, not push him or her through it. Previewing is simply letting the listener

know what is coming. It can be a simple word, thought, or phrase that lets the listener know what they are about to see. It connects the listener to your next slide or visual.

Easy to understand, hard to implement! But this skill is not optional. Integrate it into all of your communication immediately. Integrate it into your use of any type of visual: PowerPoint, white boards, flip charts, and handouts.

If you don't do this, the listener is forced to try to read the slide and listen to what is being said at the same time. But we cannot read and listen at the same time. Guys, this is proven every day when we try to watch the game and listen to our spouses. It's difficult to do both!

This brings us to second area of interaction: how to handle questions. In my experience it does not matter how great your presentation, your speech, or your meeting is if you cannot clearly and concisely answer questions. Without this skill your credibility goes out the window.

Have you ever heard someone take so long to answer a question that you couldn't remember what the question was? Or perhaps you turned to your colleague and said, "What did he or she just say?" Our recent political debates also illustrate this point very well. Here are a couple of Q & A tips:

- Your answer should be no longer than 1-1.5 minutes.
- End on a positive point or track back to a key message.
- Never repeat the negative.

Finally, the last two points around the communication foundation are two **filters**, or paradigm shifts in the way we communicate. The first is being listener focused. The second is "perception versus reality."

The concept of being **listener focused** must be applied to each of the strategic focus areas: delivery, content, and interaction. Most people are speaker focused, not listener focused. From a delivery perspective, it is acceptable in most Western styles of communication to look at someone for three to five seconds at a time.

If we were communicating in a classic Asian culture this would not be appropriate. Eye contact in classic Asian cultures is about one to three seconds instead of our three to five. If we were communicating in a Middle Eastern culture between men (women is another issue), that eye contact would go up to about five to seven seconds. Physical proximity is also a variable. Those are examples of being listener focused in our delivery. Speaker focused is all about you!

Gearing your content is just as critical. Crafting a message to an executive is different than to a technical audience. Developing content through a specific, listener focused process is essential to hitting the mark. I remember an executive who opened a presentation talking about frogs. He was addressing an audience in French Quebec,

Canada. *Frog* is a derogatory term for a French person! Clearly he didn't know his audience.

The last key is the concept of “**perception versus reality**.” Again, the rule of thumb is this: It's not about you! It *is* about the listener. Remember that what the listener experiences is completely different from what the communicator experiences. I can't count the number of times I *felt* like I had crashed and burned. I *felt* like my speech or presentation was horrible, and yet people would tell me, “Wow! That was great.”

In our three-day speaker program we walk executives through, I am constantly saying, “Do not go with how it *feels*. Go with the impact it creates.” If it's positive do it over and over. If it's negative, get rid of it! This concept really comes into play as we spend a full day of building delivery skills into behavior change.

Key Three: The Communication Template

Let's do a quick recap. We laid out the communication process at one hundred thousand feet. We laid out the communication foundation that will create influence and impact as people actually share information. Now for the communication template.

The template needs to be versatile enough to cover a myriad of communication scenarios. It needs to be simple to use, repeatable, and create memorability! It has to have all the core components: an open that grabs the audience and involves them in the first three minutes, an organized flow to the body, and a close that drives listeners to action and leaves them wanting more.

I use a communication roadmap that I developed. I have used this for meetings, presentations, keynote speeches, my father's eulogy, and an executive elevator speech. Once you learn the template you can craft a message in your head. In a moment's notice you can be clear, concise, and powerful in your message!

The Summary

There are **three keys** to your communication strategy: the communication process, the communication foundation, and the communication template. Each plays a powerful role in your success.

I truly believe that the ultimate business weapon today is the ability to communicate. Think through what makes our political candidates stand out. Think through what makes you listen to any speaker at work, your local club, or church. Implement the ultimate business weapon in your personal life or organization. Take the communication challenge. Put a communication strategy into place!

With today's economic issues you need something that will separate you from the pack. You need something that creates mental real estate in the minds of your listeners; you need something that will cause you and your message to stick!

Strategic Communication is your silver bullet!

For more information on communicating strategically, read Bart's blog at www.ultimatepowerspeak.blogspot.com or log onto www.ultimatepowerspeak.com.