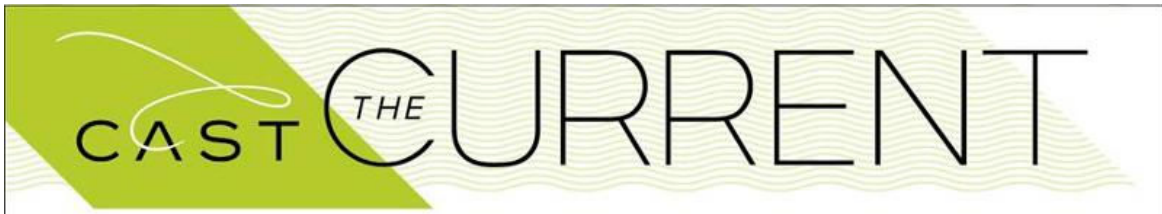


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The Cast Communication Design newsletter - September 2011

Five Ideas on the Future of Employee Communication

(Keyword: Trust)

by Jim Knutsen, Founder and CEO

Last month, my wife and I watched through dark glasses as our son walked out of our sight and into his freshman dorm and a whole new life.

It took my last measure of composure not to go running across the parking lot. "Zach, wait! You don't have to do this!"

You spend 18 years obsessed with knowing where your child is and what he's doing, and then he's just...gone. And all you can do, really, is trust that you've done something right; that, somehow, he is ready for all this. It isn't easy - but what choice do you have?

I suspect this is where we're heading with the evolution of employee communication. A discipline built to control the message now has to set free the flow of information. And while we may understand the promise inherent in a social culture built on self-organizing conversations, what if our employees get it wrong? And, as communicators, just what are we supposed to do now?

Why the name Cast?

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What's Up at Cast

- **Sept 6-30** Sr. Consultant Katharine Kelly is attending Executive Social Media Bootcamp at [Brazen U](#)
- **Sept 13** Sr. Consultant Laura Wegscheid will present "From Communication to Community: Engaging Employees to Build Your Business" at the [Legal Marketing Association](#) luncheon in Denver
- **Sept 19-20** Our leadership team will convene in Philadelphia
- **Oct 5-6** Sr. Consultant Saunya Peterson will attend the [World Business Forum](#) in New York

Facebook Poll

Which best describes communication inside your organization?

- Inner-circle: closed-door meetings between executives with minimal information shared with the rest of the company
- Cascade: information formally flows top-down with the hope

We can start by getting off the sidelines to help our organizations usher in a high-performance culture built on trust. Communication is central to the promise and potential of social business and it's our job to enable it.

Here are five ways the landscape is changing, and what it means for communicators.

1. Less control, more trust.

Traditionally, communicators have been the authoritative voice of enterprise information. We work with leaders to decide what matters, who needs to know, and how it will be shared. Great for ensuring consistency and control, but terribly inefficient if you're trying to encourage empowered conversations.

In the new world, we have to be advocates for trust. The organization needs to trust employees to participate in dynamic conversations like professionals and adults. And employees need to trust that the company is being open, transparent and thoughtful.

2. Less news, more work.

Communication is not just corporate news and information, communication is how the work gets done. We need to begin thinking of ourselves as problem-solvers. By viewing business problems through a communication lens, we can create solutions that help people come together, collaborate, find information, and work smarter. Now, that's a good story.

3. Less loudspeaker, more roundtable.

There are times employee communication reminds me of the morning announcements in high school, broadcast through a tinny speaker to every classroom with no opportunity for interaction or even eye contact.

We need to go from "Here's what you need to know" to "Here's what we should be talking about." Communicators should be setting up the conversation, and then letting it happen. We can encourage participation, monitor interaction and provide prompts when needed, but ultimately trust the subject

that it reaches front-line employees

- Dialogue: messages initiated at the top, with employees given opportunities to ask questions/provide feedback
- Community: Information flows freely, independent of hierarchy; relationships formed around spontaneous collaboration

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matter experts to carry the conversation forward.

4. Less writing, more teaching.

Every employee communication survey ever issued shows that bosses are the most important source of information in any organization. And most communication groups are doing almost nothing to equip those managers for success.

We've been too focused on the things we know and can control. We are no longer the sole creators of content, so we need to become as good at teaching as we are at writing. Communicators should be equipping managers with the skills to create productive conversations; providing them with the information they need to keep employees connected and directed; and then trusting them to carry the message forward.

5. Less IT, more HR.

Some corporate communication teams have tried to get ready for the new world by building up technology competencies. There's nothing wrong with having a few good IT experts on your side, but technology is only the skeleton of the social enterprise; relationships are its beating heart.

There are a whole host of tools designed to make enterprise communications more authentic, immediate and dynamic. Some are better than others, but none will work without attention to the people using them. You should be focused on culture, change dynamics, and personal motivations-the technology is the easy part.

Adjusting to our new roles as communicators won't be easy - saying goodbye never is.

But if we can break out of our old ways of thinking and focus on the potential of the new, we stand to play a pivotal role in helping our organizations prepare for what's ahead...even if we're not quite sure what that is.

From the Blog

What the U.S. Navy Can Teach You About Social Media

by Katharine Kelly, Sr. Consultant

The head of the U.S. Navy gets social media. He doesn't just think it's important in some abstract way, he actually embraces and uses it as part of his job...*his job as the leader of the world's largest navy.*

I know this because the transcript of the speech that Admiral Gary Roughead, Chief of Naval Operations, gave at the Institute for Public Relations Strategic Communications Summit started making its way around Twitter this week (or at least, a link to [this blog](#)). Not sure why it took so long - I have to think that everyone sitting in the audience back in June went running back to their leaders proclaiming, "If the Navy can do this, so can we!" (I would have!)

The message Adm. Roughead shared has several key points that every leader should hear...

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