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## The seven essentials of great business communication

By Lee Hopkins

### The seven essentials of great business communication by Lee Hopkins

There are seven essential elements to successful business communication:

- Structure
- Clarity
- Consistency
- Medium
- Relevancy
- Primacy/Recency
- Psychological Rule of 7±2

If you are going to communicate effectively in business it is essential that you have a solid grasp of these seven elements. So let's look at each in turn...

#### Structure

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How you structure your communication is fundamental to how easily it is absorbed and understood by your audience.

Every good communication should have these three structural elements: an opening, a body, and a close.

## The seven essentials of great business communication

The Opening allows your communication's audience to quickly understand what the communication is about. Short, sharp and to the point, a good opening lets your audience quickly reach a decision of whether or not to pay attention to your message.

The Body is where you get to the 'heart' of your message. It is in the body of the message that you communicate all of your facts and figures relative to the action you want your communication's audience to take after attending to your message.

There's a key to rapid uptake of your message — KISS. Pitch your presentation's graphics at a grade seven child. If THEY can follow and understand them, chances are good that your audience will too.

The Close is where you sum up your communication, remind your audience of your key points, and leave them with a clear understanding of what you want them to do next. The more

powerfully you can end your communication, the more easily remembered it will be by your audience.

This structural rule holds true no matter what your communication is — a memo, a phone call, a voice mail message, a personal presentation, a speech, an email, a webpage, or a multi-media presentation.

Remember — your communication's audience can be just one person, a small team, an auditorium full of people or a national, even global, group of millions.

In this instance size doesn't matter — the rules remain the same.

### Clarity

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Be clear about the message you want to deliver, as giving a confused message to your audience only ends up with them being confused and your message being ignored.

If you are giving a message about, say, overtime payments don't then add in messages about detailed budget issues or the upcoming staff picnic — UNLESS they ABSOLUTELY fit in with your original message.

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It's far better and clearer for your audience if you create a separate communication about these ancilliary issues.

### Consistency

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Nothing more upsets a regular reader of, say, your newsletter than inconsistency of your message.

Taking a position on an issue one week, only to overturn it the next, then overturn THAT position the following week, only breeds distrust in your message. And distrust in you!

People who distrust you are exceedingly unlikely to take the action you wish them to take. They are also highly unlikely to pay any attention to your future messages.

As well as consistency amongst multiple messages, be aware that inconsistency within your message can be just as deadly to audience comprehension.

At the risk of sounding like the Grouchy Grammarian, please make sure that your tenses remain the same, that your viewpoint doesn't wander between the 1st and 3rd person and back again

(unless you deliberately want to create a linguistic or story-telling effect — be careful with this!) and that your overall 'theme' or message doesn't change.

### Medium

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If the only tool you have in your toolbox is a hammer, pretty soon everything starts to look like a nail.

Similarly, if all you believe you have as a communications tool is PowerPoint™ then pretty soon all you'll do is reduce very communications opportunity to a PowerPoint™ presentation. And as any of us who have sat through one too many boring slideshows will attest, "seen one, seen 'em all"

There are a myriad of ways you can deliver your message — the trick is to use the right one. But which is the right one? The one that communicates your message:

- \* with the greatest accuracy
- \* with the largest likelihood of audience comprehension
- \* at the lowest fiscal cost

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\* at the lowest time cost

Note: it must meet ALL of these criteria. There's absolutely no value in spending the least amount of money if the medium you choose doesn't deliver on any of the other criteria.

Choosing the right medium or media is obviously critical. Get the media mix wrong and you could end up spending a whole lot of time and money on a very visually attractive business communication that delivers next-to-zero ROI.

### Relevancy

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It never ceases to amaze me that business managers still believe that everyone would be interested in their message -- and then proceed to subject any and every person they can find to a horrendous PowerPoint slideshow put together by a well-meaning but aesthetically-challenged subordinate.

Screen-after-screen of lengthy text, in a small barely legible font size (because a small font size is the only way to fit all of the words onto the slide), which the manager duly and dully reads verbatim.

Ugh!

The psychological reality is that unless a person is interested in the subject of the message they are highly unlikely to pay

ANY attention.

Which means that if you force them to attend to your message you will actually turn them against you and be even less likely to receive their attention in the future.

Save your in-depth budget and performance analysis Excel-generated charts for those who genuinely care and need to know about such things.

If your business communication needs to touch on several areas that might not be of interest to your entire audience, let them know of alternative resources that more fully address each of these additional areas.

You can do this by, for example, providing them with an

easily-remembered and written link to a webpage where a greater depth of information can be stored.

### Primacy/Recency

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It is essential to know that, one week later, a business communication is remembered by one or both of two things:

- \* the power and memorability of its opening
- \* the power and memorability of its close

Psychologists call the effect of remembering the first few items presented as a 'Primacy Effect'. Similarly, they call the effect of remembering the last few items presented to you as a 'Recency Effect'.

Since individuals differ in which Effect is the most dominant for them, it is best to 'cover your bases' and make an effort to have both a powerful and memorable opening and a powerful close.

A powerful opening can be anything that captures the audience's attention:

- \* a quote,
- \* a joke,
- \* a loud noise,
- \* a preposterous statement.

Just make sure that your opening remains consistent with and relates to the subject of the communication.

Equally, a powerful close that bears no resemblance to the main body of the communication would just confuse and disappoint an audience brought up to expect something more.

And don't think that humour will save you.

Business communication is a serious business and very few people have the skill to be able to deliver a humorous message that the audience will retain and act upon.

As Granville Toogood says in his excellent book 'The Articulate Executive', humour is a very risky strategy.

If you are determined to use humour in your presentation, then please follow Toogood's recommendation:

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- \* Tell the story as if it were true. The punch line is a lot funnier if we aren't expecting it
- \* Tell the story to make a business point. If you don't make a point, you have no business telling a joke
- \* Make sure you tell the story correctly, don't mess up the punch line, and make sure it's appropriate.

The opening and closing of your business communication are the two most easily remembered and therefore essential elements. Make sure you give your audience something to remember.

The Psychological Rule of  $7\pm 2$  (seven plus or minus two)

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Psychologists have long known that the human brain has a finite capacity to hold information in short-term or 'working' memory.

The brain is also structured to retain information in 'clusters' or groups of items. These clusters average, across the whole of mankind, at seven items, plus or minus two.

Which means that your audience is only able to hold on to between five and nine pieces of information at any one time.

Now do you see the importance of clarity of message and of having a distinctive and memorable opening and close?

If you want your key points to be remembered even five minutes later, it is essential that you limit your business communication to between just five and nine key points.

Equally, if you want your key action points to be remembered five weeks later, ensure that your communication is amongst the five to nine most memorable messages your audience has attended to in the last five weeks.

Conclusion

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There are seven essential elements to successful business communication:

Structure  
Clarity  
Consistency

## The seven essentials of great business communication

Medium  
Relevancy  
Primacy/Recency  
Rule of 7±2

If you are going to communicate effectively in business it is essential that you have a solid grasp of these seven elements.

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### **Create a Quality–Minded Dental Practice**

**By Laura Peters**

#### **Create a Quality–Minded Dental Practice by Laura Peters**

You are a CEO - Create a quality–minded practice

Whether your annual cash receipts exceed the million–dollar mark or you are at a more modest level, the fact remains the same – you are running a business. You are the leader and it is your responsibility to set quality standards.

The pro–Socratic philosopher Heraclitus said that one can never step in the same river twice. He meant that the world is a place of constant change; so, too, is your dental practice. By having an established set of quality standards that act as an anchor, your business can move ahead when the waters are smooth and ride it out during the storms that periodically blow through every practice.

There are eight essentials that really ought to be in place for a practice to qualify as truly quality–minded:

- A deep understanding of the patients so that their wants can be translated into service.
- A plan to keep improving all operations continuously.
- A system for measuring these improvements accurately.
- A strategic plan based on benchmarks that compare the practice's performance to the world's best.
- A close partnership with patients and associates that feeds improvement back into the practice operation.
- A long–lasting relationship with patients, going beyond the delivery of service to include sales, service and communication.
- A focus on preventing mistakes rather than merely correcting them.
- A commitment to improving quality that runs from the top of the practice to the bottom.

## The seven essentials of great business communication

These essentials are fundamental standards that are necessary for your practice to move from the here of current quality to the there of its true competitive potential. Commit to complete patient satisfaction and constant improvement, and develop the discipline to build these beliefs into everything you do.

Laura Peters is the administrator of Two Suns Marketing & Design. This firm serves dental professionals exclusively. Laura Peters has been in the public relations and marketing field for over thirteen years.

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