

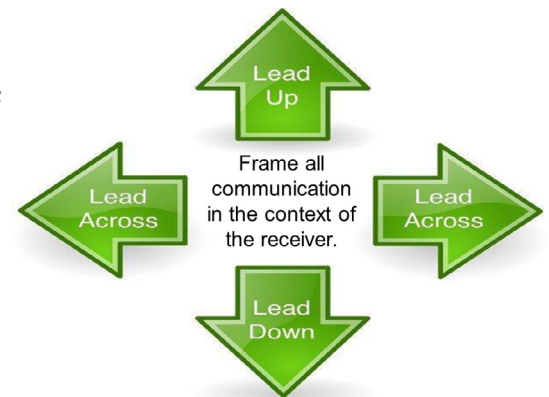
Framing Communication: UP, ACROSS, DOWN

Fast Answers Coaching Session

Emerging leaders stumble when they fail to consider this fundamental reality: communication is for the receiver, not for the sender. The reality is that one memo, one set of talking points, or one email simply won't suffice when you are communicating within your organization. All communication must be tailored to the receiver. The level of specificity, tone and language choice, depth and brevity, and format of the communications must be tailored uniquely for the intended audience.

To illustrate this concept, consider the following scenario: A key leadership staff member within your organization is involved in a major car accident. He was not badly injured. It was a one-car roll-over in the company car. The complicating factor is that alcohol was involved and a possibility that charges would be filed for reckless driving. Right now, there is no clarity of how the next steps of this story will play out. The otherwise stellar work of this leader could potentially be impacted if careful communication is not navigated well. What would you do?

- **Thirty-second Commercial.** This is a thoroughly crafted, simple statement that will be the first statement of any communication. The goal of this narrative is to give factual data encased in language that provides a sense of calm along with the acknowledgement. There is no magic in the actual length of time, but 30 seconds provides a target to ensure the message is short and easy to remember. It is the front end of the next three steps in the process.
- **Leading Up Message.** This message is designed for the leader above you. It should provide the 30-second commercial flanked by necessary detail to understand the issues. Additionally, it should include a clear understanding of what is expected of the leader(s) to whom this content is directed. As the designer of the communication, either written or in person, you need to clearly define the exact actions recommended. For example: "This information is to alert you that there may be a need for you to take action in the future. For right now, this information is provided to give you awareness if you are approached internally or externally on this topic. Should you hear anything, please let me know right away." Arming your superiors with knowledge and understanding will allow them to not be blind-sided by press, community sentiment, or company buzz.
- **Leading Across Message.** The leading across message should be crafted with the affected person as a collaborative process. The amount of information to be shared, the confidential nature of the information, the next steps being considered are important to convey. For example, this communication usually includes a description of how the individual should reply if they are asked a question about the issue. The 30-second commercial is important here, as it is already crafted and can be made available for use as needed by peers of the affected individual. It is important to give assurance that the issue is being addressed and those individuals affected are informed and doing their work.
- **Leading Down Message.** Leading down is a bit more nuanced. As a leader, you may determine that no communication on the matter is needed or recommended. That is a choice. It is not the only choice. The best advice is to be frugal with your level of detail should you wish to go forward with a communication. In addition to the 30-second commercial, a statement of assurance and admonishment to not make up stories in the absence of the facts is critical here.



It is also important to tell people what is expected of them, such as: "If someone asks you about this, give the basic information you have just received, give assurance, and contact me immediately to allow for follow-up if necessary." Not all communication is delicate. The bottom line is to tailor the message for each audience. It is not enough that you understand it, make sure each audience understands the message and what is expected of them in response to the communication.