



On Message

By Aaron Crowley

President John F. Kennedy use to say at the beginning of his press conferences, “I am now ready for the questions to my answers.” This of course meant he was going to communicate *his* message regardless of what the press might have wanted to hear. While politicians aren’t the most popular group of people these days, there are a few who are worth recognizing because of their unique ability to get their message across.

Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, and Ronald Reagan were all world famous leaders because they were experts in communicating. Lincoln wrote and delivered the Gettysburg Address, which 140 years later is still considered one of the most powerful speeches ever delivered. Churchill’s grasp of the English language helped him unite the world against the Nazis. And Reagan was so good he was simply called *The Great Communicator*.

Laboring to become a world famous orator may not be practical or a great usage of time for the business owner engaged in the everyday grind of selling, installing, and collecting on granite counter tops. Yet the ability to communicate the right message to the right audience is a skill every leader should aspire to achieve.

Uniting employees, persuading potential investors, and convincing customers to buy the product are all unique challenge a business owner faces. And the following three rules should be required reading when communication with each of them.

For employees, the rule is Confidence. Business owners live lives of uncertainty, making it easy to overlook how much importance employees place on job security. And a boss “thinking out loud” about the everyday challenges threatening the future of the company can induce a commitment crushing fear, forcing staff to wonder if they should start searching for a more secure job. In this age of employee self preservation, *all* communication should inspire confidence, reinforcing the belief that you are in absolute control.

For investors, the rule is Capability. Whether it’s a bank or a brother in law, potential investors in your company are concerned about one thing: getting their initial investment back with interest. Yes, they will want tax returns, cash flow statements, and balance sheets, but only to determine that the company is capable of making the payments. In this age of foreclosures and bankruptcies, it is necessary that you convey your company’s utter capability in paying all its debts.

For customers, the rule is Consistency. The office voice mail message, the signage on the trucks, and the lingo in the last magazine ad are message vehicles that have only one purpose: to catch the attention of a prospective customer and compel them to inquire. In this information-rich age, it is crucial

that what the customer sees, hears, and feels is consistent. Otherwise the conflicting messages will cause confusion and your company will lose credibility.

JFK also used to say that leadership and learning are indispensable to each other. Whether you are the President of your company or the President of the United States, learn to lead through the ability to say the right thing to the right audience because it means the difference between excellence and mediocrity, fame and obscurity.