

# The Message Is the Messenger

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Consider a new CEO, tasked with turning around an industry laggard, who took to the podium at his first town hall meeting, with a command-and-control style that showed that there was a new sheriff in town and things were going to change.

With hundreds of employees in the audience, the CEO began speaking. Suddenly, he noticed a man in the corner of the room leaning against the wall, not paying attention to the presentation. Furthermore, the man wasn't dressed like the rest of the audience; he was in jeans and a ragged T-shirt, with a baseball cap on sideways. Here was a perfect example, the CEO thought, to show employees that such laxity was no longer going to be permitted.

"You in the corner," the CEO yelled out. "How much do you make a week?"

Looking up in surprise, the guy replied that he made about \$400 a week. With a smirk, the CEO reached into his pocket and pulled out \$1,000 in cash. "You're fired!" he said. As the man in the baseball cap took the money, the CEO noticed a funny grin on his face, but he ignored it.

After his speech, the CEO called one of his lieutenants over. "So, how do you think I did?" he asked. "I sure made an example of that guy. By the way, who was he?"

"That was Johnny, the pizza delivery guy."

Moral of the story and cardinal rule No. 1 in communicating: Before you speak, know your audience.

At its best, communication does more than inform. It inspires and moves us to consider what we might become if we, too, were "more" — more determined, more prepared, more confident and more empowered.

During the recent holiday season, I had the joy of entertaining five of my teenagers over a 10-day period. My role: provider of transportation, purveyor of snacks and procurer of incidentals. On the condition that they had to "check" their "i-Gadgets" in the car, I took my motley crew and their friends to see "The Hobbit." At the end of this

nearly three-hour film, everyone in the theater immediately began clapping — viewers were cheering at a blank screen. Why? Because they connected emotionally with the story.

Think of the movie "Rocky," a fictional rags-to-riches tale of an unknown boxer who suddenly gets a shot at the world heavyweight championship. Even though Rocky loses the fight in a split decision by the judges after 15 punishing rounds, he is the champion for whom the audience always cheers. (The movie went on to win three Oscars, including Best Picture.) Even today, the iconic image of Rocky running up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and pumping his fists in the air evokes the heart-pumping determination of a character who was incapable of empowerment until he believed in himself.

To connect with others, to inspire others through communication, you don't have to be Rocky or, for that matter, Ernest Hemingway or George Clooney. You don't have to spin tales of how others accomplished the seemingly impossible. But you must be authentic, particularly in times like these.

Returning from the holidays, it is always refreshing to sense the overwhelming renewed hope at the start of a new year — employees return to work optimistic, even when there's no rational reason for it. When we walked through the doors in the first week of January 2013, society faced the same issues it did in December 2012.

The world's central banks continue to dole out money as if it were candy, unemployment rates in most of the world remain high, and companies continue to ask fewer workers to do more for less. With the exception of the

recent silver lining in China — where growth is hopefully accelerating — most workers probably feel as if they have been riding a stationary bike for the past four years, pedaling faster and faster, yet not advancing.

No matter. We arrive at our workplaces in the first week of January filled with more enthusiasm than we had 10 days before. Why? Hope and human nature have entered the picture. We want to be inspired. We want to be optimistic. We want to grow, learn and be developed. And we want to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

Leadership is all about creating this once-a-year feeling every day — regardless of whether the team is winning or losing.

Leaders listen, learn and then lead. They anticipate, navigate and communicate. In good times, team members look to the leader for guidance and praise, and in difficult times they turn to the leader for assurance. Communication informs, persuades, guides and assures, as well as inspires. Leaders communicate frequently, with passion, through stories that connect emotionally with others.

Leaders listen, rather than simply hearing; they speak, rather than just talking. Leaders inquire, not question; before they speak, they observe. Leaders reveal more of themselves, allowing others to see their soul.

The actions of leaders are ultimately more lasting than their words. In fact, more important than what they say is how they say it. The role of the leader is much more than merely relaying information contained in tables, charts and slides; it's about being the message.

There are no better examples of “being the message” than T. Boone Pickens, the legendary oilman, corporate raider, alternative energy pioneer and hedge fund manager, or A.G. Lafley, former chairman and chief executive of Procter & Gamble. Both are highlighted in this issue of *Korn/Ferry Briefings on Talent & Leadership*. As you will read, Pickens is a man who can tell a good story and, at a vibrant and fit 84, he's done it more than once. Lafley discusses strategy — during his 10 years leading P&G, the company added \$100 billion in shareholder value.

In *Briefings*, Korn/Ferry shows how companies can grow faster by focusing on developing executives first, markets second. Because stress is inextricably linked to these times, we decided to tackle it. Whether it comes from sprinting for a plane or from running in place in this listless economy, staffers are fatigued, which drags down morale. Research not only shows there are ways to cope with stress, but also indicates that leaders at the top



of an organization are often far less stressed than the workers reporting to them. This insight sheds light on better ways to lead, and it illustrates why it is important for bosses to listen and to empathize with those they lead.

Also, one of our regular contributors, David Berreby, takes a look at the way humans remember events and discusses what researchers are now coming to realize — while our brains do compute, we are not computers. Our memories tend to be changeable, and how we feel today determines to a certain extent the way we recall what happened yesterday. Finally, *Briefings* takes a look at MIT's Media Lab, one of the most creative places on earth. In choosing its new leader, MIT went beyond its academic comfort zone and hired Joichi Ito, a brilliant, iconoclastic, venture capital investor and technologist who never finished college. Ito is a global citizen. He was born in Japan, grew up in Detroit and worked in Tokyo, Silicon Valley, Boston and Dubai.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Briefings*, finding reasons to be hopeful and inspired — and bring that optimism and enthusiasm into the movie you're living every day, so that 12 months from now you can say it was, indeed, a very good show. 