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Improving Communication on Human Rights

*A Guide to Using Audio-Visual Means
of Communication and Building Your
(Social) Media Presence*



Editor: Toni Skorić



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**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.
Central Europe and the Baltic States

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Media Presence

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WHAT'S INSIDE?

Communicating Human Rights in a Challenging Working Environment

Educating people about their rights and responsibilities and unhindered reporting on human rights violations are vital prerequisites for creating strong liberal democracies. However, individuals, groups or organisations dedicated to this goal can face serious challenges in the countries in which they work. Populist authoritarian regimes restricting access to information, curtailment of media freedom and freedom of expression, disinformation and defamation campaigns aimed at delegitimizing the work of human rights defenders often make the task of effectively communicating, promoting and protecting human rights very difficult. With the COVID-19 pandemic replacing in-person gatherings and meetings with virtual ones, it is becoming harder to support and reach out to people who have experienced human rights abuses and educate them about their rights.

In order for us to still be able to do that, we need to discover and acquaint ourselves with more effective ways of communication. Knowing how to use and keep abreast of **audio-visual means of communication** and **social media**, as well as building a good **relationship with the media**, are important skills for raising awareness for your cause and reaching out to a wider public.

This publication will show you how to use audio-visual storytelling and audience targeting to get your message across and will provide you with practical takeaways for managing social media and media relations.

It can also help you define your starting point in terms of working environment, communication obstacles you currently face and channels at your disposal as well as help you prepare a communication strategy for your upcoming projects.

You can also use this publication in your human rights education and outreach activities, especially if your goal is to increase the visibility of your work, mobilize people or raise awareness for your cause.

Before you start worrying about the lack of financial means, technical skills or human resources in your organisation, this guide is here to show you that it is much less about the equipment, large teams and number of communication channels, and more about knowing what to say and understanding the medium you are going to present it through.

Thinking and moving outside of our “social bubble”, creating an environment of non-discrimination on social media and providing media with reliable information can bring us one step closer to a more informed, understanding and democratic society.

The publication “Improving Communication on Human Rights” is here to guide you through that process.

- Toni Skorić, Editor



(VISUAL)
STORYTELLING
FOR RIGHTS DEFENDERS

How to Stop Worrying and Learn to Love the Drama

By David Djambazov

Introduction

“If you really want to communicate something, even if it’s just an emotion or an attitude, let alone an idea, the least effective and least enjoyable way is directly. It only goes in about an inch. But if you can get people to the point where they have to think a moment what it is you’re getting at, and then discover it, the thrill of discovery goes right through the heart.”

In 1964, just after the release of his cult film *Dr. Strangelove*, famed director Stanley Kubrick was speaking to Joseph Heller, author of *Catch 22*, when he formulated this profound, yet simple explanation for storytelling’s powerful spell on audiences.

What the idea boils down to is that speaking at the audience does not work. Instead, crafting a journey and conferring upon the audience the role of a trusted witness is a vital necessity.

Surprisingly, while being a good audience is innate to us all, the storytelling mindset seems to run counter to many of our instincts for sharing information. That’s the reason human rights communication often seems to fall on deaf ears, or in the best-case amounts to preaching to the choir. Perhaps the difficulty stems simply from the fact that each of us lives in our own head and by default sees the world from our own perspective. Whatever the reason, the art of good communication is an acquired skill.

I would like to offer a few tips on how to begin thinking about communication

that respects the audience and has a real chance of carrying a resonant message.

Get out of your head

Thinking as a human rights defender is not only different from thinking as a successful communicator, but very often the two might seem downright incompatible. Where a defender’s preoccupation is with many important details like correcting injustice, with changing the legal framework of the problem or with manipulating the bureaucratic mechanisms for improving a given situation, good communicators obsess about two very different things - audience and story - in that order. To make things worse, what audiences want is often something very different from an efficient layout of the factual landscape.

To bridge this gap in communication, human rights defenders need to first get as far away as possible from the very things that make them good at what they do - their expert knowledge and their passion for the principles underlying human rights. Then they need to honestly ask the question, “Who do I want to hear me?”

Target the smallest possible audience

When speaking to human rights defenders about their communication strategy, I often encounter the notion that because human rights are universal, a universal message seeking the widest possible audience is necessary. That is not the case, far from it.

One of the most successful modern political communication techniques employed by successful election campaigns and, worryingly, populist illiberal regimes all over the world, has been “microtargeting”. It builds on the idea that the probability that a given political message will be well received is proportional to the alignment of that message to the beliefs and values of the intended individual recipient.

Wait! We’re not trying to manipulate voters, are we? No, we’re not, but changing society is about working with people’s minds and predispositions. We could do worse than to study the techniques used by populists to motivate people to go against their own economic or personal interests in voting for them.

The big idea is that by focusing on a small audience for whom the storytelling and the message definitely work, a human rights communicator can achieve three very important goals. The first is to deeply understand the mind-set and motivation of people outside their bubble. The second is to learn how to hone in on the message, so it does indeed work for the intended audience. The third is to discover how the target audience could act as a willing conduit for the message in their network - a more powerful endorsement than any other form of media boosting.

What is the value proposition?

In order for the communication to gain traction in the first place, there needs to be a clear notion of the value proposition for the target audience. This can be a difficult idea for many human rights defenders who see their cause as limited to a direct declaration and upholding of unalienable, self-evident rights and freedoms. While in some circumstances that can certainly be an important and worthy stand to make, influencing outcomes is a complex task that is often

more effectively served by taking a more subtle approach.

Going back to the idea of the smallest possible audience, a “value proposition” is the one thing a particular group of people will most appreciate about either the communication itself, or the message encoded in it. If they laugh, if they feel smarter, if they feel intrigued - those are all examples of value propositions, but the most powerful proposition of all, and hardest to implement, is to create a strong emotional connection. This is where storytelling can work its magic.

Narrative structure

What we consider human culture is estimated to be nearly 50 thousand years old. Yet, people have been writing information down only for the last 10% of that period. So there must be some other powerful method for connecting people across space and for passing important information and ideas about the world down through time. Of course, we had spoken language, but I’d argue that as important as language is for communicating in everyday interactions, storytelling exists on an altogether different plane of communication, for which language is only one vehicle. In fact, there are many examples of storytelling that do not involve language at all - from cave paintings to music to Japanese Butoh theatre.¹

The big idea here is that storytelling evolved as a function of the way the human mind works, intertwining important, useful survival information with powerful emotional signals. In the brain, the process of consuming stories mimics the mechanisms involved in the formation of knowledge from living experiences. In a sense, rooting for the “Little Mermaid” as a child listening to Andersen’s story is more akin to falling from your first real bicycle than to sitting through any

¹ Butoh began in 1960s Japan as a new dance-theater form created by Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno. The two kanji characters that form Butoh translate to dance and step, though originally it was called ankoku butoh, or ‘dance of darkness’.

elementary school lesson. Which do you think you're more likely to remember 20 years later?

The experience of engaging with a well-told story is profound and formative. Understanding how that process works is key to successfully communicating

anything beyond the most pragmatic information.

Since fairy tales are perhaps the purest form of storytelling that has survived and thrived on the journey from the caves to modernity, it's worth examining their basic structure.



Once upon a time there was a hero... and every day the hero would do a set of things... until one day something changed... and because of this the hero tries to achieve something... and because of the hero's actions there are consequences that make achieving the goal even harder... until finally, the hero has an epiphany... and ever since that day, the hero's epiphany sets the new state of the world and carries within itself a deeper knowledge addressed to the audience.²

Seems so simple, yet if you look for it, you can find this structure everywhere - from the Brothers Grimm to Milos Forman's movies. Why does that particular framework work so well? And why isn't it obvious to the audience?

The short answer is that narrative structure is invisible when it takes the audience on a journey they are willing to make. There are some very basic, almost trivial facts that this structure builds on, but that's exactly what makes it so powerful. Let's do a quick breakdown.

People care most about other people, especially if they can identify with those other people. This is why having

a relatable "hero" or protagonist in the story is so crucial. The protagonist doesn't need to be human, but the use of anthropomorphization can give the audience an emotional hold even to some abstract concept. A good example is the animated film *Inside Out*³, where the main characters are feelings.

Next, the hero must confront a problem. Without this step there can be no story and consequently no storytelling. People are hardwired to want to learn from the misfortune of others. Give them a hero to root for and a big problem they understand, and they will go with you to the end of the world.

² See *Invisible Ink*, by Brian McDonald, Talking Drum, LLC, 2017

³ *Inside Out* (2015), dir. Pete Docter, produced by Pixar Animation Studios

The protagonist must be a fighter. If they struggle mightily to overcome the problem, their efforts in the face of failure are going to make the audience care much more than any easy success. As the going gets tougher, the emotional stakes for the audience go higher.

Until the moment when the protagonist finds the key. This is a critical moment. The best stories successfully walk a very fine line here - precisely when the problem appears insurmountable to the audience, the hero undergoes a credible, meaningful transformation and resolves the situation. Notice that I did not say "solves the problem". That could happen in the more obvious storylines, but at the highest level of the craft, often the epiphany is that the obvious problem is not as important as the subtle, hidden issue that has motivated the story all along. In this case, we see what Aristotle might have meant by *catharsis*⁴ in the mind of the audience. They will now replay the entire experience from the perspective of this new realization and discover what the story has been about all along. They will learn and through the emotional experience, be themselves transformed.

When this process occurs, on a physiological level the neurotransmitters dopamine and oxytocin are released - literally creating waves of pleasure and empathy.⁵

The key notion is that the narrative structure has given the audience the emotional investment and twists they crave, but the final reveal, the answer to the question "so what?" is unexpected, perhaps both devastating and uplifting.

Incremental steps

When all is said and done, even with the incredible power of storytelling, changing deeply held beliefs is a very hard thing to

do. The main reason can again be found in the human brain - people are wired to build exceptionally stable representations of the world and stake their whole psychological identity on maintaining and defending them. Good communicators understand this predicament and like skilful navigators find ways to make the headwind work for them, rather than sail directly into it.

Because human rights defenders are such passionate believers in their cause, it is difficult for them to let go of the idea that human rights should easily become a universally recognized good if only people knew more about the subject. But that is precisely what they must do. Once free from the dogma, it becomes easier to see the reality of the task and to learn to appreciate the concept of incremental change.

The big idea of incremental change is that each small step in the right direction makes the next step more likely. If a big task seems impossible, say legalizing gay marriage in a deeply conservative society, most probably there is no one sweeping action that can change that. However, a series of deliberate, well thought out and executed small steps can tilt the scales surprisingly quickly. The goal of good communication on human rights should be to build out and contribute to such a strategy.

Conclusion

Sure, the theory of storytelling is all great and exciting and budding writers and filmmakers would do well to consider it, but what does it really have to do with the reality of human rights defenders' everyday struggles to help vulnerable people facing hostile laws, governments and public opinion? And what about technical skills - shouldn't we be focusing

⁴ From Poetics: "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude... through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation [catharsis] of these emotions."

⁵ *Why Inspiring Stories Make Us React: The Neuroscience of Narrative*, by Paul J. Zak, *Cerebrum*, 2015 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4445577/>

on the basics of shooting, editing and publishing instead?

These are fair questions. My answer is that storytelling has everything to do with convincing other people that they too should care and defend human rights. Yes, it is very useful to know how to work with a camera and even better to know the intricacies of editing, but if you have time to learn one thing, it would better be where to find and how to tell a powerful story.

The great news is that human rights defenders are on the frontlines of the human struggle for dignity. That is the stuff most important stories are made of. The rules of storytelling do not just apply to Hollywood blockbusters or arthouse darlings. They work anytime an audience engages with content. And they work most powerfully when an audience is asked to connect to real people and their stories. That's what great documentary films are made of.

The intrinsic quality that gives human rights defenders the potential to be great storytellers and communicators is their empathy both for people who need protection and for those who want to deny it. Communicating is about bringing those two groups together and showing them that the most human thing of all is to connect and help the person on the other side by going with them on a journey. Bon voyage!





SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Networks Give Us a Voice, So Let's Talk Out Loud

By Adriana Černá

Social networks have given a voice to each of us. With the creation of social networks, everyone in the world with an Internet connection was given the chance to become a medium. Such an opportunity is perhaps incomparable to anything in the past.

But because people are just... people, they have taken this opportunity mostly to share memes or, in case of communication professionals, to sell their products.

We can complain about it, we may not like it, but it's just a reality. Let's learn a few tricks on how to saddle social networks and use them again for something beneficial - to defend human rights.

The importance of the art of communication on the Internet is still growing, especially in the time of the coronavirus pandemic, when we were all forced to move our lives online, there was a lot of competition on social networks. You certainly know how difficult it is to get attention and especially participants for your online event.

The issue of human rights is very important to society as a whole, it is our responsibility to make people aware of it and not to make human rights a subject so complex that it is only addressed by elites.

Success on social networks depends on many different factors. After all, there are certain rules that, if you master, success will come. OK let's go! We will discuss

how to manage on-going communication on your channels and how to make a successful campaign beyond the normal daily work on social networks.

Hard work everyday

Social networks do not replace the web. Websites are your bulletin board where the visitor will find everything he needs to know. In contrast, social networks are used to inform people about what is going on right now with you. Posts do not have a long life and users pay a fleeting moment of attention to them. Facebook robots (algorithms) know if people like and respond to your content and show it to more and more people accordingly. It is true that "the more...the more".

If you understand the business model of social media and can **look at your content through the eyes of its algorithms**, you can deduce what the network wants from you.

It wants you to have content that people will enjoy and to spend more time on the network (and not go to other places on the Internet) and the robot wants to rely on you to supply it with such content on a regular basis.

You must also be able to **look at your content critically through the user's eyes** and give them a reason to pay attention to your content. You have to grab their attention, arouse their emotions and create the urgent feeling that they have to tell other people about it.

A few simple rules on social media

• **Choose your social network.** If you have limited capacity, choose one network and do a good job there. It's much better than breaking capacity and doing bad work on all networks. You don't have to be everywhere, be where your target group is.

• **Prepare a strategy.** The fewer resources you have, the better strategy you need. Ask yourself what you want to achieve. Find out how much time and how many people you have and what expertise those people have. Decide how often you will post. Identify the topics you want to address and do it systematically. You have to be systematic!

• **Don't write a detective story.** We compete for the attention of users on social networks, and you only have a small second of a user's attention while frantically scrolling the feed. Therefore, always place the most important message at the very beginning of the message - in the first line of text or in the first seconds of the video. Don't leave the resolution for the end.

• **Remember that regularity is more than frequency.** The reach of your posts will grow when social media algorithms can rely on you. It doesn't matter so much whether you contribute three times a week or three times a day, but you have to do it regularly.

• **Build a community.** Your work doesn't end with the post, social networks are an interactive tool, and their purpose is for people to communicate with each other. Take care of people who are interested in your topic. They must feel that you care about them. Respond, like, thank and be proactive.

• **Be innovative.** Look for new ways to engage people, and most importantly, take advantage of the opportunities that the network gives you. Every time Facebook introduces a new product, start using it, be the first, the network will appreciate it - it always prioritizes posts in new formats over others.

Something more than hard work everyday

A campaign is a time-limited intensive communication that is created for a specific purpose, trying to achieve something. No matter how many resources you have, **a good campaign can be created for little money**, just like a big-budget campaign can be a failure. Don't be afraid to campaign, each of us can become a star on social networks (and that is what is so beautiful about them!).

How to make a successful campaign

The most important thing is to clearly **define what you want to achieve** with the campaign. Depending on your goals, you choose the channels and the way you distribute your narratives.

Your campaign will look different depending on whether your goal is to fundraise money to support your projects, draw attention to a specific topic, or influence systemic change in society - for example, to achieve a change in the law. It is always necessary to clearly articulate this; it is not enough to have a vague feeling that you know what you are doing.

If you have well thought out campaign goals, be sure to set **metrics to measure your campaign success**. Such indicators can be statistics generated from social networks (reach - number of users affected, cost of performance, number of shares, total number of video views or new fans of the site, etc.), or, for example, the number of media outputs that will be generated by your campaign or the above-mentioned change in the law.

Depending on your own resources, you can have the campaign prepared by an **external company**, or you can invent it and realize it „**in house**”, i.e. by yourself.

External company:

Standard communication and advertising agencies usually do not have much

experience in communicating sensitive or controversial topics and do not have as deep knowledge of the topic as you have. On the other hand, they can come up with an idea that you can't come up with in your own team, because you lack an overview and a view from the outside.

Cooperation with the agency can be beneficial, but it has many risks, which can be eliminated mainly by thorough briefing of creative directors and enough time for overall alignment. The biggest enemy in preparing a good campaign is the rush (although it almost always happens) - so my advice is to start preparing everything well in advance, if possible.

In-house campaign:

Preparing a campaign on your own requires, above all, realistic expectations. The smaller your resources, the better you need to define and plan all aspects of your campaign. The advantage of preparing an „in house” campaign is, on the one hand, your expertise in the topic and, on the other hand, your communication experience, which arose from your long-term practice.

Follow-up communication

The work does not end with the launch of the campaign. A successful campaign is one that will elicit a response, and how the response will be, can never be fully planned in advance. If you have an experienced team, you can roughly estimate the reaction of the audience and you can prepare for it.

It is essential to have communication materials prepared in advance, such as answers to all possible questions people may have in connection with the campaign. In the post-launch period, communication can be very hectic, it is strategic to have prepared and thought-out development scenarios in advance. Unleash your imagination and prepare a script for less likely situations such as your campaign becoming viral and think about what weaknesses your campaign has, what could go wrong and prepare

for a scenario in which you will have to approach crisis communication.

Going viral

We all want to “go viral”, but the truth is that virality is basically impossible to predict, it arises from the concurrence of many circumstances, and no one can predict which viral sensation will come next. No one.

Especially with campaigns with big budgets, it sometimes happens you literally feel the awkward effort to become viral. But believe me, especially in communicating such socially important topics as human rights, authenticity and sincere enthusiasm are more important. And a little creativity combined with a lot of work.

What makes a campaign successful?

- **Timing.** Relate your campaign to a specific time or opportunity. Do you know when your topic will be discussed in parliament? Is there an interesting anniversary coming up? Will there be a regular, important event soon? Ride the wave of attention.

- **Tell a story.** The success of your campaign depends on whether it can evoke emotion in people. Personal stories told by specific people with whom the audience can empathize can evoke such emotions.

- **Create nice content.** Honestly, social networks are quite a superficial place; few people go there to study. Keep videos, photos or info graphics looking good.

- **Tell people what you want from them.** Content is clearly being successfully spread when it gives people the feeling that they can do something about the described situation, and influence it in some way. From signing a petition to, for example, a boycott of certain products. Engage the people.



Newsstand

MEDIA RELATIONS

Building a House From the Ground Up

By Marek Hlavica

We have all seen it happen. Someone raises his or her voice in anger: „We're invisible! We don't get enough media coverage! No one knows about all the great stuff we're doing!" The feeling of being unappreciated and unrecognized by the public provokes various ideas about how things could be improved: „Let's do a presser! A charity ball with celebrities! Chain ourselves to Parliament's gates!" Most of these ideas are fuelled by the desire to make one's way to the fore, quickly and loudly. The implications are usually not considered at the moment.

Get your goal right

First, you need to understand that making yourself visible is not the goal. Surely you know someone who has made a living from being in the spotlight and would do anything to stay there. But most businesses and NGOs have a different mission, and media communication needs to be built on realistic goals. The goal is not to „be on TV" but, for example, to raise funds from donors or increase turnout at an event. Such goals are measurable, and you align all your activities, communication being one of them, around those measurables.

A TIP:

What if you have no specific needs defined? Maybe you only want to raise awareness of your organisation or the issue it is focused on. This is your task then and you need to think about how you will know that you have delivered on it. One thing that can help, for example, is a simple before-and-after questionnaire disseminated by volunteers to the people whose opinion you value the most.

Define where you are and where you want to be

We do not live in a void. How far is your goal, is it realistic? To what extent can the media help you achieve it? What will help and what will hamper your effort? This is a further set of questions you should think through. Maybe you will succeed in opening a new, attractive topic for the media. Maybe the topic has been discussed many times before and you will need to find a fresh new perspective to look at it. Maybe you can garner allies (search the media for publicity of your topic) among editors-in-chief, but you also might come across strong opponents.

A TIP:

The media's interest is volatile. The fact that you consider your topic to be important does not mean much. Keep an eye on topics that are resonating across the media, and look for relatedness. Try to find supporters among public figures currently enjoying the media's attention. Offer them a topic that is attractive for them.

Define whom you want to persuade

Everyone? The more people the better? Naturally, but not even the richest corporations have enough resources to reach out to all mankind. Neither do you. Instead, try to target those who will help you disseminate your ideas whether on social media or by the word of mouth. Focus your effort on decision-makers and influencers with authority. Find or guess what kind of media they consume.

A TIP:

To specify your target audience, you can use basic socio-demographics such as age, education level, location, income, etc. Yet, it is sometimes better to use contextual criteria such as: those who play computer games, those who go to a multi-racial / multi-ethnic school, etc.

Why on earth?

The goal of your communication is to make members of your target group do or think something you want them to. Mostly, they will not do it just because you let them know you wish so. Look for other reasons why those you are trying to persuade should come over to your side. These will be the arguments you will use in your media communication.

A TIP:

Look at your communication through the eyes of the person you are trying to persuade. Verify your hypothesis in several interviews with members of your target group. Make sure you understand their motivation, but do not fight over it – it is useless.

Who do they trust?

The source of information can significantly influence your success or failure. Focus on those media that are most relevant to your target audience. Use those speakers, third parties, or institutions that are perceived as trustworthy by your target audience. Again, the logic of „the more the better” may not apply when it comes to information sources. Do not waste your energy and only focus on those sources that will deliver the biggest impact.

A TIP:

Having experienced something on your own, seeing it with your own eyes is the most powerful persuader. The next best thing is those who you trust – friends, parents and relatives. Their recommendation is stronger than TV coverage or a video on Facebook. The media are losing authority

worldwide; still, they have the advantage of a wide reach.

Tools and channels

We have come back to the beginning here – we know what we want to achieve and how to persuade our target audience, what to communicate, to whom and why. The next question is HOW? A press conference or selective one-on-one meetings with influential journalists? A costly, opulent event, which is a feast for the eyes and TV cameras, or a heart-wrenching intimate story? Television, press, Internet, or radio?

A TIP:

TV and video messages are only impactful when there is something to show. A mere talking head will not do. Statistics and facts are better presented in writing – in the press, Internet articles and blogs. Radio communication requires a stand-out, charismatic presenter.

Can you afford it?

Let your creativity run wild. That is, until you count the cost. Do you know the price? If not, ask those who are more experienced. Do you know the time intensity? You might not know exactly how much time it takes to deliver something. Do you have the capability to realize your ideas, a team big enough, with enough experience and professionalism? Do you know where to turn for help, for a free-of-charge service? Or will there be additional spend and is it worth it? By the end of this excruciating exercise you will have eliminated any nonsense and will have chosen only those tools and channels through which you will be able to achieve your goals, without ruining your budget.

A TIP:

A number of topics have a potential to appeal to volunteer communities and organizations that can provide a lot of services for free. If an activity only requires their time and effort, there will be no costs incurred. Careful though, even big businesses (such

as audio-video producers) use materials and equipment, which they need to buy or hire. So these things will not come for free and you should bear in mind that if someone provides a 'free' service, there still might be some costs - you should ask about it beforehand.

We did it!

So you're finished, OK? Just one more thing! When you have done all the writing and developing, ran all errands and made all payments necessary, you drop from exhaustion, looking forward to some time off. But this is the best moment to reach for the piece of paper on which you wrote down your measurable goal(s). Have you raised the sum of money expected? Was the turnout as big as planned? No? What went wrong? Maybe your goal was not realistic enough and you would be more conservative now. Maybe you did not get something right or did not follow through. Now, with all these things still fresh in your mind, you need to analyse them for future needs. And only then get some rest.

A TIP:

Market and opinion research agencies conduct regular surveys, in which a few additional questions can be included. If you need to find out if there has been a shift in opinion, try to ask them for assistance or partnership. Ideally, you want a sample before and after your campaign.

Your key message

Before any appearance in the media, remember your time will be limited, the audience's attention likely to be superficial and memory poor. If you think now that you have the opportunity to speak, you should reel off everything that is on your mind, you will end up saying nothing in fact. That is why you need to undergo the painful process of uncompromisingly cutting off all unnecessary information until you reach the bone. What is left is called a key message. It usually takes the form of one up to

three simple (not composite) sentences, which most accurately describe what you want your audience to remember. These sentences must be carefully crafted and honed in on, with each word being meaningful. There is no place for relativizing or generic, empty claims in a key message. What is it good for?

- You know exactly what you want to say
- You must say it, whatever the question
- It is good to repeat it
- If the media appearance involves more than one person, this will be a unifying guideline for each of the presenters

Examples and mistakes:

*„In our country, the right to freedom of expression is often infringed, although people are granted this right by the Constitution.” – **Mistake: generic, relativizing***

*„Mr X was prevented from participating in the TV debate, on grounds of a false claim that his political party had not been registered in time. In fact, this was negligence or bad faith on the part of the public official who made the entry in the register with several days' delay even though the filing was timely and in line with law, which Mr X proved repeatedly.” – **Mistake: too complex***

*„Mr X was deprived of the right to make a public statement due to the state's negligence or bad faith.” – **Good example***

A key message does not have to be written down or recited word for word, even though it can. Further circumstances regarding a topic do not have to be withheld but the key message must be mentioned both at the beginning and the end of a statement, position, article, etc. It must not get drowned out in „information mush.”

Say it – prove it

The golden rule of media communication is: Make a statement and make it

indisputable. For each message, you need to stock up with evidence. There are two types of evidence:

Rational evidence

Statistics, documents, conclusions in scientific studies, verifiable or well-known statements made by respected authorities...

Using the above-mentioned example, it would be the statistic of how many times Mr X was prevented from intervening in a political debate; a document - filing for registration; a confirmation by the public authority that the entry was indeed delayed, etc.

Emotional evidence

This type of evidence is usually to be found more in audio-visuals since emotional perception leads to more permanent changes in the brain, with faster and deeper imprints as compared to analytical perception.

A story, expressive words, emotions, charismatic presenter, surprise (shock, conflict)...

In the above-mentioned example, it would be the portrayal of Mr X's conflict with the public official or a TV representative, confrontation of them; a video showing the charismatic X colourfully depicting his failure in a story ending badly, etc.

Preparation is 80% of your success

It is a dangerous mistake to think that one's confident and convincing performance in the media is to be credited to their brilliant improvisation skills. Not even the most seasoned of routinists are immune against challenging situations they might be faced with, as evidenced by all those awkward, embarrassing or sleep-inducing media appearances made by politicians and party representatives – the very people for whom effective media communication is a key success factor.

It is therefore a must that everyone with the ambition to spread their ideas and make a difference through the media (which they usually cannot fully control) makes careful preparation. Come up with a plan which defines:

- The purpose of your communication – the goal
- Who you will address and why – the target audience
- What you want to say and why – the key message
- Which channels should be used to maximize the effect – your media plan
- What you need to make it happen – a budget and a team
- How much time you have – a timetable
- How you will know you have succeeded/delivered on the goal - metrics

Of course, in this highly variable world, any of the above components may suddenly change: sometimes due to a change in circumstances, sometimes because an unexpected opportunity has come your way. Then you need to amend your plan or replace it with a new one. This only highlights the importance of having a plan - without it, there is nothing to change or replace.

You will also have to put up with two frustrating circumstances:

- Only very rarely will you be able to meet your initial expectations, achieve or exceed your goals. Approach your plan development with not scepticism, but realistic ambitions. Still, be prepared that you will not completely achieve them. There are usually so many variables at play, which are likely to hamper your initial plan that you cannot factor in each and every one of them.
- As a result, your communication project will never be complete. Never.

Once your message is out and moving, and its movers as well, nothing can be stopped - the communication is ongoing and mutating even when you are asleep. The question is whether you still have the ambition to influence it.

However, it is only a small part of the process that you can moderate to a great extent. Many times over, communication

has proven to be a history changer. People will more easily remember tragic mistakes and blunders, although you can find more examples that are positive, it is just that they are less thrilling read. People love bad news, catastrophes, horrific happenings...that is, if they themselves are not involved. This is also something worth remembering when you venture into the world of media relations.



About the authors



Adriana Černá

Adriana Černá works as a digital strategist and is a member of the executive board at the Czech NGO People in Need (the largest NGO in Eastern Europe). Adriana has extensive experience in communicating challenging and complex topics as human rights, the importance of international development cooperation and need for social cohesion, in form that people understand and accept. She is an expert in strategic and crisis communication with knowledge of advanced marketing approaches.



David Djambazov

David Djambazov is a filmmaker and documentary film producer based in Sofia, Bulgaria. Over the past ten years with his company Tanuki Films he has journeyed across continents and genres on an exciting quest to find and tell stories. From working with indie-cinema darlings Bob Pulicni and Shari Springer-Berman in New York, to doing undercover investigative work at the border between Bulgaria and Turkey, boring is not something he knows. His storytelling is also informed by diverse life experiences like working with gravitational waves as an undergraduate at Caltech or trading bonds on Wall Street. He calls Prague's famous film school FAMU alma mater. More recently he might be found investigating turtles with Arke, his young son, at the local park.



Marek Hlavica

Marek Hlavica is a Czech senior expert on communication who started his career as a writer and reporter in the general interest magazine Mladý svět (Young World). After 9 years he left the publishing house at the position of Managing Director to help to start up the first private TV station in the former Eastern Block (TV Nova 1994) as Marketing and Communication Director. He became a partner of Impact PR Agency in the late nineties. As a managing partner, Marek provided his consultancy to many global brands and organisations as well as local firms and institutions. In the beginning of the new millennium Marek came over to the client side working for companies like Philip Morris, Citibank, ČEZ (national utility company) and Plzeňský Prazdroj (currently ASAHI breweries). In the last 15 years, Marek worked as an independent consultant. He also managed Prague International Advertising Festival. In 2020 Marek was re-elected Director of Association of Communication Agencies.

About the publisher



European Liberal Forum

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 46 member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard. ELF was founded in 2007 to strengthen the liberal and democratic movement in Europe. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen. ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European. We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and other experts. At the same time, we are also close to, but independent from, the ALDE Party and other Liberal actors in Europe. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different actors.



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The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom is a political foundation in the Federal Republic of Germany, founded in 1958 and devoted to the promotion of liberal principles and to political education. The goal of the foundation is to advance the principles of freedom and dignity for all people in all areas of society, both in Germany and abroad. The Friedrich Naumann Foundation is active in over 60 countries around the world, spanning Europe, Africa, Asia, North and Central America. Within these project countries, our regional offices work to support human rights, rule of law, and democracy. In order to achieve these aims, the foundation seeks to foster both international and transatlantic dialogue through conferences, study tours, and publications, among other means. In addition, the foundation supports local, regional, and national initiatives which advance the rights of minorities, the democratic control of security forces, and the strengthening of international human rights coalitions.



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