

## Communication Consulting: CMST 5600

Journals by Harsh J. Gagoomal

### Journal #1 - 1/24/2022 - "Don't be a dud."

I'm struck by the phrase, "Tell the truth, tell it all, and say it first." Ethically, I find no fault in it – heck, I even find it inspiring - and yet, there seems to be an inherent conflict that arises when communicating between the values of transparency and confidentiality. How much truth is too much truth to divulge?

In our first Communication Consulting class, we learned about the difference between reactive and proactive statements, which are both needed in different contexts. But what are those contexts? Perhaps it all goes back to truth (in some cases phrased as "evidence" or "knowledge") and the question, how much truth do we have access to? If you have access to a lot of truth, you may want to issue a proactive statement, as the mere existence of you possessing truth means that the truth is obtainable. However, if you don't have much truth, you might be better off crafting several different reactive statements to issue when the time is right. An example of a reactive statement is one created when an affiliate has yet to be convicted of a crime and there's a lack of evidence against them. In this example, a company might adopt a rights-based approach to their communication and hedge their bets on the legality that their affiliate is "innocent until proven guilty." But what if their bet doesn't pay off? What if the affiliate is found guilty? What do they do then? I pose these questions while perusing article after article about Elizabeth Holmes and I still wonder: When the trial concluded, what did Elizabeth Holmes's investors have to say? Were they still "Holmies"?

I've also been wondering about the two rules we covered in class regarding issuing internal statements:

1. "Someone will send it to the media" (...so internal statements are essentially unofficial press releases).
2. You don't want the members of your company to hear the news from the media (you want to be proactive).

How early should a company aim to send out an internal statement? What is the usual time lapse between an internal statement being shared and the media sharing it? How much of a time buffer do you aim for? For instance, if you release an internal statement 15 minutes before the media shares the news... have you really been *that* proactive? Wouldn't employees still feel blindsided/shortchanged? These are some questions that ran through my head when doing an in-class "Scruples" exercise about roleplaying as an Internal Communications manager and being tested with withholding news of planned layoffs. The "right" response to the prompt was to simply withhold the information. As I shifted in seat, the words, "Tell the truth, tell it all, and say it first"

echoed in my dome. Yet again, the battle between transparency and confidentiality had played out, and this time, confidentiality had won.

Journal #2 - 1/31/2022 - *"You're going to sound like a jerk if you don't talk about Human Cost."*

"What's the worst thing your business does or could be accused of doing?" It's a hard but necessary question to grapple with. Without having done that reflection a business leaves itself susceptible to media scrutiny, market shifts due to changed public perception, and a souring of company culture. Always be prepared. This, of course, applies to individuals too. Joe Rogan is a prime example of one of the latest celebrities to face the reckoning of a wave of cancel culture. Up to this point in time, I've been weighing the positives and negatives of the sea of cancel culture we find ourselves treading in. Positive: people shift their behavior (or at least people pretend to shift their behavior). Negative: People are walking on eggshells and divisions between people widen as the act of canceling takes precedence over the act of communication.

Then again, is pretending a good thing? Is placating people just for the sake of self-preservation a positive outcome? And if almost everything seems like it's on the verge of being canceled, how can people be their authentic selves? I mean, there is something admirable about hearing someone own their mistakes, their hot garbage. I think I'd take that over the interchangeable, disingenuous canned responses that have become dull common practice. To Marci's point, it is refreshing when a response "sounds like a real person said it." Why is it so hard to be human?

I'm also very curious about what my peers would think of [this response](#). Does it sound genuine?

Journal #3 – 2/7/2022 - *"It was just a nothing-burger of a statement."*

I'm grateful that Michelle Johnson came in and spoke with our class. Some of my biggest takeaways from the discussion are:

- Find a mentor (and the fact that they might not look like you is not a bad thing).
- Job mobility (growth) is sometimes more important than job stability (comfort).
- "Master the art of networking" (with a purpose).
- You want to be in an environment where you can *do your job*. If there are things that are interfering with your ability to do so (organizational culture, inefficient processes, poor management), it might not be the right fit.
- Be humble, be nimble, be good at your job, and be open to feedback.

- If you're the "expert" at your company and you're still early in your career, you might be in over your head.
- Sometimes a media frenzy is an opportunity to educate.
- When negotiating for a job, *get leverage* (aka get more offers than you need).
- Press releases go out *early* before the stock market opens.

Two questions I have are:

- How do you deal with communication situations where time is of the essence, yet you have internal disagreements on how to respond? What happens in the "real world"?
- What is the relationship between press releases and the stock market? Can you elaborate on how important timing is?

#### Journal #4 – 2/14/2022 - "Who's leading the conversation?"

Timing. Timing can be everything. As someone who often veers down the road of "let's get shit done" impatience, I needed to be reminded that it's important to take things piecemeal when working with a client. When questions arise, it's ok – nay, imperative – to understand that the team doesn't need to go into collective brainstorm problem-solving mode. That process is best left for after the meeting. After all, very few consumers want to see how the meat is made. It's ok to say, "let me think about that" and then, well... to think about that. It's OK. Maybe I've been watching too much *Love is Blind*, but a simple question like, "Why did you say yes?" can clarify what a client and a communications consultant group are working towards and what to not lose sight of. Overcommunicate; yet space out the communication so that it doesn't overwhelm. And, when in doubt, *practice maturity*.

#### Journal #5 – 2/21/2022 - "A generation of challenged writers."

As someone who is interested in public policy, I was inspired to hear Karla's journey. I was inspired that Karla essentially taught herself how to process and understand law. I was inspired that Karla took the initiative to reach out to a legislator and ask to be their speechwriter (amongst assuming a myriad of other roles). And, perhaps most surprisingly, I was inspired to view myself and my abilities in a different way. I never thought that writing could be considered a lost art in today's age. While this is the first communications class I've taken in 8 years, I'm reminded that because I know how to write, I know how to communicate. Karla's words were the lift I needed. During the break, Karla and I briefly spoke about housing and the interconnectedness of the healthcare and housing systems. I'm not sure what my path to working in such systems will be once I graduate, but I imagine it'll be a little bit like Karla's - full of pivoting, brave leaps, and questions.

Question: How do you craft a "memo"? Are there different types of memos that are used depending on the situation? Is there specific formatting we should be aware of?

Journal #6 – 2/28/2022 - *“People didn’t know what was going on in Broadway.”*

Carrie is a Boss (capital B); the kind of boss that empowers their employees to act with autonomy. I loved that one of Carrie’s goals for her team was for them to never have to say, “let me ask my boss,” for such a statement is the antithesis of agency. I also learned that the qualities Carrie was looking for in her employees weren’t the qualities one might immediately expect – “curiosity” and “kindness” were actually more important than a love of fashion because a love of fashion doesn’t equate to being able to engage people and make them feel welcome. Admittedly, I was surprised that Carrie wasn’t focused on growing their business through online ventures and opening more storefronts, but it’s nice to know that not every business has to be built with capitalistic intent.

Question: Do you have any advice on how to communicate what a “communication audit” is (and can be) to an organization that has never heard of such a thing?

Journal #7 – 3/7/2022 - *“A safe place for difficult conversations.”*

Marcus White spoke about the importance of creating space and suggested some best practices to do so:

- 1) Be open about the purpose of the gathering and what we hope will come of it.
- 2) Set ground rules.
- 3) Exploit the white space.

I was particularly drawn to the third role, as it is so simple yet often overlooked. It’s important to craft moments when people can breathe, stretch, laugh, socialize, and connect without external pressures. I’m also curious about what common ground rules are. Sometimes I find that “community agreements” sound good but are not followed. How do you enforce ground rules without policing?

On another note, I loved the initiative that Marcus White spoke as having taken place in South Africa where people from different racial groups hosted dinner for each other. There is a beautiful line between comfort and discomfort. It’s important to venture outside and connect with others. In many ways, food and home serve as a bridge, a gateway to communication.

Journal # 8 – 3/21/2022 - *“A bad snowplow year can ruin a mayor’s career... forever.”*

Alderwoman JoCasta Zamarripa spoke candidly about her political journey and aspirations to retire. It’s a draining profession, especially when you live in a “fishbowl” and you 1) Care deeply about your community and try to be as available as possible for your constituents and 2) Are a minority within the majority. I am glad to have met an

introvert with a passion for public service, as the perception I get from politicians is that most of them are extroverts with a passion for public approval. If I do decide to enter the political fray, Alderwoman JoCasta emphasized the importance of being your “authentic self.” She confessed that she wasn’t living authentically when she concealed her sexuality from the public. Nevertheless, Alderwoman JoCasta garnered support by leading with integrity, hustling to knock on doors, and remaining a consistent, grateful presence in the lives of the people she served. The question I now struggle with is: Could I run for an elected position in a city that I haven’t lived long in? What would my platform and communication strategy be? It would be easy to dismiss or discredit me as someone who did not grow up in the community; I would be an outsider and people could rally behind the idea of “voting local.” How long does it take until someone joins a community, becomes ingratiated, and represents a city? Does the quantity of years matter more than the quality? In case I ever run for office, I sincerely hope so.

Journal # 9 – 3/28/2022 - *“Part of the battle is acting soon enough to be relevant.”*

After speaking about Disney’s slow response to Florida’s 1557 Bill (otherwise regarded as the “Don’t Say Gay” Bill), I have been thinking more about the importance of timely communication and communication that takes a defined social-political position. I disagree with Disney’s CEO Bob Chapek’s statement that “social issues aren’t a business matter.” At their core, human beings are values-driven, so an affront to their values will affect how they support businesses, as evidenced through Disney employees protesting their employer’s initial silence over the 1557 Bill and, on the other end, parents protesting Disney’s “woke” response. You can’t please everyone, can you? That’s an honest question. Is it worth attempting to please everyone? What are some pitfalls you have noticed that people fall into when attempting to do so? What are some success stories, if any? Is it about appealing to common values shared by all?

The other question I have is in response to comments made by Annamarie Scobey-Polacheck, the Director of Corporate Philanthropy at Johnson Controls, when she said that foundations typically don’t give more than 1% of their revenue while simultaneously acknowledging that Johnson Controls “don’t give enough money.” Why not? What’s stopping the foundation from doing so? It is good to know that Johnson Controls’ presence at galas encourages giving from other donors, stimulating a domino effect of giving. In that sense, could giving more than 1% spur a similar domino effect from other foundations? Maybe the competition to give more would create a sense of charitable capitalism. Don’t organizations go to great lengths to look good, or perhaps more so, to not to look bad? One big takeaway from class is, if you do good, try to get someone else to say it first, and then repost/comment on the story. In the world of communication, curating humility appears to be a fine art.

Journal # 10 – 4/4/2022 - *“You can’t just do nothing. Nothing is something.”*

I really hope DEI work isn't a fad. When it's truly developed and embraced, it can be life-affirming and culture-changing. However, sometimes I worry that people just say the right things or show up to DEI trainings to check-the-box. In any case, I'm curious to investigate [DiversityInc](#) and do more research into the field.

Journal # 11 – 4/11/2022 - *“Sell what you think is wonderful.”*

I find it inspiring that Sara Tomlin is reimagining what a cemetery could be. Rebranding a cemetery as an arboretum and finding new and exciting ways to bring the community in? Genius. As a theatre artist, I'm also happy to hear about the perfect pairing that is theatre in the cemetery. The big takeaway for me is that unconventional settings breed creative possibilities. The other takeaway from today's class? Drink scotch and water when you're having a meeting at a bar: The bad taste will help you pace yourself.

Journal # 13 – 4/27/2022 - *“Ask for advice, get a job; ask for a job, get advice.”*

Anthony and Tressa were very helpful at orienting people on how to approach job-hunting. Some of my big takeaways were:

- Let people know when you're getting antsy; maybe then new challenges will arise to keep you engaged.
- When interviewing, reach out to the hiring manager.
- Find out what the culture of a company is: Is it a culture of learning? Do they value hybrid offices? Do they extol the virtues of ping-pong and beer?
- Along these lines, ask behavior questions. It can be insightful (and empowering) to ask a manager how they give feedback and to describe a time their team had a conflict.
- Lastly, when negotiating salary, always ask for 5-10% more; it's a reasonable amount that most companies should have the ability to meet.

Journal # 14 – 5/02/2022 - *“What are you doing to further yourself?”*

Building off the previous week, Lori Ruffing offered invaluable interviewing insights that ranged from the bold (or what I perceived as bold) to the practical (useful reminders or tips). Here's how I categorized them:

<b>The Bold</b>	<b>The Practical</b>
Ask to speak to people who report to your potential manager.	Ask questions.
Bring in your laptop and show your portfolio.	Follow-up.
State why you're fit for the job. Be direct.	Radiate passion (you can't train that).

Never be bored.	Stick it out for one year.
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1. "Identify The Goal"- What is the goal? This is so you can "speak with purpose."
2. "Understand Your Audience" - Who are you communicating with? What are their perspectives/interests/values/statuses?
3. "Communicate The Value" - help people understand what your values are, what values are shared between you, and what the value of the engagement is.
4. "Express The Need" - use shared values to leverage change and the obtaining of goals. Why should we care? Why should we act now?