

Communicators

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Introduction

Being a Professional Communicator is Hard

What makes it particularly difficult is that in today's digital landscape, everyone has access to tools to reach millions – making communicating seem easy. The barriers of entry to communication have crumbled. Gone are the days where freedom of the press was for those who owned one. This radical democratization of communications channels has made connecting to audiences more accessible than ever while at the same time making the task of delivering messages that are heard, understood and felt *exponentially* more challenging. This paradox of the attention economy has put unique and unprecedented pressures on communications professionals.

In many ways, we as communicators have lost sovereignty over our scope of practice. In a world where everyone considers themselves as communicators, we struggle to define and maintain the value, influence and jurisdiction of our function. In my work with thousands of communicators across Canada and around the world, I've consistently observed this pattern, which applies to both internal and external communications practitioners. It often looks like this:

Communicators are War-Weary

Practitioners are exhausted and dispirited, feeling that they constantly have to do battle to do their jobs effectively. It's a struggle to gain access to senior leadership meetings, and to get the financial and staff resources required to meet ever-rising expectations. Not to mention the difficulty in having their strategic counsel seen as legitimate subject matter expertise (as opposed to the pervasive perception that the advice is merely a subjective "take it or leave it" point of view). Communicators are time-poor and starved for recognition of the often-invisible value they contribute to the organizations they serve.

We're Caught in a Chronic Frustration Trap

Communicators are exasperated by a sense that internal clients and executives are never satisfied and have unrelenting unrealistic expectations. At the same time, internal clients often report being consistently unhappy with the quality and responsiveness of the communications function. The familiar routine is that when things go well it's someone else's win, and when they don't, it's the communicator's fault. The cherry on top is that communicators often note that they are the first ones to arrive at the office and the last to leave. They are the ones called in when chaos or crisis strike, and yet their clean up jobs go largely unnoticed and underappreciated.

The Profession Suffers From a Systemic Credibility Deficit

There is an absolutely consistent feeling that relative to other groups such as finance, legal, policy or even marketing, communicators struggle to have the value and legitimacy of their function recognized. This disconnect is most often culturally and structurally entrenched. One of the classic symptoms of this is the far too common practice of parachuting an IT executive into an acting role heading up communications, if the Director is absent or on maternity leave – the reverse of which never happens of course. Similarly, finance or program leaders will be quick to critique a communications strategy or product yet would bristle at the idea of a communications leader providing commentary on their budget spreadsheet or program plan.

Communicators are Stuck in a Vicious Cycle

A universal truth among communications practitioners (and leaders in particular) is that they are spread too thin. With limited resources and small teams, they're forced to work a mile wide and an inch deep. While this has always been a problem, it's been exacerbated by the proliferation of digital tools. There's always a new shiny object to chase, and in the quest to capitalize on new technologies, an insidious and costly form of scope creep sets in. Communicators then find themselves in a dangerous and maddening self-fulfilling prophecy – as

they feverishly scramble to do too much with too few resources, internal clients remain consistently dissatisfied with the results. The consequence? At best they don't involve communicators as vital contributors to their projects at the outset and at worst they ignore or circumvent the communications function altogether. What happens next is entirely predictable – the communications team is disconnected and disempowered, meaning all it can serve up in response to the organization's needs is some form of mediocre vanilla mush. The perception of internal clients that their communications team isn't very effective is proven and the nefarious cycle of exclusion-mediocrity-disappointment is perpetuated.

The combined effect of these challenges has triggered a kind of low-grade fever among the communications community. What I see over and over again, in the hundreds of workshops I've led with communications teams, is that the fever finally breaks when practitioners have the time and mental space to take a step back from the day-to-day grind. To stop and think not so much about *what* they do, but instead take a hard look at *how* they do it. This often leads to breakthrough insights in identifying practical ways of shifting the way in which they work. That includes having brutally honest conversations exploring the role communicators may themselves be playing in perpetuating and enabling the very patterns of organizational dysfunction they loathe.

The Results Map® Solution

The Results Map® System for Strategic Communications is designed to help you get unstuck from the frustration traps you face and position you to contribute at your maximum potential.

This Handbook is all about setting you up for success.

It introduces the Results Map® methodology for adopting a strategic approach to communications, including time saving tools, worksheets and samples. It's a proven system for equipping communicators to deliver strategic value and measurable results.

In it you'll find one of the system's core tools – the Top 10 Questions in Strategic Communications (see page 21), as well as:

- Practical, on-the-ground advice for raising your game through consultative skills
- Guidance on how to be strategic and offer a constructive challenge function
- Essential do's and don'ts for managing your communications career