

# Vision 2020: How to Build Four Skills Now That You Will Need to Succeed in the Future

By Laura Kane

Consumer demographics are shifting, mature markets are reducing spending and younger consumers are demanding new innovations. Mobile technology and cloud computing are changing the way employees and companies function. Disruptive technologies like robotics, machine learning and artificial intelligence are creating better tools to help communicators more accurately predict consumer behavior.

As target audiences change, the tools for engaging them evolve, and machines enable us to do our jobs faster and more accurately. Our core function remains the same. PR pros still will be responsible for creating stories that educate, influence and connect people with our organizations and brands.

To thrive in 2020, communications professionals will need to become more creative, have strong cognitive flexibility, collaborate, be emotionally intelligent and develop the grit necessary to constantly challenge the status quo. Here are ways to start building these important skills now.

## Creativity

It is often said that being creative is the ability to connect two previously unrelated things to create greater understanding. In order to maximize the capacity to be creative, it stands to reason that the more things an individual knows, the more things they can connect. To quote Walt Disney, “We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we're curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.”

Start opening new doors by reading new magazines, watching different television shows or attending lectures. An interesting article in Popular Science may provide the analogy that will help explain a complex business idea to employees, or a nugget from a lecture on beekeeping could be applied to achieving greater harmony in the workplace.



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If you are feeling very ambitious, then take an improvisation class. Improv requires that in order to keep the scene moving individuals can never challenge the validity of the previous statement, only build on it. This is commonly achieved by using the phrase “yes, and....” Here is an example of how this principle could be applied in a brainstorm session. Person 1 suggests that the type of bread found in your sandwich is an indication of your future success. Person 2 is unable to discount the idea; she can only build on it. So, person 2 might say, “Yes, but one’s true status lies in the ability to create an interesting sandwich.” These exchanges could continue until someone lands on a concept for a campaign. For example, the campaign says the brand of bread one uses not only builds better sandwiches, it lets others know that you are an interesting person.

## Cognitive Flexibility

To see things from different perspectives, it is essential to develop an understanding of various viewpoints. Here’s one way to do this: study the same news event from several different sources. Fox News, MSNBC, The Wall Street Journal and The Daily Show all interpret the same story from very different perspectives. Over

time, immersing oneself in a variety of media sources will provide insights about how each distinct audience perceives and comprehends the same experience.

### **Strategic Collaboration**

Employees who can facilitate better communication between divisions and collaborate with other disciplines are increasingly in demand. Breaking down silos isn't easy, though a simple place to start is by taking someone from a different department out to lunch. A group of employees having a meal together can enhance the exchange of information across divisions to help build relationships that improve communication and integrate strategies that will grow the business.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

The ability to understand motivation and behavior is essential to the process of crafting effective messages. Studying behavioral psychology, economics and discussing the underlying motivations of movie characters is one way to start. Human beings are best

observed in the real world, however. So, seek out new experiences and maintain diverse relationships. Join a social club or professional organization, volunteer at a soup kitchen or frequent the local community center and listen to what people are saying. Building a varied network of colleagues and friends will provide a better picture of what motivates you and others around you.

Even with all these skills, sheer grit may end up being the ingredient that makes the difference between a project succeeding or falling. As the world continues to innovate and change at a staggering rate, tomorrow's successful communicators will need to be constantly trying fresh ways to engage and educate others. They must have the courage to enthusiastically try new ideas, despite an uncertain outcome. Just as important, they will need to learn to accept failure with humility to come back next time and try again.

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