

PRNews'

Employee Communications Guidebook

VOL. 3

- CSR
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- coaching & training
- crisis communications
- employee engagement
- internal branding
- motivation & morale
- recruiting & retaining talent
- social media

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PR News Editor: Scott Van Camp,
svancamp@accessintel.com

Guidebook Managing Editor: Kaylee Hultgren

Editorial Director: Steve Goldstein,
sgoldstein@accessintel.com

Community Editor: Bill Miltenberg,
bmiltenberg@accessintel.com

Events & Special Projects Manager: Regina D'Alesio,
rdalesio@accessintel.com

Associate Editor: Sahil Patel, SaPatel@accessintel.com

**Associate Publisher and Brand Director,
PR News Group:** Amy Jefferies, 301.354.1699,
ajefferies@accessintel.com

Director of Marketing & Event Logistics:
Kate Schaeffer, kschaeffer@accessintel.com

Senior Graphic Designer: Christina Barnard

SVP/Group Publisher: Diane Schwartz,
212.621.4964; dschwartz@accessintel.com

Division President, Heather Farley
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**Access
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PR News published weekly by Access Intelligence, LLC
4 Choke Cherry Road, Second Floor,
Rockville, MD 20850 USA 888.707.5814

FAX: 301.309.3847

e-mail: clientservices@accessintel.com

New York Editorial Office:

88 Pine St., Ste. 510, New York, NY 10005
Phone: 212.621.4890 Fax: 212.621.4879

To Order Multiple Copies and Article Reprints:

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Letter from the Editor

Internal Messages for a Social World

First rule of employee communications: Craft your internal messaging the same way you would craft your external messaging. Second rule: There really is no difference between internal and external communications in the social media age.

The employees at your company, organization or PR agency share messages about your brand every time they communicate with each other, every time they interact with your external stakeholders and every time they mention their employer to their friends and family—via face-to-face communications and electronic media.

Through their own messaging, they are either helping your brand thrive or they are—often unwittingly—throwing up roadblocks. Your job, as a PR professional, is to communicate your core brand messages to your internal team members and transform them into ambassadors who feel they have a stake in their organization's future. You must build trust and make them your brand's most powerful advocates in times of growth so they will be your greatest allies in times of crisis.

That's where the latest edition of the *PR News Employee Communications Guidebook* comes in. In these pages, internal communications experts share their best practices, tactics, checklists, role-playing suggestions, case studies and policies to help you improve workplace morale; meet the challenges of management turnover; recruit, develop and retain talent; manage crises; set boundaries on social media use; and break down the barrier between brand and employee.

You'll find tips on how to roll out corporate engagement programs; keep your best and brightest employees motivated in a difficult economic climate; use crowdsourcing techniques to tie employees' activities more closely to the bottom line and recognize achievements; build morale through community involvement; engage with your internal team during a period of transition; encourage employees to become thought leaders; train frontline staffers to think like PR pros; and set policies for using social media networks.

As one of the authors in this *PR News Employee Communications Guidebook* says, successful organizations are those whose employees are aligned with the brand and who deliver a consistent expression of the brand at every service touch point. We thank every contributor to this book, whose goal was to show you how to forge bonds between brand and employee and be the catalyst behind every successful team-building initiative in your organization.

All the best in all your communications endeavors,

Steve Goldstein
Editorial Director, *PR News*
sgoldstein@accessintel.com



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How to Bridge the Gap Between Leadership Expectations & Results

By Liz Guthridge

Demand is increasing. Supply is tight. So why aren't more communication professionals stepping up to fill the gap and serve as strategic advisors?

In survey after survey, CEOs and other leaders say effective internal communication, including strategic communication counsel, is critical to the performance of their organizations. For instance, in their most recent survey of CEOs (2007) addressing which HR issues are important to the success of the business, **Deloitte & Touche Tohmatsu** and the **Economist Intelligence Unit** found that 95% of the surveyed CEOs rated effective internal communication as a key ingredient for success. Yet, just 22% said that the delivery of internal communication was effective.

Is it a skill gap? A lack of experience, low interest or something else?

Survey Says

The Being a Strategic Communication Advisor survey, conducted during summer 2011 by **Connect Consulting Group**, an independent coaching and

consulting change leadership and communication firm, sheds some light on this gap. As background, the purpose of the survey was to gain intelligence on how strategic communication advisors view their role and their effectiveness. (See sidebar, "Survey Methodology.")

Effective strategic advisors said they practice three key success factors: more disciplined and targeted relationship-building, measurement and professional development. Besides confirming the gap in expectations between senior leaders and their strategic communication advisors, the survey results showed another divide. The data pointed to clear differences in the behaviors of effective advisors versus other advisors. (See sidebar, "Survey Respondent Profile.")

Yet, these practices aren't the only difference between the two types of advisors, dubbed Absolute Advisors and Accidental Advisors. Absolute Advisors also reported spending more time advising leaders. They devote at least half or more of their time in a coaching, counseling or educating role of leaders at all levels. Furthermore, these Absolute Advisors said they enjoy

Comments from strategic advisors about leadership vs. the perception of strategic communication advisors:		
About leaders:		About strategic advisors:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "They aren't clear about what they want." • "They don't communicate their needs." • "They don't understand the value of strategic communications" • "They think they can do it on their own." • "They believe communication is magic." 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have low business acumen. • They have poor consulting skills. • They have inadequate political skills.
Other problems contributing to the gap between leaders' expectations and what they get:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time pressures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational culture/structure

advising and consider it a career choice.

By contrast, the Accidental Advisors said they tend to have fallen into their role, which they don't always enjoy—hence their nickname. As for their commitment, 29% spend between 10–25% of their time advising, 21% spend 25–50% advising and 14% spend up to 10% advising.

These survey results have clear implications about what communications professionals need to do if they want to move away from tactics and adopt a more strategic, value-driven approach to communication, especially employee communications. This value-driven approach can benefit leaders as well as employees in these uncertain economic times.

Leaders and Advisors Share Responsibility for Gap

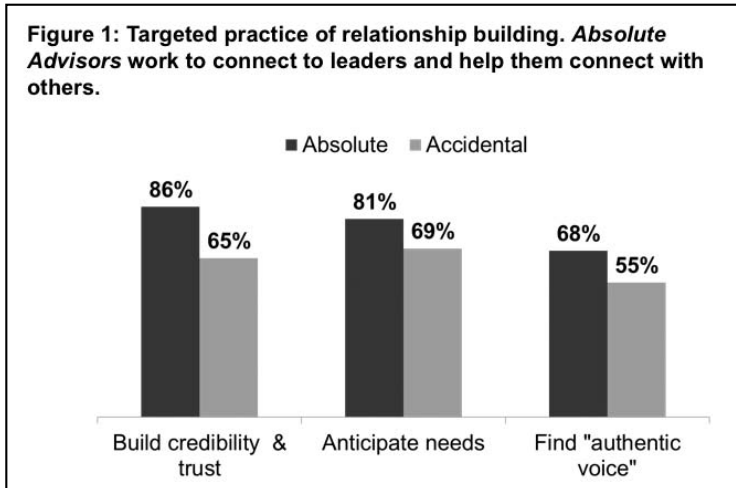
In the survey, the strategic advisors said they believe that leaders and strategic communication advisors are both at fault for the significant gap between what senior leaders say they want versus what they get.

Yet, by a 3-to-1 margin, advisors said they feel leaders' attitudes and actions contribute more to the expectations gap than advisors' actions or inactions. (See the chart on the previous page for the strategic advisors' take on what gets in the way.)

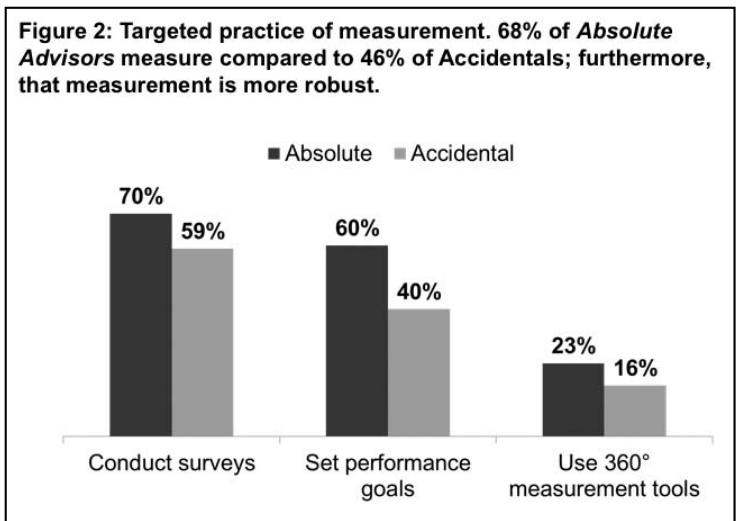
Absolute Advisors Take Actions to Close Gap

While Absolute Advisors expressed frustration with limited time with and access to leaders, they described how they work within these constraints. Basically, Absolute Advisors work at being strategic advisors, compared to the Accidental Advisors. Besides adopting more disciplined and targeted practices in three areas (relationship building, measurement and professional development as shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3), Absolute Advisors also take more initiative.

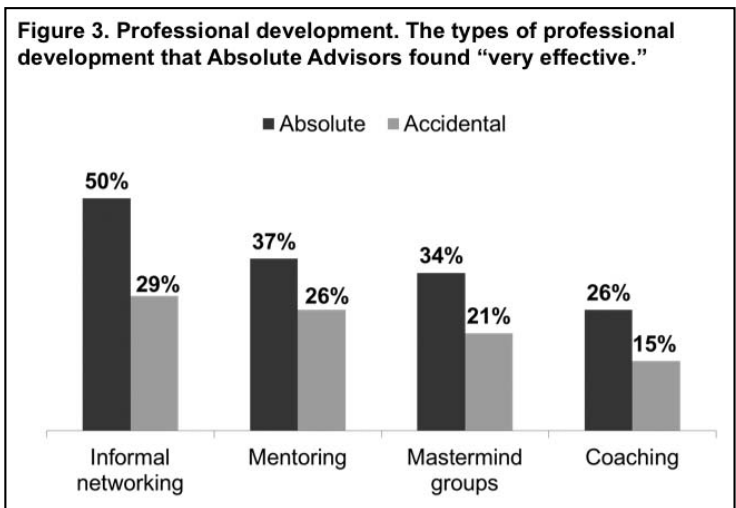
For example, Absolute Advisors empha-



Absolute Advisors excel at building strategic relationships.



Absolute Advisors embrace measurement tactics more actively.



Informal networking and mentoring form a part of Absolute Advisors' professional development.

Absolute Advisors Advise Other Communication Advisors

In the Being a Strategic Advisor survey, Absolute Advisors provided suggestions to help others be a better strategic communication advisor. The recommendations fell into three categories: take action, concentrate on your mindset and build relationships. Some representative comments include:

Take actions

- Know your business and ensure everything you do has a well-crafted, strategic purpose and plan, with measurable goals.
- Have the courage of your convictions. Fight for ideas you believe in.
- Support your assertions with data (e.g., numbers, case studies, other evidence).
- Institute feedback mechanisms to help continuously improve or adjust.
- Try to work on projects that service clients across the company, not just a select few. Your profile will rise and company leaders will start to recognize the value you bring the organization as a whole.
- Target, recruit and continuously develop talent to build a team that comprises a blend of innovative strategists, “best athletes” and talented specialists who can execute communications plans with supreme competence.
- Learn how to say no. Skip the non-value-add administrative work so you can focus on the strategic work that really matters.

Concentrate on your mindset

- Put yourself in the executives’ shoes. Understand what they really need to be successful in their role
- Talk business rather than communication.
- Do as much homework as you can to stay on top of issues and skills.
- Really get to know yourself, so you understand your strengths, blind spots and how others perceive you. This will also help you to be able to recognize preferences/styles in others that will allow you to more effectively communicate with them at a level and with messages they will be open to.

Build relationships

- Build a relationship with the executive. The better you know him/her (and vice versa), the more likely you will be able to offer honest coaching.
- Engage client staff at every level. By all means build a relationship with the CEO, but ignore at your peril those deep in the organization who get the day-to-day work done.

—Liz Guthridge

sized the value of learning the business, building relationships with leaders, their assistants and others, and speaking up on critical and challenging issues. They also talked about the need to eliminate non-value-add work so they can focus on being strategic and supportive.

How Being an Absolute Advisor Differs from Standard Communications

Effective strategic advising requires being present with leaders to coach and serve as a sounding board. It also requires working behind-the-scenes to build relationships, measure results and develop skills. It’s more about demonstrating strong business acumen and emotional intelligence, and less about writing

and editing. Strategic advisors do practice the technical aspects of the communication craft. However, they focus more on “being” than “doing.”

Communicators who become Absolute Advisors—those who serve as strategic advisors and love doing so as a career—quickly become indispensable because they are delivering what leaders actually want for employee communication support.

The Benefits of Providing Strategic Employee Communications

This more strategic, value-driven approach to communication benefits not only employee communicators, but also leaders and employees. For example, a few years ago, a regional employee communications

5 Attributes of Strategic Communication Advisors

1. Leaders comment on your high business acumen.

You know your business and your industry. For example, you can explain how the company makes money and where it spends it, who your biggest customers are, their concerns, your competitors, how you differ from them, trends influencing your business, the metrics you track and why and other relevant information. You provide communication advice within this context.

2. You have high self-awareness as well as a great skill set.

You realize your role is to take the perspective of the leaders you serve, support them in a systematic way and improve the impact they make. You are conscious about how you present yourself, you regulate your behavior, you continuously develop and improve your skill set and you stay abreast of developments and trends. You measure the effectiveness of your work.

3. You build trusted relationships.

You know that business is all about relationships, which is especially true when you're working closely with leaders. You're personable and considered easy to work with, especially since you have a positive outlook. You keep your word and other commitments; you're discreet with confidential information; and you provide constructive feedback. You ask thoughtful questions.

4. You take the initiative to act as a coach/trusted advisor.

You act before you're asked. You relate your advice to urgent, pressing issues. You speak in verbal billboards (sound bites with significance) in a timely, relevant and sincere manner. You identify emerging issues that your leaders care about—or need to care about—and you raise them at appropriate times.

5. You think strategically.

You look up and out, not just down and in. You have a future focus. You also analyze opportunities and problems from a broad perspective. You try to understand the potential impact on others, especially any unintended consequences. You figure out how to take incremental actions that will advance your leaders' agendas. You anticipate needs. Also, when appropriate, you suggest far-reaching actions.

—Liz Guthridge

team of a global company recognized that leaders weren't asking them to deliver communication products, which was their current focus.

Instead, leaders were requesting help in totally different areas. They wanted to know how they could build greater trust with employees. Leaders also were interested in encouraging employees to learn more about the business challenges facing the company. And the most senior leaders recognized that to improve their credibility, they should become better informal and formal conversationalists with employees.

With some outside help, the employee communications team changed their orientation. They stopped serving solely as a filter between leaders and employees. Instead, the employee communications team

started actively advising and coaching executives to meet directly with employees. Now, executives have become one of the most important communication channels, especially for providing two-way dialogue with employees.

Executives report that their comfort level and communications skills are improving, especially around conducting two-way conversations with employees. Employees say through informal feedback and surveys that they are more informed and more connected to the leaders and the business.

By moving out of their role as ventriloquists and publishers, the employee communications team now serves as advocates for employees as well as strategic communication advisors for leaders. The communi-

cation professionals help call attention to key issues, clarify complex topics and spark conversations. The cycle times are faster and the quality of the communication is higher as it's more personal.

The Good News: You Can Learn to Be An Absolute Advisor

The good news for communication professionals is that the skills that separate Absolute Advisors from Accidental Advisors and the rest of the pack are not innate; you can learn them and you can apply them to improve employee communication.

The actions—relationship-building, measurement and professional development—are relatively simple things you can do, too. And you can add them to your communication tool kit whether you consider yourself already an Absolute Advisor or an Accidental Advisor who's ready to claim your strategic expertise and start doing more strategic work.

So why aren't more communicators taking steps to become more capable, confident and credible strategic advisors? According to many of the survey written comments, respondents said they don't have the time, the training or the support they want or need.

Many commented that they haven't found skill training in a format that works for them. Some added that they're especially challenged to even think about learning how to be strategic when they're under extreme time pressures to deliver tactics. A few said they're scared away by the challenges of the role. One admitted being a "wallflower" was more appealing.

Yet, being a wallflower or a writer in an attic or cube is not what leaders want or need. Especially in these uncertain economic times with organizations operating under extreme complexity, leaders need Absolute Advisors more than ever.

As I work with the individuals in my Strategic Action Group—a combination training and mastermind program for strategic communication advisors—we work through the five key characteristics that strategic communication advisors need to adopt. (See sidebar, "5 Attributes of Communication Advisors.")

We practice getting out of our comfort zone to look up and out rather than down, question assumptions and speak truth to power. We also work to adopt suggestions from Absolute Advisors. (See

Survey Methodology

Connect administered the 22-question survey online, July 8–August 4, 2011. We contacted strategic communication advisors through: Connect's subscriber list; professional associations, such as **CCM/The Leadership Exchange** and **IABC**; and LinkedIn groups where advisors regularly interact. Respondents numbered 113.

Survey Respondent Profile

Of the 113 respondents, 48% work for publicly held companies, 15% work for privately held companies and the rest work for nonprofit, government, education, agencies, consulting firms and sole proprietorships.

Participants primarily work in corporate communications (35%) or employee communications (25%). Other areas include executive communications, IT, training, HR, marketing, strategy, planning, business units and M&A.

The respondents are a tenured group: 64% have been working 20 years or more and 24% have been working between 10 and 20 years. As for titles, 55% are director or above, including 13 VPs. Another 22% are managers. Many are specialists, such as communication and public information officer, project manager and principal.

A majority are experienced strategic advisors: 22% have worked as a strategic advisor for 20 years or more and 31% have worked as an advisor between 10 and 20 years.

—Liz Guthridge

sidebar, "Absolute Advisors Advise Other Communication Advisors.") For some, the new behavior is an easy transition; for others, it's more difficult yet it's possible.

Based on my experiences in the role of a strategic advisor and with these groups, the work is also very rewarding. You're helping leaders make a difference for them, their organizations and employees. **PRN**

Liz Guthridge is founder of Connect Consulting Group, an independent coaching and consulting firm. Guthridge consults leaders of Fortune 1000 companies to get employees on board with complex new initiatives. Along with Hewlett-Packard, Connect won PRSA's 2011 Silver Anvil Award of Excellence for "Redesigning HP's Human Resources Communications."