

# Moving the why I should care dial

Perspective on People:  
By Karen Friedman

The new client was a small startup company. I was brought in to help them explain how their rather complicated product could benefit various stakeholders including the media. From my vantage point, I wanted them to learn how to move the 'why should I care' dial.

The first person to enter room was the President and CEO who didn't say hello but asked "where is the escape route?"

"Escape route" I asked. "Are you planning to leave?"

"It depends how your session is" he retorted. "I typically don't like these things."

"Have you ever attended media training?"

"No" he shot back, "but the media is wrong all of time and I already know how to talk about what we do."

"Well," I suggested as the rest of the group entered the room, "good media training is good communications training and perhaps you'll learn something you didn't know."

"Maybe" he remarked, "but I doubt it."

This is a man who is in charge of leading his young company and product to success. Aside from poor manners, his arrogance, ego, negative attitude and sour tone filled up the room like a stale aroma.

I was seething and wanted to put him in his place. How dare he undermine my credibility in front of the people I'm supposed to educate before the day even began? My first instinct was to go toe-to-toe with him. But a quick recalculation of my internal thermometer reminded me to take advice I might give a client and focus on setting an example which meant applying positive communication skills.

So I backed off realizing the best way to show this know-it-all what he didn't know was to let him show himself.

We began a series of video recorded mock media interviews. I was playing a business reporter. He went first as he 'didn't have much time for this' and needed to leave early.

I asked what his company did and he responded with words like 'target markets', value proposition', aggregate and analyze and 'apply data management to create platforms



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for care coordination." I tried to stay awake.

"What exactly does that mean?" I inquired. With arms crossed defensively he talked about bridging gaps, monetary drivers and quality in healthcare

provisions.

So I pressed further, reminding him that the people reading my mock-publication were primarily hospital executives. Even though these words may be accurate, they do not address how his company can bridge gaps, improve quality and save money.

He said I didn't get it and left the room.

I'll tell you what I do get. Stories, presentations and communications are not about you. They're about what matters to a reader, viewer or audience. No one cares how smart you are or how impressive your vocabulary. They don't need to know everything you know. People want to know how your information benefits or affects them. How can you solve their problems? What will improve or change as a result of your product or service? If you really want people to buy what you're selling, then sell the outcome.

This particular company helps patients transition from hospital to home. Technology enables all of their information to be easily accessed by clinicians, caretakers and others involved in their care so they know what medicines to take, when to schedule follow up appointments and what to do if they get sick again. This reduces hospital readmissions, costs, frees up beds and provides better care. That's the outcome. That's what the reader cares about.

Interestingly, as soon as the CEO walked out of the room, the atmosphere dramatically changed. His subordinates who co-founded the company wanted more. They are good people who

passionately believe in their product and through continued exercises recognized that they don't know how to explain what they are selling. They conceded that they make what they do sound too complicated and fear they could be out-manuevered by competitors who offer solutions that appear simpler.

The exercise with their leader reinforced the need to develop people-centric messages that humanize information so people care about what you're saying. Through additional mock interviews, they recognized that sometimes just a tiny change in wording can transform how a message is received. They were very excited and ended the day anxious to get together again so they could continue to move forward.

That would have been great, but the CEO has now banned agencies and other expert communicators. He says they don't understand his business.

There is a difference between leading and dictating. Strong leaders embrace ideas opinions and are open to seeing things differently. They thrive on creativity which leads to innovation and strong partnerships. Dictators aren't interested in what others have to say. It's all about them and their massive egos drive their decisions.

When companies are run by dictators, there are usually an abundance of escape seats. Unfortunately, the escapees are customers, investors and employees.

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