

Three Things Every Leader Must Communicate to Survive

Welcome back to Guidestone University and a new session.

In this session we're going to look at three things that every leader must communicate in order to survive.

I want to tell you a quick story. Several years ago, in our non-profit, we were working on some things, and we experienced the greatest season of charitable giving. There was no capital campaign, there was no fundraising campaign, no direct mail appeal, no challenge; we didn't sell anything. We didn't beg for a lot of stuff, yet, people gave; they started giving, and more than half a million dollars came in over a period of a number of weeks. At first, I didn't fully understand it. As I started looking back, it was so incredibly alarming to me, I almost didn't plan for it. I went back and said, "What did we do and how can we do that again? How can we replicate this as we go forward?"

I was really caught off guard by the significant increase in giving. Don't misunderstand me; we had planned for a surplus, because we were looking ahead and we had projected a surplus. But, I was cautiously optimistic and here's why: this was during the time when the economy had a significant downturn. People were losing their jobs, people were getting laid off, people were very worried about their investments; they had lost tens, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars they had been working for a long time.

There was a lot of things that were going on in the market. Many people felt like the country was headed off the proverbial cliff. At the same time, the stock market was taking a dive. It was just wasn't looking good.

Those people that know me know that I have huge vision; even in the moments like that, normally, I'm able to go through those things, anticipate them, and come out the other side and feel okay. But, even though my vision is normally huge, as a result of the things that we experienced during this incredibly challenging time in the market place and for people all over our country, my vision today is much greater than it was then, because I

saw what happened in those moments; that people gave generously despite the numerous negative economic indicators.

So, every year we send out communications to the donors that we have — people that give significantly to our organization. These same things can be translated. If you're in a company and you have people who buy products or who buy services from you; or if you're in a faith-based organization where you have people who attend at your church; or if you're at an educational institution where you have enrollment or donors that give to donor development and fundraising in an educational situation. All of these things translate. We've helped all of these types of organizations, even entrepreneurs who are just selling things in an online space. We've helped organizations with these things to move their organizations forward using these same principles that we're going to talk about here.

Here's what I know: **people willingly and generously give** and people willingly and generously buy **where they perceive value**. That's why it was so energizing when people gave to us. By giving, they were demonstrating that they believed in us; they believed in our mission; they believed in our vision; they believed in our purpose, and they value it enough to give to it or to buy from it over every other organization in the market — over every other cause in the world.

The mission and vision of our organization is huge. It's valuable. And, you feel the same way about your company, or about your organization, or about your work. Part of my role involves communicating that value, so that people have the opportunity to join in the cause, to see the value and to buy or to donate to the cause. So, as we are thinking about these things, we're looking at, "Okay, what happened and how can we communicate this year? How can we communicate this quarter to our key stakeholders? What does that communication need to include?"

We ended up coming up with **three things that every leader must be communicating in order for their leadership to survive**, in order for their organization to survive.

Number one is Vision: You'll say, "Well, yeah, I've heard this talk before. Everybody's got to be developing vision, communicate vision," – and that's true. Successful people and successful organizations are not only continuously developing vision, but they're continuously communicating vision.

If you think you have communicated vision enough, you haven't. You need to communicate vision more. **You will never over-communicate vision.** Do something that is doomed to fail, unless your entire heart is into it. Do something that is doomed to fail, unless your entire team is passionately working toward it; then communicate it fanatically. You will never over communicate vision.

Number two is What's Next—communicate what's next. Vision is all about long term, looking ahead. What's next is all about the short term. See, it is not enough to communicate with people about what's way out there; sometimes they can't grab a hold of that, especially, if you are in the commodity business where you are selling products or you are selling services. People like, "Well I don't need to know about what's way out there if I can't get it now," we're in an instant gratification culture in an instant gratification world.

The journey is much more enjoyable when you can share it with other people. So, when you have people who can identify with where you are and what you're selling or the cause that you are benefiting, then they love where you're headed; they have an opportunity to buy in with where you're headed.

Free them to succeed, by providing clear tangible next steps for them to follow. Show them what's coming up, show them what's just over the horizon. They might just take it and run with it. That's when you're able to see exponential growth, because then, they're out there communicating the vision and they're out there communicating the next steps for you and together with you. **So number two, communicate what's next.**

Number three, communicate what just happened. Number three is about the recent past. This is just as important as the first two. People need to know that when they buy from you, "Okay, what are you doing with it? Are you going to create something else? Are you creating something better? Are you creating something bigger?"

It's easy to forget to stop and smell the roses, yet our teams need to hear about the progress that we're making. Sometimes, it's hard for us to see the progress when we're in the midst of the work. So, enjoy the journey; celebrate the progress. In your communications, talk about where you just came from. Celebrate even the small successes. Your team, your organization, even in your leadership, you'll find more energy and passion when you do.

So, what's the alternative?

I have an organization right now that I've been talking to for over a year. They're struggling. They're losing key stakeholders, they're losing revenue, they're running behind in nearly every key indicator. I have shared with them these three things over and over again, and, yet they've refused to do it. If they would do it one time — In fact, I even thought about saying, "Look, I will pay for all the work that it takes to get this done, and then when it works, you can just give me 90% of the profit or whatever happens from it." But, the alternative is **if you're not communicating these three things your company or your role may be gone in less than five years**. You cannot survive. If we're not communicating what's ahead, if we're not communicating what's next, if we're not communicating what just happened, we will not make it. We cannot make it, because we don't have the respect and influence that people are looking to us for.

Action Step

Here's what I want you to do: I want you to, whether it's craft an email or if it's craft a letter or if it's craft a simple newsletter – whatever it is that works for your organization—I want you to include these three things:

1. Vision
2. What's Next – short term
3. Recent Past – what just happened

It can be just a handful of sentences. It doesn't have to be long, it doesn't have to take you a long time to create it. And then have some type of call to action that you can send out to people: Here's what we want you to do next. Then if you want to shoot it to me in an email, "Hey, I did what you said to do. Here's a draft of it, I'd love for you to look it over. Send me some feedback," and I'll be happy to do that for you. So, you're going to craft an email, and you're going to include these three things in it, and you're going to use it sometime over the next couple of days. You're going to use it to see how it helps you and how it helps your organization.

We'll see you in the next session of Guidestone University.

