COMMUNICATE TO INFLUENCE

HOW TO INSPIRE YOUR AUDIENCE TO ACTION

BEN DECKER & KELLY DECKER
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CHAPTER 1

Business Communication Sucks

The two words “information” and “communication” are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communication is getting through.

—Sydney J. Harris

In 2013, Marissa Mayer was ranked no. 32 on the Forbes list of the World’s 100 Most Powerful Women. In 2014, she moved up to no. 18 on that list, just below Beyoncé Knowles. Not bad for an engineering nerd.

When Marissa Mayer took the helm as president and CEO of Yahoo! in 2012, the company was seen as a digital media dinosaur whose best days were in the rearview mirror. She quickly changed all that with a website redesign, a host of new products, a series of major acquisitions, including
Tumblr, and a sales force shakeup. Media profiles painted her as “iron-fisted,”1 “authoritarian,” and “a dictator, with a top-down style,”2 yet she was also glamorized as a tastemaker, even scoring a bold photo spread in Vogue. Though she teetered between dorky and chic, nobody could deny that she was getting results. In her first 14 months with the company, Yahoo!’s stock price more than doubled.

Vaulting into the spotlight, she rapidly became a household name and a business icon. If her name was on the marquee, the event would sell out. What would Marissa say? Would we hear her signature snorty laugh? What would she wear? Opportunities were aligning, left and right, for her to share her vision, steer industry conversations, and join influential boards. When she was part of something, people expected great results.

That’s why the international community was waiting with bated breath—and active Twitter handles—when she gave a presentation at the 2014 Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity. Cannes Lions is a conclave of 12,000 advertising and media creators and executives from 94 countries, representing billions of dollars in ad revenue. Presentations at the event highlight the very best work throughout the year, and speakers deliver inspiring, thought-provoking talks about the future of creativity in advertising. It is, after all, a festival of creativity. But Mayer didn’t get that memo.

Mayer sacrificed connection for content. While other presenters at the event created exciting experiences with unscripted
presentations and audience participation, Mayer stayed rooted behind a lectern and read a canned speech from a teleprompter screen. Her performance was described as stiff, forced, and pandering.3

Even worse, her scripted content didn’t connect. It wasn’t inspirational. It wasn’t thought-provoking. In fact, her entire message came off as a Yahoo! sales pitch. At Cannes Lions, speakers are expected to be thought leaders, not company or brand leaders. Mayer was skewered by tweets. Business reporter Laura Petrecca of USA Today tweeted from the event, “Yahoo CEO @marissamayer puts forth a VERY hard sell of the company during her Tues presentation at the #canneslions ad festival.”4

Marissa Mayer missed two critical opportunities: (1) she missed the opportunity to be more than a talking head, the opportunity to create a real, emotional connection with her audience that would engender trust and believability, and (2) she missed the opportunity to think beyond a Yahoo! sales pitch and data dump and move toward a bigger message of influence and inspiration. She had a golden moment to spur change and give the audience members goose bumps. Her paramount mistake: she made it all about her, and not at all about them.

Did it end her career? No. Did she earn any new fans or endorsements from the international audience? No. She was OK. But she could have been great. If you were speaking in front of thousands of influential people in the south of France, wouldn’t you want to be great?
But the important point here isn’t about Marissa Mayer. It’s not about a big name, a big event, or a big opportunity. It’s about our daily communications—in the morning huddle, the quarterly town hall meeting, the midyear all-hands meeting, the weekly sales call, industry conferences, client pitches, and quarterly business reviews. We approach all of these in the exact same way that Marissa Mayer approached Cannes Lions. We spit out the information we want to share, along with the information we need to share, and we miss the opportunity to influence, inspire, or even mildly entertain because we don’t consider the experience that we’re creating. We get stuck in an information overload of facts, stats, updates, and action items.

We don’t bother to create an emotional connection because it’s just too hard, or maybe because we don’t dare. We’re not intentional about influencing because we don’t get close enough to what our audience expects, wants, and needs. We don’t show the contagious passion that it takes to ignite action. Instead, we present our agenda and the logical arguments to support it, and then expect our audience to come right along with us. We shortsightedly expect others to take our information the way we present it and then do something with it. In doing so, we perpetuate every single reason that business communication sucks.

So let’s do something about it! The first step is to admit that we have a problem. In fact, we consistently tell ourselves five little white lies about our own communications (Figure 1-1) to justify why maybe, just maybe, we don’t really suck.
THE FIVE WHITE LIES ABOUT COMMUNICATION

White Lie #1: If I say the words, people will get it.
White Lie #2: When I’m “on,” I’m great.
White Lie #3: I don’t need to prep. I can wing it.
White Lie #4: People tell me I’m pretty good at speaking.
White Lie #5: That’s not the way we do things here.

Figure 1-1

WHITE LIE #1: “IF I SAY THE WORDS, PEOPLE WILL GET IT.”

Think back to a recent message you delivered—to your executive team, your staff, or a customer or client. What percentage of your time did you spend developing your content versus practicing your delivery? If you’re like the people we coach and train every day, you probably spent at least 99.9 percent of your time preparing the content. You scripted or created a very detailed outline (maybe even with bullets!) of an argument, positioned details, layered on data and proof points, carefully crafted transitions, and finally prepared the coup de grâce . . . your PowerPoint deck. All that was left for you to do was to stick to the message.

Let’s switch gears for a minute. How many times have you completely tuned out of a meeting because the person who was talking (not you, of course) was boring as hell?
Maybe he spoke in a deathly monotone. Or maybe he showed nervousness in his voice or by wringing his hands. Or maybe he showed a lack of confidence in his, um, I mean, like, the uh . . . story.

What was the difference between your preparation and the horrendous meeting you had to sit through? Nothing. That presenter was you. You have—we all have—habits that create an experience. The experience we create either connects with our listeners to draw them in or disconnects and allows them to tune out and start making to-do lists.

Of course, the message is a massive part of that experience, but the most common misconception about communication is the idea that “communication is about words.” Communication is not just about words (whether they’re on a teleprompter or in a detailed outline); it’s about the experience that you create. Sticking to the script will not save you, especially when the teleprompter breaks.

Film director Michael Bay is an immensely successful movie director. His credits include Armageddon (1998), Pearl Harbor (2001), and the Transformers series (2007 to the present). As a director, Bay understands that his job is to create an experience for the viewer. Someone should tell him that his job as a public speaker is no different.

On January 6, 2014, Michael Bay took the stage at the five-day Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Accompanied by Samsung executive Joe Stinziano, Bay’s job was to help launch Samsung’s new 105-inch ultra-high-definition curved TV. Facing a crowd of hundreds of tech professionals
and journalists, he began, “My job as a director is I get to
dream for a living—” Then he stopped and nervously rubbed
his hands together. An awkward silence ensued.

Stinziano tried to rescue him, asking him a question
about moviemaking. Bay said, “I create visual worlds that
are so beyond everyone’s normal life experiences, and Holly-
wood is a place that creates a viewer escape. And what I try to
do as a director is I try to—”

He trailed off into silence. A pained expression came over
his face, and he turned away from the audience with a groan.
Then he turned back to the audience and said, “The type is all
off, sorry. I’ll just wing this.”

Stinziano prompted him to continue.

Bay started again. “I try to take people on an emotional
ride, and, um—” Again he trailed off into silence.

“The curve?” Stinziano said. “How do you think the
curved screen is going to impact how viewers experience your
movies?”

“Excuse me,” Bay said. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” And he
turned and walked off the stage.

“Okay,” Stinziano said, “ladies and gentlemen, let’s thank
Michael Bay for joining us.”

And a smattering of awkward applause echoed in the
stunned room.

Michael Bay later blogged, “The teleprompter got lost. . . .
I walked off. I guess live shows aren’t my thing.”

It was a train wreck. It was painful to watch Michael Bay
floundering in front of an audience. The event was a costly
misstep for Samsung—and it was even costlier for Michael Bay himself. His onstage meltdown was aired repeatedly on network newscasts and went viral. And we’re not telling this story to criticize him in any way. Like so many people in the public eye—entertainers, business executives, politicians, and others—he tried to deliver a scripted speech from a teleprompter screen. His hosts at Samsung and the Consumer Electronics Show undoubtedly told him, “You won’t have a thing to worry about. Everything you need to say will be right there on the teleprompter. Nothing can go wrong.”

You may be thinking, “Phew! Good thing I don’t use a teleprompter!” Here’s the thing: the teleprompter was not the problem.

The same exact thing happens with scripted outlines in boardrooms and meetings around the world. It happened recently to Charlene, who became a client of ours because of her experience as part of her Fortune 100 company’s high-profile executive development program. She was part of a team that was to deliver its project research and recommendations to the CEO and her executive staff. In the final rehearsal, Charlene began reading from her perfectly scripted message, but then she lost her place. Just like Michael Bay, she tried to recover and wing it, but she quickly became scattered and finally threw up her hands and left the room.

When you rely so heavily on a script (or on bullets or on a teleprompter or an outline), you are considering only
one side of the experience. You become so focused on specific words and the order in which you say them that you miss the forest for the trees.

You’ve seen this happen outside of the business world, too. Think about the acceptance speeches at the Academy Awards. There is a huge difference between the Oscar speeches that are read and the ones that are delivered from the heart. When an Oscar winner whips out a list of names, then looks down and races through the thank yous—heaven forbid someone is omitted—it feels as if everyone gets an honorable mention rather than a heartfelt thanks. Contrast that to the emotional impact you felt when the winner shared a story about the sacrifices someone else made to help him be successful (Jared Leto in 2014), about the time someone talked him off the ledge (Hugh Jackman in 2013), that “a beautiful man and a wonderful agent” is not an oxymoron (Gwyneth Paltrow in 1999), about the first person who took a chance on her career (Lupita Nyong’o in 2014), or that the first time she didn’t feel it, but this time around it feels really good to get validation that the academy likes you (Sally Field in 1985). Those remarks were delivered from the heart, and they just felt different.

*Reality check:* It’s time to ditch the script and stop sacrificing connection for content. The experience is more than the message. That message comes through *you.*
WHITE LIE #2:
“WHEN I’M ‘ON,’ I’M GREAT.”

Many people make a false distinction between “public speaking” and having a conversation. They think that public speaking is a performance, like playing a role on stage. But why should we put public speaking in a separate category of communication? Is there any such thing as “private speaking”? Of course not—unless you are talking to yourself. If you are having a conversation with even one other person, you are engaging in the public act of speaking.

So don’t think of a presentation to an audience as a performance, as a role you are playing. Think of your presentation as a conversation in which you authentically, transparently interact with your audience. Your ability to simply be yourself when you speak may make all the difference to you, your audience, and your organization or cause. Great communicators are authentically themselves all the time. This level of authentic communicating has power—even the power to change losers into winners.

Consider this: in the last four presidential elections, the losing candidate was the one who appeared more contrived and unnatural—the one whose formal campaign persona seemed the most unlike his informal private demeanor.

The matchups pitted George W. Bush against Al Gore and John Kerry in 2000 and 2004, respectively, and Barack Obama against John McCain and Mitt Romney in 2008 and 2012. Whether you are on the left or the right, try to put
partisan politics aside to see the connection between these rivals—and how their carefully controlled, robotic images shaped their campaigns.

More than three months before the 2012 election, Politi
cico columnist Maggie Haberman observed, “Voters crave personal connections with candidates—George W. Bush was the person people wanted to drink a beer with, Bill Clinton felt voters’ pain.”

Spoofed on SNL as having less personality and pizzazz than a manila folder, Al Gore bored Americans throughout his campaign. CBS newsman Bob Schieffer said of Gore (who lost in 2000), “I have never known anyone whose off-camera demeanor was so different from what we saw on television. On TV, he seemed stiff and rehearsed, but off it, he was witty and interesting.” His behavior was such a contrast with the Gore we’ve seen since the election—a champion of the environment known for An Inconvenient Truth, a nonprofit advocate, and the founder of Current TV.

When John Kerry ran (and lost) in 2004, the PBS documentary series Frontline interviewed people who knew Kerry well. The interviewer asked Kerry’s older sister Peggy if the real John Kerry was as “aloof” as he so often appeared on television. Peggy Kerry replied, “John, once you get to know him, is really a warm and open and funny human being.”

The problem is that few people get to know him that way—even those who meet him in person. Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist David S. Rohde once assessed Kerry’s persona this way: “When you first meet John Kerry, he can seem as stiff,
awkward, and aloof as his television persona—the haughty, flip-flopping Massachusetts aristocrat who lost the 2004 presidential election against an eminently beatable George W. Bush.”

Former TV anchor Kathy Kerchner wrote John McCain’s political epitaph more than four months before he lost the 2008 election: “In person, and often in interviews and speeches where he’s expressing himself extemporaneously, McCain is as charming as Obama. He’s funny and self-effacing, authentic, friendly and engaged.” But put him in front of an audience with a scripted speech, Kerchner said, “and watch that natural charisma disappear.” Many commentators noted that McCain’s concession speech was probably the finest speech of his career—a relaxed and humble speech that he delivered when he no longer had anything to lose, and no longer had political handlers telling him what to say and how to say it.

In the 2012 election, Mitt Romney and his handlers deliberately decided to wall off the real Mitt from public view. Romney had an impressive record of good deeds, charitable giving, helping neighbors in need, and saving lives—but his handlers clamped a lid on his personal story out of fear that it would remind voters of his Mormon faith. Many people who knew Romney well described him as warm in person—not at all like the robotic Romney that voters saw on TV.

All of those elections were reasonably close (the 2000 Bush-Gore contest practically came down to a coin flip). If each of the four losing candidates had realized that being “on” turned so many people off, and instead had just been
themselves, any one (or maybe even all four) of those elections might have gone the other way.

We see this same political phenomenon when business leaders deliver a formal speech or presentation. They assume an “executive” posture, and they become too polished and overly robotic. As a result, they lose their connection with the audience. And when they lose that, they lose the audience’s trust. When you contrast the formal presentation with the off-the-cuff Q&A session, the same person is usually likable, engaging, and connecting. You’re great when you’re you—not when you’re “on.” In fact, a good red-flag test is to see if there is a difference in the authenticity level of someone onstage and offstage.

**Reality check:** Be authentic—all the time. Audiences want to see and hear the real you, so that they can determine whether or not they trust you. The very best communicators don’t change from one situation to another. They may dial their voice up or down and use big behaviors onstage, but they are always the same authentic person. And that means it’s time to stop “giving speeches,” and it’s time to become spontaneous, vulnerable, and human.

**WHITE LIE #3: “I DON’T NEED TO PREP. I CAN WING IT.”**

Many of us have Outlook calendars that are booked back-to-back-to-back. Day after day after day. It makes it pretty
tough to prep for our 3 p.m., because we don’t have time anywhere else in our day. We’ve all been there. What happens? We get into the habit of winging it. As leaders, we’re lucky in that we can usually get away with it. But the difference between zero preparation and a little bit of focus is much greater than the sum of the two.

In March, Ben got a call from an existing client—we’ll call him Steven—who was ready to begin preparing for his company’s annual branding conference, an event with millions riding on it. “This year, we’re going to outdo everything we’ve done before. A new venue in New York, more publicity than ever before, performances by Grammy winners, presentations by actors and producers. Now we need to make sure all our execs are just as good!”

Ben and Steven jumped in and began to storyboard the right message for the high-stakes New York event. At the end of their brainstorming, they planned out a series of follow up meetings to further refine the message and to allow for practice, practice, and more practice. As they wrapped up the meeting, Ben asked Steven if there was anything else he had going on.

“Oh,” he said, “I’ve got this little off-site retreat at Auberge in Napa Valley—but it’s an internal event, not a big deal. I’m not going to prep much for it. I’ll just go in with my agenda, shoot from the hip, make my points, and it’ll be fine.”

Upon hearing “Auberge,” Ben’s radar lit up. Auberge du Soleil is one of the top hotels in the world. It’s not exactly the place for a no-big-deal kind of meeting. Ben quizzed him
further: Who would be there? What was the purpose of the retreat? What were the stakes?

“Well, it’s our senior leadership staff,” he said. “We’re about to take a left turn in our strategy—pretty much 90 degrees from the direction we’ve been going. We’re asking our top people to adjust to some radical new approaches. As for the stakes—well, it’s funny you should ask that, because the stakes are pretty high. We need to get buy-in from everybody.”

“And what happens if you don’t get buy-in from everybody?” Ben asked.

Steven paused. “I hadn’t really thought that far ahead. The more questions you ask, the more I realize that this little Napa Valley retreat is just as important—if not more important—for our company’s future as the huge branding conference in New York.”

“When is this retreat?”

“In three days.”

“Well, we’d better get started.”

Like so many of us, Steven was focused on communication when the stakes were high. Are only events with bright lights and a big stage prep-worthy? There’s nothing like an audience of thousands of people to motivate you to prepare. And yet, we’re missing opportunities to influence and inspire everywhere else. Every interaction is an opportunity and worthy of great communicating. When he has an internal meeting coming up, Steven no longer says, “It’s not a big deal—I’ll just shoot from the hip.”
Thomas A. Stewart, the editor of *Harvard Business Review*, put it another way: “Everything a leader does is symbolic. Everything is amplified. ‘If the chairman asks for a cup of coffee,’ runs an old joke at General Electric, ‘someone is liable to go out and buy Brazil.’” Remember that you are always being observed, whether the stakes seem to be high or low. If you’re not prepared or you’re not paying close enough attention, you might not be communicating what people need to see and hear. And you’ll miss opportunities to go from informing to influencing.

**Reality check:** You’re always communicating, so it’s always worth some preparing. Don’t limit great communicating to big events. Good communication habits are for the off-site leadership retreats, the weekly coffee-and-doughnuts staff meetings, the business lunches at the local steakhouse, and even the impromptu conversations in the hallway. (The good news is that this preparation will become easy. We’ve got a simple, quick tool to help you prepare and frame your message every time. If you want to cut to the chase, go ahead and flip to Chapter 6.)

**WHITE LIE #4: “PEOPLE TELL ME I’M PRETTY GOOD AT SPEAKING.”**

We have three young boys, and, as you might imagine, story time is a pretty big deal at our house. One of their favorite
stories is Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” and it goes something like this:

Once upon a time there was an emperor who cared only about fine clothing. One day, two swindlers came into town and told everyone that they were the most amazing weavers and could create the most magnificent fabrics the land had ever seen, fabric so magnificent that it would become invisible to those who were unfit for their positions. The emperor decided that he must hire these weavers so that he could tell the wise men from the fools. The swindlers agreed to produce their finest suit, in exchange for money, gold thread, and silk. They pocketed the materials and pretended to weave away madly. The fear of being seen as a fool was so strong that even the emperor’s most trusted advisor reported that the fabric was the most excellent work he had ever seen. Finally, when the suit was complete, the swindlers pretended to dress the emperor in his new clothes and prepared him for a grand procession. (Enter howling laughter from the boys.) The townspeople smiled, waved, and applauded the emperor until a child pointed and yelled, “But he hasn’t got anything on!” When the rest of the town finally began chanting with the child, the emperor’s worst suspicions were confirmed, but he completed his prideful procession.

This bedtime story is an analogy for any leader who needs to work on communications. Your team members may be so worried about losing favor that they will offer you a shine job, sugarcoating their feedback rather than actually sharing
what you need to hear. Fortunately, there is one great instrument for eliciting honest feedback: a video recording.

The CEO of a $30 million software start-up came to Ben for some coaching in preparation for another round of venture funding. He had founded the company with his brother just three years earlier. He was the older of the two, in his early thirties, and he was definitely the intense one—logical with a healthy dose of skepticism. Ben asked him, “Have you ever seen yourself on video before?” The CEO said no, he hadn’t. So we had him give a five-minute presentation in front of a video camera. His voice had almost no inflection, and his expression was flat. He projected overconfidence to the point that he came across as cool and aloof.

We sat down with him and played back his performance in high definition. About 30 seconds into the playback, he said, “Whoa! Hold it! Pause it, please!”

Ben paused the playback.

“Let me understand something,” the CEO said. “As I’m watching myself on video, is that the same as you seeing me give the presentation live?”

“I’m not sure I follow your question,” Ben said. “But if you’re asking me whether what I’m seeing on the TV screen is exactly what I saw and heard when I recorded you live, then yes, I’d say it’s the same thing.”

His eyes widened and his jaw dropped. “So, what I’m hearing now is how people always hear my voice?”

“Yup.”

“That’s how I sound?”
“Yup.”

He was silent for a few seconds—then said, “That’s fucked!”

“Yup.”

He was experiencing the disorientation of seeing himself on video for the first time. This experience is called disparity. It’s the discovery that the way we think we come across to others is completely different from the way we actually come across to others. One of the most common problems top executives have is that no one dares give them honest feedback. No one dares to say, “Boss, you really stink at this!” Instead, people sugarcoat it: “Great job—that was awesome!” Or, in many cases, they say nothing at all.

That’s why video feedback can come as a huge shock to leaders—video sometimes reveals that the emperor has no clothes. Many businesspeople go through their careers thinking, “I’m a good enough communicator to get by.” They have no idea what their communication habits and idiosyncrasies are. They’ve never seen themselves in action. They think they’re doing fine, when they are actually hurting themselves and their organizations. The good news is that this initial realization, as painful as it may be, leads to major improvements in their communication skills. Let the video be a mirror for your communications.

**Reality check:** You can’t create a communication experience for your audience until you become self-aware. This means getting communication coaching and feedback—especially
video feedback. It also means seeking feedback from your peers regularly and creating a culture of sharing feedback across your team.

**WHITE LIE #5: “THAT’S NOT THE WAY WE DO THINGS HERE.”**

Many leaders within organizations and corporate businesses aren’t excellent communicators, and we see a trickle-down effect. After years of watching her boss read from behind the lectern, or editing PowerPoint decks filled with bullet points, jargon, and footnotes for her senior executives to share, a midlevel manager says, “I am going to be that way, present that way, because that’s obviously what it takes to get to that level.” The result is often an organization or a business with average or below average communicators. And thus . . . the title of this chapter.

Think about mirroring, the classic act of doing what the person you are talking to does. If he changes his body language, you change your body language. While this technique is often used in sales situations, consider this: If the other person is boring, serious, and showing a lack of interest with a slouch, should you be boring, serious, and also show a lack of interest with a slouch? No way! That’s a sad, vicious cycle.

Change is never easy, and it’s even harder when you’re the one who’s leading the charge. You stand out, and you are different from the rest of the team. It feels so much riskier,
and it almost doesn’t make sense—it goes against logic and reason—to do something differently.

Recently we conducted a series of training programs with a group of business unit vice presidents from a large insurance company based in Illinois. Each VP had been with the company for more than 15 years, knew its ins and outs, had received mentoring by other leaders in the company, and had relocated several times for various leadership positions. These people were viewed as the company’s future top leaders. The executive sponsor of the training program had an interesting request of us: “We’re leaning on you to help change our culture. It’s too stiff, meetings are too long and ineffective, and things just aren’t getting done the way they could be. We’re facing big changes and challenges in the next year, and we need to do things differently. These leaders need to be excellent, energizing communicators. We need your help to give them a green light to take more risks—and they’re likely to resist because of the culture.”

Sure enough, we had our work cut out for us. We urged the VPs to get out of their shells to show passion, to connect with and energize their teams. They resisted because the new practices felt awkward and uncomfortable. That didn’t surprise us—it’s hard to get out of your comfort zone! What surprised us was that they actually said: “This is not the way we do things here.”

The breakthrough happened when we told them about the permission and approval from the executive team. They needed to hear that it was OK to take a risk, to change their
style and approach to communicating. Suddenly, something shifted, almost as if a light went on above their heads. They responded with, “If you look around the organization, the people who are moving up and being promoted are the ones doing some of these things: showing more emotion, more passion, mixing things up. I’ll try it.” Needless to say, the rest of the training went well. And as they shifted their communication styles, it made a dent in the shift of culture inside this rather large company. Their new behaviors, stories, and real-life examples resuscitated those meetings. And it all stemmed from the moment they gave themselves permission to change.

**Reality check:** It doesn’t have to be the way it has always been. In fact, it can’t be! Don’t let yourself fall prey to Einstein’s definition of insanity: doing the same thing but expecting different results. Instead, use storyteller Doug Stevenson’s mantra, “Safe is a dangerous place to be.” Be bold and get out of your comfort zone to inspire others to more: more ownership, more buy-in, more empowerment.

**YOUR CHARGE: CHANGE THE STATUS QUO**

Business communication sucks. Stop being part of the problem by lying to yourself. A quick reality check will show you that everything that’s wrong with business communication today can be made right—with a few simple yet powerful tools. You are called to communicate well. This call has never been more urgent. Read on.
EXERCISES

- Watch the next award show (or at least the best and worst speech highlights). Check out the huge differences in the acceptance speeches.

- Look for the differences in executive presentations during your next town hall meeting, sales kickoff, or industry conference. Who's scripted?

- Which white lies are you most guilty of?

- When do you turn “on” and “off”? How would your family or friends describe you? How would your colleagues describe you?

- How much time do you spend preparing your message versus practicing your delivery?

- For what situations do you prepare the most?

- What feedback have you received about your communications?

About the Authors

BEN DECKER

The leading business communications expert, Ben bridges the gap between executive leaders and their teams. As CEO of Decker Communications, Inc., Ben has worked with hundreds of leaders in Fortune 500 companies to strategize and implement communications solutions that are practical, direct, and attainable.

Renowned as a speaker’s speaker, Ben regularly addresses large audiences on the importance of creating a communication experience, developing executive presence, and the communications of a leader. He has been featured at large conferences and kickoffs for companies such as Marriott, Robert Half International, Hewlett-Packard, Million Dollar Roundtable, CHRISTUS Health, and Exponent.

Ben also coaches C-level executives from major organizations, including Charles Schwab, McKesson, Cisco, Bacardi, U.S. Coast Guard, JPMorgan Chase, AT&T, and Kaiser Permanente, as well as start-ups and portfolio companies seeking to raise capital. Ben’s prior experience and success in sales
and sales management in the telecommunications and surgical industries validated the importance of communicating effectively, even in the briefest interactions.

Ben has been steeped in the Decker Method his entire life. Early in his “career,” he remembers being videotaped prior to his junior high book reports. In hindsight, he can certainly see the value of it, but the jury is still out on whether or not he’ll subject his own three boys to the same. Family time is his most important treasure, and he’s always protecting the calendar to spend time with the boys. Ben holds a BS in psychology from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

KELLY DECKER

A keynote speaker, messaging expert, and executive communication coach, Kelly Decker unlocks the potential in individuals—especially senior leaders. As president of Decker Communications, Inc., Kelly leads innovation efforts, most recently developing new programs for challenges like Telepresence, team selling, and sales storytelling.

In addition to serving as the mastermind behind Decker’s program offerings, Kelly personally coaches executive leaders from Fortune 500 companies such as AT&T, Clorox, and United Health Group to increase their impact and lead by influence rather than by authority.
Kelly has been a featured speaker at conferences and events for companies including Clorox, Microsoft, Newmark Grubb Knight Frank, Pfizer, United Health Group, and Wells Fargo. She helps navigate communication challenges specifically related to female executives. She has also been featured in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Marketwatch*, and *MarieClaire*.

Every day, she leverages the skills and past experience that she gained in consulting with the Alexander Group and in corporate communications and sales management with AT&T. She holds an MBA from the Haas School of Business and a BS in psychology from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.

Having grown up in a large Italian family, Kelly has worked hard to overcome the communications challenge of overgesturing. She’s also a proud survivor of growing up with three brothers, and she uses her experience to raise her and Ben’s three boys, Jackson, Joseph, and Christopher.