

Hello Council members,

Thank you for attending the Communications Leadership Council's virtual retreat on November 18, 2020. Below is a summary of the topics we discussed during the retreat, organized into categories for easier reading.

As always, thank you for talking so openly about your jobs, challenges and successes. We are honored to have you as part of this community. Please reach out to us at Councilconciierge@ragan.com, if we can be of help regarding retreat information or other content that could help you or your team.

Member video showcased at the beginning of the retreat is linked [here](#).

2020 HIGHLIGHTS FIRESIDE CHAT

Speakers were Mark Ragan of Ragan Communications, Jim Ylisela of Ragan Consulting Group, Council member Susan Donlan of KeyBank, and Council member Matthew Young of ABB.

What did we learn about ourselves?

- A big takeaway was “adaptability,” including the ability to engage from afar.
- Even those people who have never seen the importance of comms have acknowledged the value of the comms role this year.
- The pandemic has made teams more empathetic, which has helped serve customers better. Empathy helps people discover what is “essential.”
- Was the pandemic an opportunity to let go of some things? Internal comms usually is a game of addition. Some examples of slimming down:
 1. Bundling information and sending it once, to streamline comms. Make a template to make it catchy. Create a deadline so it can be included in the briefing.
 2. Cut back on newsletter or channel content to ask yourself: “What is something that we need to start doing that we would never have been able to start until right now?”
 3. Try to say what matters to people. Cut through the clutter of channels to “What does someone need to know today” and then get a leadership voice behind it.

What will the new work environment look like?

- The consensus is that not everyone who shifted to remote overnight will all go back to 5 days a week in the office. However, the pendulum will not swing as far as you think.
- Coming into work sick as an act of heroism is “gone.”
- Business travel is going to change, particularly for those who were on the road continuously.
- People will want to be in the office 1-2 days a week.
- We are in the trenches right now. We will need to remember this kind of relationship building we are experiencing.
- As communicators, we are now thought leaders within our own company. People are looking to comms for answers and not small ones.
- We have a chance to break norms and not go back to work as we knew it. We should keep the behaviors we learned: innovation, flexibility, empathy.

PURPOSE IN A PANDEMIC: REI'S STORY OF EMPLOYEE AMBASSADORSHIP

Speaker was Diana Kowalsky of REI.

Employees can engage consumers during the pandemic

- Anchor to principles learned during COVID-19: be authentic and transparent.
- Keep employees at the center of the conversation while having conversations around tough decisions like staff reductions.
- Keep commitments to community and nonprofit partners.

Developing “Recreate Responsibly” coalition

- Allowed employees to engage with customers to help customers get outside and do it safely.
- It spread on social, allowing employees to engage on their channels.
- Brought engagement with other outdoors brands.
- Tied the campaign to annual decision to stay closed on Black Friday.
- Produced employee-exclusive apparel (masks) that allowed employees to demonstrate safe recreation.

Tips for making employees ambassadors

- Make sure it matters. Have a powerful message that employees care about.
- Keep it simple. Don't overcomplicate your message.
- Let the employees make it their own.

Finding what matters to employees

- Listening to store managers revealed employees were big advocates of mask use during the mask debate.
- Giving them the campaign helped solve an immediate problem for front line workers.
- Employees feel like they are banner carriers of the Co-Op in their local areas – they can take an idea and localize it.
- Figuring out what really resonates with employees is how you know that they will get behind an initiative.

WHEN BIAS IS SHARED: ENTERGY SHOWS HOW VULNERABILITY ADVANCES DEI GOALS

Speaker was Michelle Delery of Entergy.

Diversity and inclusion begins internally

- Generally cautious about getting into the conversation on social issues unless it affected the business.
- Internally, diversity, inclusion and belonging—what they call DIB—has always been part of the conversation.
- The formal DIB vision dates to 2013, and includes statements of shared values, the creation of diversity and inclusion councils, and a roadmap for how to get where it needs to go.

DIB goes public

- When the social-justice movement erupted earlier in 2020, organization decided they needed to speak up.
- Company was aware that there might be some employees on social media saying things that don't align with Entergy's values. Chairman and CEO wrote his first-ever public blog, outlining the company's DIB initiatives and its values around social justice.
- Conversation around DIB accelerated, even in the virtual setting. They put together a 90-minute virtual town hall that included all of the CEO's direct reports, a group called the Office of the Chief Executive.
 - The underlying goal was to form a more cohesive leadership team. Each participant shared vulnerabilities and biases. Each offered testimonials about their experiences. All sought to model behaviors that all employees could emulate.

Numbers, and DIB going forward

- The town hall served as a jumping off point for companywide engagement, including training.
 - More than 400 employee sent comments expressing thanks for the town hall.
 - More than 90% of the workforce participated in a post town hall survey.
 - Most of the senior management has already gone through DIB training.
- Ethnic and gender diversity isn't where it needs to be, but they're trying to make progress.

FROM PAIN TO PROGRESS: THE NEUROPSYCHOLOGY OF RESILIENT LEADERSHIP

Guest speaker, Dr. Julia DiGangi, Neuropsychologist, Founder and CEO at NeuroHealth Partners
Her forthcoming book from Harvard Business Review Press will be sent digitally to all attendees in the spring of 2021. A copy will be available for the CEOs of all attendees, too.

Introduction

- Dr. DiGangi is a neuropsychologist and an expert on the effects of chronic stress on our brain and our behavior. She has treated stress and trauma in civilian, community, organizational, and military contexts.
- Humans are notoriously bad at change, whether it's dieting habits, political change, organizational change, etc. Workplace changes are leading to pain amongst employees, whether it's stress, anxiety or uncertainty.
- Understanding the brain can help move us from a place of pain to a place of progress. Here are the principles of converting pain to progress:
 1. Change management requires pain management
 2. To get to change, we must think counterintuitively
 3. Find the right frame for pain

Change management

- Our pain is the fusion of human behavior and informs our experiences.
- Even during this pandemic, many of us aren't sick, our house is intact, we have our jobs, etc. – we might not be experiencing direct pain, but related feelings of fear, worry, uncertainty, anger, fear, and frustration.
- All pain-related emotions can be mapped to parts of the brain:

- General response to pain: Extinguish as quickly as possible, for all types of pain for every instance it occurs.
- Paradox of pain: We get stuck in painful patterns of behavior because of our tendency to immediately extinguish the pain.

Think counterintuitively

- You have to be willing to do the exact opposite of what feels right. Addressing your pain can help break its paradox.
- Our brain is a 'pattern detector' that helps us navigate all the noise that we encounter. Detection is incredible for survival but can also lead to dysfunction.
 - Pattern detection often leads to confusing the problem with the solution, which means that innovative solutions are often dismissed because we can't endure the discomfort they bring us.
 - Example: A combat veteran experiencing PTSD tried 'intuitively' avoiding reminders of his suffering. However, after 8 weeks of counterintuitively reengaging with his traumatic memories, he learned how to process his pain.

Right frame for pain

- Business leaders emphasize the importance of resilience, listening, empathy, transparency, etc. – if we value all these things, too, why aren't leaders following their own advice?
- There are two barriers to emotionally intelligent leadership:
 - Our own pain and discomfort
 - Learning the highly sophisticated behaviors of good listening, being empathic, etc.
- Our 1 brain features 2 systems:
 - Our Emotional Brain is a Sprinter:
 - It's reactive, explosive, and fast.
 - Can be mapped to feelings of anxiety of fear, anger, and stress.
 - Our Thinking Brain is a Marathoner:
 - It's powerful, smart, and slow.
 - Can be mapped to calmness, empathy, and thoughtfulness.
- We need to train our Thinking Brain so that our Emotional Brain doesn't take over. To solve the 'Two Runner' problem of the brain, we need to think about pain in a new way.
 - From pain to progress:
 - All pain is not created equal.
 - Pain hurts but it can't be avoided.
 - Pain is the primary catalyst for the very change we need.
 - Invite the right heat of discomfort – change begins in the places we avoid.
 - Ask yourself the following:
 - What are our organization's top avoidance issues?
 - What conversations are being avoided?
 - What types of questions have I been reluctant to ask?
 - How can I start these conversations?
 - When pain means progress:
 - Breaking patterns creates an uncomfortable 'sting' – if you feel that sensation, you're probably doing something right.
 - Change can become bearable when we use our Thinking Brain to reinterpret emotional sensations.

Closing thoughts

- Don't try to put too many parameters on how a conversation should be conducted – it might be a latent strategy of avoiding the heat of discomfort.
- Uncertainty about whether you can expect to feel any pain can often create more pain than the actual 'painful' sensation. Our Marathon Brain can help us break the cycle of uncertainty.
- Employees might have different expectations from their leader than the organization's investors/shareholders. It's normal for leaders to feel uncomfortable about the prospect of answering to all audiences – that stress comes with the position!
- If your team is experiencing division after the election, ask them questions that can spark a discussion and help navigate the uncomfortable experience.
- Radical clarity can be exceptionally empathetic – even if you're delivering bad or uncomfortable news, delivering it straight and allowing room for conversation will resonate with everybody within your organization.

MERGING TWO ORGANIZATIONS IN A PANDEMIC: BUILDING ONE POWERFUL COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Speaker was Sheila Noel of UKG.

Reconfiguring a merger

- Ultimate Software and Kronos merger process began in February – goal was to create 3,000 jobs over three years and double revenue by 2025.
- Two weeks later, the COVID-19 pandemic began and immediately threatened the merger. Data and systems weren't fully accessible, and information couldn't be shared freely because the two organizations were still considered separate entities.
- Even during the pandemic they announced a new brand, harmonized benefits, developed a combined compensation plan, rolled out a new go-to-market strategy, unified processes and collaboration software, undertook organization-wide health surveys and more.

Communications initiatives launched

- Combined-company intranet conceived last June and rolled out in August.
- Published a CEO blog.
- Created a master communications framework that defines roles and responsibilities.
- Set communications priorities, starting with a vision to "deepen the connection to our people, and theirs to UKG; and embed our culture from day one and ongoing through effective communications."
- Quarterly "state of the company" meetings helped ensure employees stay connected to organization's strategy.

Lessons learned

- Different ways of working matter, even when you want the same results.
- You can achieve open, transparent communication in a variety of ways.
- Communications philosophy matters – take the time to develop one and preach it to all stakeholders.
- No one wants to be a guest on their own team.

INTENTIONAL COMMUNICATIONS: HOW NETAPP'S COMMS TEAM PUT MANAGERS ON A SUCCESS PATH

Speaker was Dana Masuda of NetApp.

- Managers are the linchpin of great communication, though they are often overlooked, undertrained or underused in terms of conveying crucial messaging.
- NetApp created “The Leader’s Edge,” an empowering and educational community for managers, to cure the company’s faltering comms cascade.
- At NetApp, information wasn’t getting far enough downstream to reach its 10,000+ employees. Just 20% of the company’s VPs were communicating well.
- NetApp started by gaining manager feedback and getting clarity on what communication gaps existed and what sort of group might interest them.
- Managers wanted to know, “What’s in it for me?” Team emphasized the benefits to engagement, productivity and their own careers.
- “The Leader’s Edge” started with 50 early adopters. Then 120 early adopters. The goal was to empower a new channel of internal influencers who could disseminate crucial messages.
- Driving an intentional community makes all the difference.
- What approaches worked to boost managers’ involvement in the program?
 1. **Asking for new member introductions**, where people could share hobbies, personal interests and passions.
 2. **“The Download” program**, which distilled two weeks’ worth of crucial info into bite-sized messaging.
 3. **Creating a virtual water cooler, not a virtual billboard**. Employees will tune out bland white noise, but they like having spaces where they can freely share opinions.
 4. **Leveraging healthy, peer-to-peer competition**. NetApp created a leaderboard to track which managers were inviting the most people to join “The Leader’s Edge,” which massively expanded the user base.
 5. **Consistent polling and surveys to gather feedback**, which helped shape and augment the program moving forward.

THE ART OF STORYTELLING IN LEADERSHIP

Guest speaker Dawn Fraser, Storyteller and Speaker, Fraser’s Edge, LLC

Why stories matter

- Stories are highly effective in connecting and communicating our own values and principles, and those of our organizations, to others.
- Good stories have an impact on our brain:
 - Dopamine is released, which stimulates our brain’s reward and pleasure center.
 - Cortisol, a hormone that helps focus attention and facilitate memory, and Oxytocin, a hormone central to social bonding and wound healing, are also released when we hear a good story.

What impedes storytelling

- Focusing on what a product or service is going to do for us dulls the impact of storytelling. We should focus instead on how we feel when we receive the product/service.
- Our empathy bias – how we empathize with a member of our ingroup versus a member of another social group – is another challenge. There's a difference in how we relate to people who look like us and how we do it with those who don't look like us.
 - Bias maps track how warmth and competence are assigned to different categories of people based on perception – many of these perceptions are prejudiced.
- Fortunately, good storytelling can transcend these impediments.

The elements of an effective story

- Follow the STORY acronym:
 - S: Significance.
 - T: Theme of the story. This is the guiding light. Take out the non-essential parts.
 - O: Organize. The arc of the story.
 - R: Recreate. Show the story, don't just tell it.
 - Y: You. Be authentic.

Tips for business-specific storytelling:

- Have a clear purpose
- Understand how the story relates to the audience
- Start strong and end in power
- Use emotions, not just facts
- Incorporate scenes, involve the five senses
- Keep it simple
- Use stakes to show what could be gained or lost
- Personify using characters
- Consider a call to action
- Be authentically you