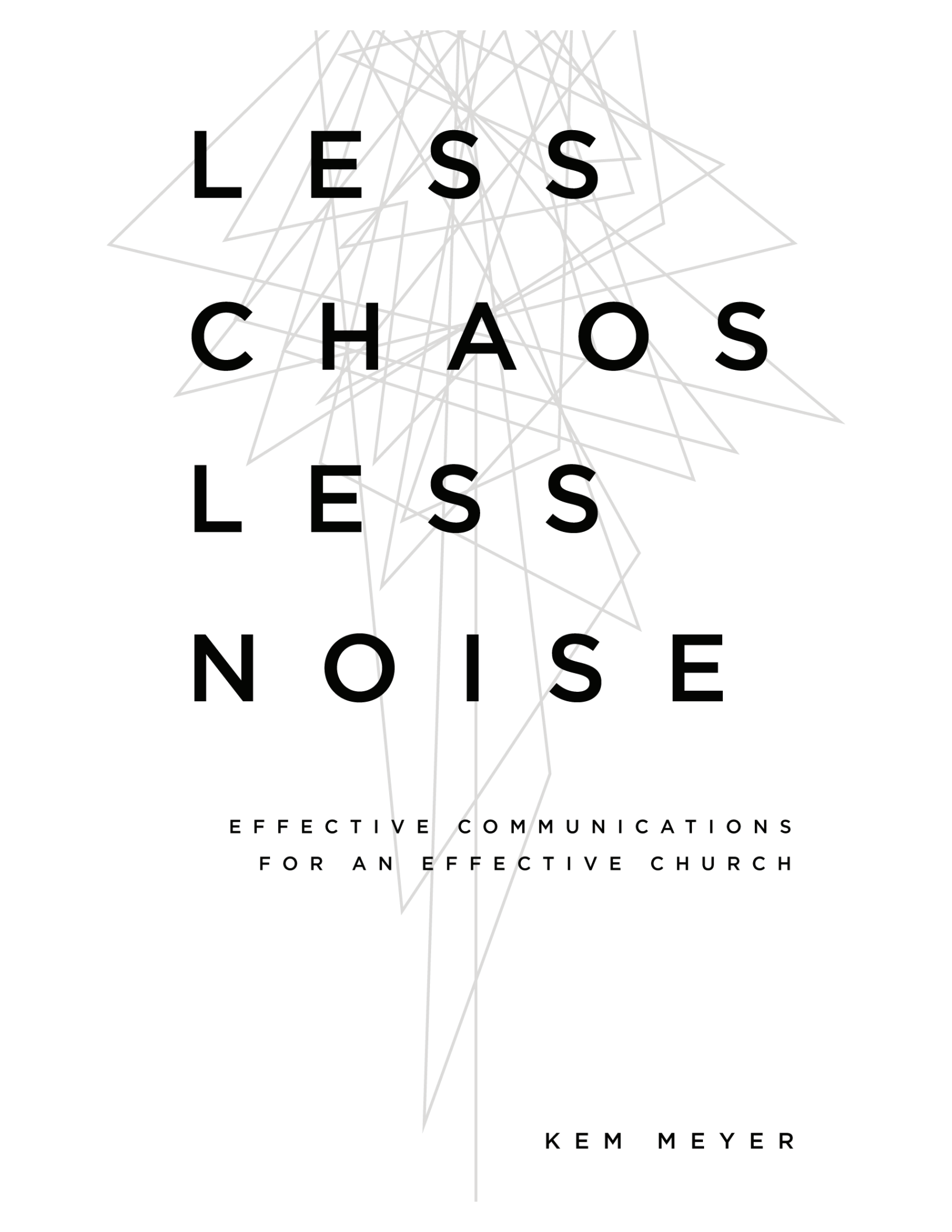




L E S S

C H A O S

L E S S

N O I S E

**E F F E C T I V E C O M M U N I C A T I O N S
F O R A N E F F E C T I V E C H U R C H**

K E M M E Y E R



Less Chaos. Less Noise.

Kem Meyer

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“**Kem shows us how to target and connect rather than barrage and confuse.**

...relevant strategies that are laser-focused and people-driven.

...a field guide for connecting with your community and transforming lives...

“The greatest message ought to be communicated in the most memorable ways. And, Kem Meyer will show you how to do it. This book is both inspirational and practical. A must-read for those who care about communicating the message of Christ in the most compelling way possible.”

—Mark Batterson, *New York Times* bestselling author
and Lead Pastor of National Community Church

“Practical, insightful, even breathtaking at times. If your communications are failing to communicate, this book is a fabulous place to start.”

—Seth Godin, bestselling author

“With a 360-degree view of the author and application of this book’s content, I find myself in a unique position. As Kem’s pastor, I’ve watched her integrate the values and principles espoused in this book throughout the fabric of Granger Community Church. This stuff isn’t just theory. I know it really works. Kem has made this extraordinary material available to you. Use it up.”

—Mark Beeson, Senior Pastor,
Granger Community Church

“Meyer takes a candid look at the stupid barriers that prevent progress and explains how to tear them down. By reading this book, evangelists in churches, nonprofits, and businesses can learn to connect with the head, heart and gut of their customers and employees and then change the world.”

—Guy Kawasaki, Chief Evangelist of Canva, board of trustees of Wikimedia, and Mercedes Benz brand ambassador

“This book is a field guide for connecting with your community and transforming lives; it needs to be on every pastor’s desk in America. Speaking from years of experience as an expert in corporate communications, Kem Meyer reminds us that the most effective communication tool is ‘simplicity.’ In today’s multi-platform, complex media world, *Less Chaos. Less Noise.* is my reality check.”

—Phil Cooke, filmmaker, media activist and author

“As a leader, communication is key. And since we all communicate on a regular basis, pick up this book immediately. Whether web strategy, traditional mail, brochures, or social media, you’ll learn from a proven and effective leader in Kem Meyer. After years of experience in both the corporate and church world, she understands what it takes to effectively get your message across. This book provides the lessons that will help you incorporate proven and practical communication practices into your organization.”

—Brad Lomenick, author of *H3 Leadership*
& *The Catalyst Leader*

“Practical. Brilliant. Profound. Funny. These are just a few words that came to mind as I read *Less Chaos. Less Noise.* Kem Meyer has become the leading expert for church communications. There is something here for every church leader or pastor—regardless of the size of your church.”

—Tim Stevens, author, *Fairness is Overrated*

"I've worked with hundreds of churches over the last several years. One of the common areas where churches get stuck is with communications. Whenever that challenge rises to the top, I always recommend Kem's practical and strategic resources. Now, you get them all in one easy-to-read book. Every church leader, whether you are a communications director or not, should read *Less Chaos. Less Noise.*"

—Tony Morgan, founder & Chief Strategic
Officer of The Unstuck Group

"Those of us who communicate in local churches, seeking to inform and persuade, would be wise to pay attention to this book. Kem Meyer writes out of her own experience in a highly effective local church where she has learned what kinds of messages have the best shot at breaking through the clutter and compelling individuals to action. Thank you, Kem, for this extremely practical and helpful tool."

—Nancy Beach, Leadership Coach, Slingshot Group

"In the 21st century, how a church communicates is more important than ever. Beyond being clever, we have to cut through the clutter of a noisy and chaotic world to spread a message that matters. Kem Meyer has been a trusted advocate for helping churches communicate better for over a decade and has been a leading voice about how to be smart about the tools we use to do it. This book is a tremendous resource to anyone who wants to communicate more effectively and purposefully."

—Tim Schraeder, Social Media Strategist. Community Builder.
Church Communications Reformer.

“In the business workshops I teach, people of all generations consistently complain they are buried in messages. Most people tell me they ignore half of their email—and it’s addressed to them. They ignore most messages, but want better communication. New technologies have allowed churches to dramatically increase the number of messages they can send. And, in the process, they increase the likelihood people they want to help will tune them out. That’s why I love this book. Kem shows us how to target and connect rather than barrage and confuse. I guarantee you will do the classic head slap when she shows examples of how much clearer and simpler we can make our church communications.”

— Haydn Shaw, Senior Consultant at Franklin Covey and
author of *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn’t Dying,*
Millennials Are Not the Problem, and the Future Is Bright

“What a thought...Our message should be designed to meet the needs of those we are trying to reach, instead of ourselves. Kem’s unique experience and skill provide us with a much-needed reminder and insights that will transform the way we communicate, and thus relate, to others. This book caught my attention from the moment I picked it up, and offered relevant strategies that are laser-focused and people-driven. One thing is for sure, Kem’s common sense approach and encouraging style will make a difference in how you lead.”

—Larry Little, Ph.D, author, speaker, and CEO of
Eagle Center for Leadership

“Kem covered probably the most undervalued asset in any creative space, being either a marketing agency or a local church: communication. Being able to relate to people and convey your ideas clearly doesn’t come naturally to everyone, but Kem has definitely laid out a great groundwork here to follow. I read this and found so many great, refreshing points that I will use daily.”

—Matt Hernandez, VP On-Air Design, CBS Network

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A NOTE TO READERS — NEW AND OLD

I published the first iteration of this collection of stories in 2009 in a book titled *Less Clutter. Less Noise: Beyond Bulletins, Brochures and Bake Sales*. A lot has changed since then. But, there's more that hasn't changed.

Churches are still looking for more ways to get more information out to more people, while more people are looking for relief from more. And, while we've got access to so many new tools to help us do our jobs faster or easier, it doesn't mean we're doing them better. **The most effective communications are rooted in the power of *less*. Less chaos. Less noise.**

So, I've taken some time to update the old content with new examples, answer new questions to new pressures people are facing and provided some fresh handles to foundational principles that never change. I've also added more helpful tools in the back of the book from a variety of churches and consultants I've worked with over the past couple of years.

This little book is designed to be a common sense steroid shot in the arm. An encouraging dose of best practice vitamins. A cold splash of reality water on the face. And, a quick reference toolbox of examples. By the end (which shouldn't take too long to reach at all), you will be walking taller, basking in what you already knew in your heart, but may have forgotten.

ENJOY!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Meyer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

INTRODUCTION

Life is hard and people are bombarded, used, abused and skeptical. They live day to day in a stressed-out, over-committed, over-extended survival mode—whether they go to church or not. They simply don't have the margin for more, but they are looking for answers that will make a real difference in their lives.

The church should make it easy to find those answers. Most of the time, unfortunately, that is not what happens. Too often, churches just add to the confusion.

BEST INTENTIONS WITH DISASTROUS RESULTS

Scrambling to keep up and looking for ways to get their message heard, churches are creating more videos, designing new logos, printing more inserts, sending more emails, launching new apps and websites, posting more social media updates and trying to write lots of captivating content.

Here's what happens. The people they are trying to reach move further away just to survive the onslaught. They shut down. Stop listening. Move on. Because, more is not better.

Every organization, including the church, has to face a changing culture. Part of that requires us to get over ourselves and recognize

that effective communication is really about “releasing the right response.” The way to do it is by creating great experiences, a seamless message and a few smart systems. Sound complicated? It doesn’t have to be!

MAYBE THIS IS YOU

You are committed to helping people take steps in their spiritual lives. You may have even devoted your entire life to it. You know the local church can change hearts and lives, but you are struggling to make that connection with people in your community.

You really are trying to figure out how to get people to notice.

On the other hand, maybe you “get it.” You have a few things in your toolbox that could break your church out of a rut, but you’re having trouble getting buy-in from your staff, peers or leaders.

Navigating through this change can be frustrating and discouraging.

WHAT YOU NEED

Great communication strategies will make a noticeable difference, and many churches today are making efforts to get better at it by jumping into social media, hiring graphic artists and videographers, creating “storyteller” roles and more. In the best scenarios, these steps can help.

But, more often than not, all this increased activity just adds to the frenzy instead of making a connection with their desired audience. Even with an increased awareness of better “communications and creative efforts,” few teams understand the core objectives of the tools they’re using, and even fewer know how to manage it.

Just as many people look to you for inspiration and practical answers, you are looking for practical answers, too. Something to help you get out of survival mode.

You don't need to read an exhaustive textbook with heavy narrative and academic case studies to learn how to plan and run an effective communication strategy. What you do need is air. A fresh perspective. An encouraging nudge. A few "aha" moments. A simple example or two that helps you stop focusing on the output and start focusing on the outcome.

YOU DON'T KNOW ME

Or even if you do know me, you might ask yourself as you're reading, "Who does she think she is and why is she talking to me right now?" Good question—let's get acquainted.

I took two major tours of duty in my professional experience: fifteen years in corporate communications and digital strategy for a global organization, and a dozen years on the staff team for a multi-site church. On the first tour, I picked up the strategic best practices and absorbed blunt, real-life public opinion about ministry and not-for-profit communication tactics. The second tour showed me ministry and not-for-profit work is harder, and more important, than it looks.

Though my vocational experience started on the outside, I have been part of my local church since 1991. In the past twenty-five years, I've worn every hat and played every role on payroll and off—skeptical guest, defensive attendee, lukewarm member, volunteer leader, part-time staff and executive leadership team member. I have watched and participated one step at a time as we experienced explosive growth and as we've struggled to turn around a trending

decline. And, while I'm no longer on the Granger Community Church staff, my family and I are still serving, growing and attending there. It's our community. It is worth the "price of admission," if you will. But, it hasn't always been that way.

The beginning of my story is common. As a young adult, I was chasing everything that might compensate for the feelings on the inside I didn't know what to do with. Feelings of fear, insecurity, lack of purpose, loneliness, individuality—I had them all, even if I didn't recognize them for what they were.

Things in culture—things of beauty, art, excitement, fun, adventure—clearly captured my attention; they were not hard to find. I tried to fill the void with a career, more stuff and an active social life. On the outside, I was fulfilled and successful. I had it going on, but on the inside, I was empty. Without a foundation in Christ, I lacked the filter to know which paths were empty facades, and which were paths that would bring real life.

I was looking for inspiration and real answers that would make a difference in my life, but nothing about the church captured my attention. Even when I sought answers at the church, I could not find my next step. The church was like another world—one where I could not find a handle to hold onto. It didn't match anything I knew, so I left bombarded and confused and continued to chase the wrong things. My lasting impression of the church? It was for weak, out-of-touch people who just needed to "get a life."

AN INSIDER WHO NEVER LOST THAT OUTSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

Obviously, something happened along the way to change my mind. I was able to find real answers and see the tangible difference Jesus could play in my life. I was able to take steps and learn how God created me the way I am, and that he has a plan for me.

Whether you recognize it yet or not, your audience has an outsider's perspective, too. People know they need "something more," but have stopped turning to the church for answers because its methods and language are clumsy and difficult. Maybe in times of crisis, ceremonial traditions or for an hour a week, the church is the place to be. But, what about for inspiration and direction for normal, everyday life? Not so much.

Are you interested in how an institution can still capture someone's attention in the midst of all of the chaos and cultural momentum? Keep reading.

COMMON GROUND

I've spent the past ten years facilitating workshops, speaking at conferences and providing custom coaching and consulting for hundreds of churches. Over and over, I have listened to what leaders are saying and how they are dealing with pain. The common issues I see surfacing about understanding different worldviews and finding ways to remove the barriers that keep people from connecting with Christ—and each other—is what led me to write this book.

NOT JUST FOR CHURCHES

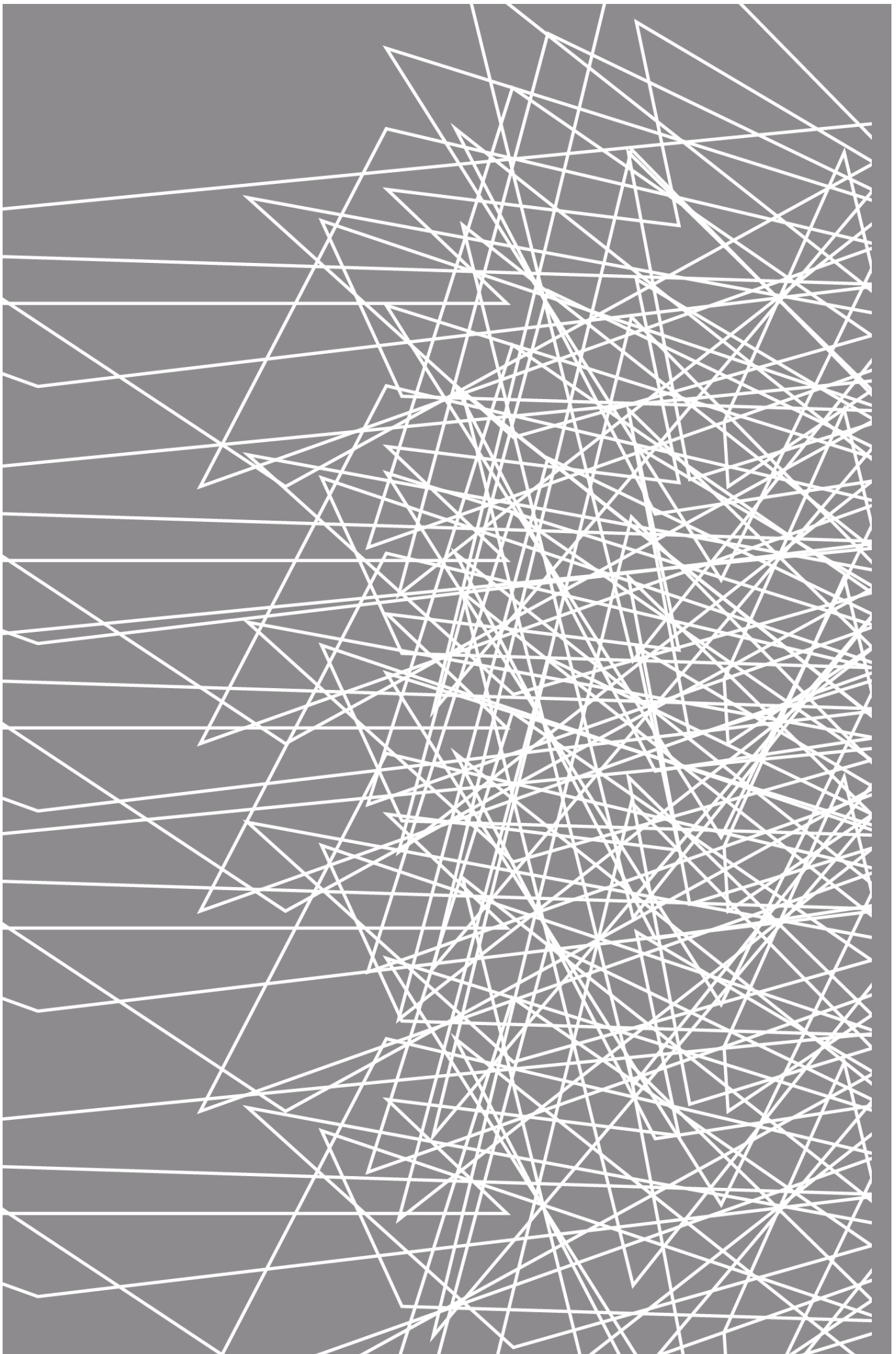
While this book was written from the vantage point and uses a lot of examples from the local church, the principles speak loudly to the schools, not-for-profits and small businesses I work with as well. Anyone struggling to get the word out to motivate their audience to action can, and should, tap into these pages for support. My heart and drive is to bridge the gap; both sectors have so much to learn from each other.

Currently, 78 percent of Americans describe themselves as “Christian, but beliefs and practices vary widely.”¹ Even with such a high percentage of adult U.S. citizens identifying themselves as Christian, there is an increasing number of religiously unaffiliated, a steady drop in church attendance and growing tension over religious freedoms across America. I ask you, what better organizational case study to learn from than the church?

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

A little background will help you digest what’s next. My goal is to serve you with an easy, quick-reference, short course on incorporating proven communication practices into your organization—regardless of size, style or location. This book does not follow the typical linear, A-Z outline. It caters to the short attention span (for my sake and yours). It is conversational. It bounces around. It uses real stories and practical examples. You can read a few pages here and a few pages there. Relax, have fun and enjoy each bite-size serving. Each chapter will contain a new idea or story that encourages or challenges you to look at how you talk to people; whether it’s through your announcements, apps, Photoshop or Facebook.

Although I will reference a variety of sources along the way, I have thought of you as I've developed the content in this book to deliver new insights from a real-life perspective. I realize this is crucial as you try to apply practical principles in a not-so-practical reality. Use the examples and stories in this book to promote team discussions in your world, bridge the gap and help leverage the power that already exists in your environment. I'm setting the stage now; the only way to reveal fresh observations is to put an end to preconceived notions. Every page is designed to provide you the context for reinvention.





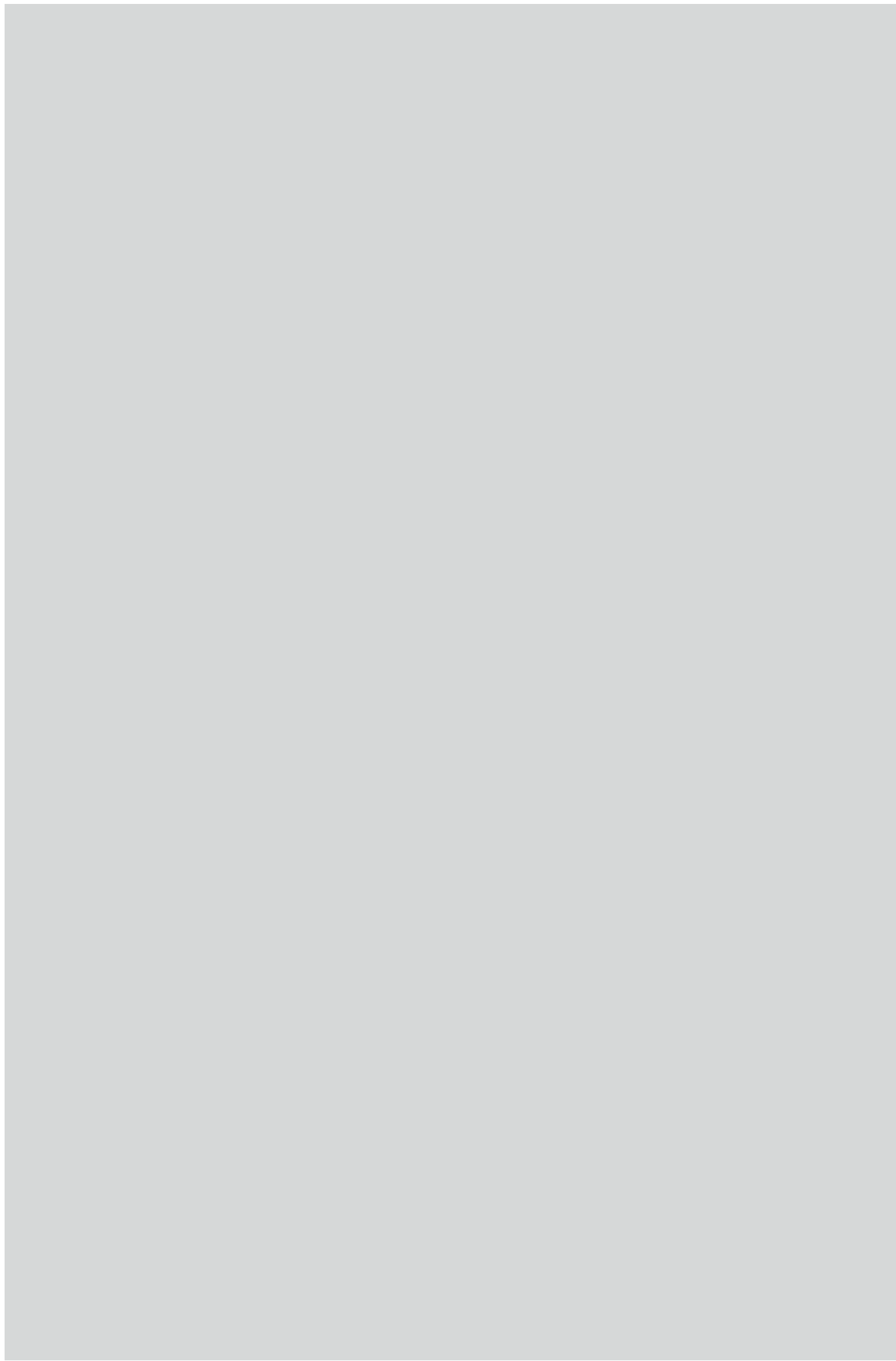
part 1

ARE PEOPLE LETTING YOU IN OR SHUTTING YOU OUT?

**Just because something is legible doesn't
mean that it communicates; it could be
communicating the wrong thing.**

David Carson

Many times, conventional wisdom about communications and marketing is wrong. It mass markets, force-feeds and assumes people are just waiting to hear what you have to say. Are you unknowingly falling victim to believing five myths about getting the word out?



chapter 1

THE MYTH: YOU ARE IN CONTROL



One of the ways we elicit wonder is by scrambling the self temporarily so the world can seep in.

Jason Silva

Every person has a unique framework of ideas and beliefs they use to interpret the world and interact with it—a worldview. A person's worldview encompasses his or her experiences, wishes, biases, values and assumptions. Good communication is not so much about sending the right message as it is about releasing the right response. The right message assumes you and the other person will respond in the same way. A person's worldview shows up before you do, and that is the reality of the message you send. It's not what you say; it's what people hear. And, while you might not be able to control what people see or hear, you can do a better job of trying to anticipate it.

IT'S A FRICKIN' ELEPHANT!

I heard a story about a grandpa helping his four-year-old grandson learn to read. The boy pointed to a picture in a zoo book and said, "Look, Grandpa! It's a frickin' elephant." The grandpa took a deep breath and asked, "What did you call it?"

His grandson repeated himself.

"It's a frickin' elephant, Grandpa! It says so on the picture!"

And, so it did. When the grandpa looked down at the picture, it read,

"A F R I C A N Elephant."

It's not what you say; it's what people hear.*

* Think you may have heard this before? It's the subtitle of a book by corporate and political consultant Frank Luntz: *Words that Work*.

ARE BIRDS TOO FEMININE?

Believe it or not, we processed this real question as a ministry team. The question arose when we were evaluating whether or not to use the image of a bird on our website. We also discussed whether our baptism graphic resembled a female body part. Both of these conversations were totally serious and appropriate.

It is important that you're willing to ask these types of questions before using graphics and images:

- Does this graphic support or compete with the intended experience for our audience?
- Does this visual help accomplish the desired objective or not?
- Does it have potential to attract or repel?
- Does it add to or take away credibility?

Several years ago, Pepsi ran a short-lived billboard campaign for their Pepsi ONE¹ product.



What does this mean?²

When I saw it, I wondered why Pepsi was using a drop of blood to advertise their cola. The billboard would have made more sense for a hemophilia center or blood bank, but it did not make me want to drink Pepsi One, that's for sure. After some research, I discovered the experience they intended for their audience. The little circle guy is supposed to represent one calorie. The little drop guy is supposed to represent taste. And, isn't that cute—they are coexisting happily together. See, you really can have it all.

Except, that is not the message I got driving down the road at 55 mph. They weren't in control of the message. **Sometimes, you need to evaluate a graphic's potential to take on a life of its own.**

In the end, we decided the particular bird image we were considering would send a more feminine message than we wanted. Although, we did all agree that a cardinal can put on a mean face.

IT TAKES TWO

Do we think about how what we say is going to affect others, or do we just think about what we have to say? I've heard David Armano, a user experience design guru, say it this way:

“What are we trying to communicate?” implies a one-way conversation. Maybe we should ask ourselves: “How can we facilitate?”

I was once forwarded a response to a form letter someone had received. It's a real-life demonstration of a message action and the reaction it triggered. I'm changing some names and details to protect the innocent, but here's the gist:

SUBSCRIPTION SUSPENDED

I'm disappointed.

You requested a subscription to our magazine, and I started that subscription for you in good faith. But so far, you haven't held up your end of the bargain.

I have no choice but to cancel your subscription unless we receive your payment in the next 10 days. Please mail it today.

This simple letter from the magazine seems harmless and normal enough, doesn't it? That is, until you see how it made the reader feel. The recipient tells the rest of the story in a candid response that gave voice to what many others feel but rarely communicate aloud:

DEAR EDITOR,

When I was six, I regularly bullied my sister.

When I was 10, I stole candy from the Dollar Store, even though I had the money to pay for it.

When I was 14, I broke my mother's heart by yelling at her to leave my baseball game because she was embarrassing me.

When I was 19, I regularly pilfered wads of toilet paper and Ziploc bags of hand soap from my place of employment.

I'm impatient with my kids. I'm selfish. I judge people harshly. I'm not as kind to strangers as I should be. I don't like animals. I take the miracle of my life for granted. I'm ungrateful. I'm obscene. I make absurd banalities into "issues" just so I don't feel boring. I once instigated a fight with my wife over green beans.

I am not as good as I could be. Of this, there can be no doubt.

Two months ago, I filled out a little card requesting a free copy of your magazine. After reading through it, I chose not to subscribe. Was I disappointed in the quality of the writing? Did I find it overpriced? Did I get busy with giving birth and raising an infant and forget all about it?

You didn't ask, and I am disappointed. Had I received a kinder message from you such as, "I'm sorry you chose not to subscribe to our magazine. Please keep us in mind in the future. Please have a nice day," I would have considered sending a check for \$12.95.

Please take me off your mailing list. I have enough to feel ashamed of in my life without more guilt trips from you.

It makes me think of this new response I've been seeing lately when I unsubscribe to mailing lists or opt-out of subscription pop-ups. Retailers—or worse yet, content providers I'm following—ask too much as I manage my personal influx of information.

- ☐ Yes! Please sign me up for more insights with regular emails to my inbox.
 - ☐ No! I don't want to be more effective in my work.

That cleverly-worded choice doesn't make me second-guess my decision, it reinforces it! Geez, magazine. Thanks for trying to take me on the biggest guilt trip of my life. But, honestly, our relationship status isn't even close to that level.

If we asked, I wonder what candid feedback we'd hear about emails we send? Or, the status updates we post? How often do I draft my correspondence, seemingly harmless enough, without concentrated consideration as to how it makes the recipient feel? Do I test my words against the objective I'm trying to accomplish?

I appreciate the insight I gained from this honest response to a thoughtless form letter. When I'm able to get insight such as this, it helps me anticipate responses. Only then am I able to communicate in a way that opens doors instead of closing them.

WAIT FOR IT!

I don't necessarily like surprises, but I do love the unexpected. I love it when someone breaks away from the norm to introduce a fresh approach. When I can't predict what's going to happen, I'm left going, "Huh. How about that?" I like it when that happens.

A close friend of mine once attended our weekend service and sat down behind a family whose teenage son was playing his handheld video game. As the service began, my friend was irritated that the boy continued to play. The longer the service went on and the longer the boy kept playing, the more agitated my friend became. The game was on mute, but it was still distracting and unnerving to see the teen playing in the middle of the service.

My friend was just about ready to ask the boy to put the game away when something caused him to stop. He waited a few minutes, then finally leaned forward, tapped the boy on the shoulder, and said,

"I've got the guide with all the moves to beat that game if you want it."

Huh. How about that?

What my friend did not know was that the teenage boy in front of him was autistic. He also did not know the boy's family hadn't been able to attend church for years because of their son's inability to sit still. They had been asked to leave public places numerous times because of the boy's erratic behavior. When the boy's parents saw my friend lean forward and tap their son on the shoulder, they immediately assumed the worst: "Here we go again."

But, they experienced an unpredictable comment, wouldn't you agree? It even took my friend by surprise, and he's the one who said it! I am so glad he kept his heart open and was slow to speak.

It's easy to judge people who are not like me. It's easy to dismiss people who act in a way I just don't understand. It's also easy to slip into this complacent mode where I think, "I've got it all figured out." When that happens, my unsolicited sermons into those people's lives are destructive because I don't have all the information. I end up keeping score based on my own personal worldview—a worldview that lacks important context outside of my individual walk.

“**Your life bears a message, a message of hope and redemption. But, before people in your world encounter your message, they encounter you.**”⁴

Ouch.

When Rob Wegner was the pastor of Life Mission at my church, he spoke about the two parts to the great commission. Part one is, “How do we get people into the church?” Part two is, “How do we get the church into the community?”

He said the only way to accomplish these objectives is to make some “missional moves.” In other words, move on mission. Even if those moves are small, they have the potential to make a seismic impact (for better or worse).

Case in point? Rob is the friend I just wrote about who almost jumped all over that kid for playing his game during church. But, he didn't. And, that's what's so honorable. He didn't forget that Jesus gives us multiple spheres of community influence. Be it for the one, the few or the many, we're responsible for handling every interaction with care.

“**Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.**
C. G. Jung

IS YOUR INFORMATION RELIABLE?

I was driving home from visiting my sister in Cincinnati, and as I passed an eighteen-wheeler, the driver honked. My first instinct was, “Hey, I’m in my lane...what are you honking at?”

I drove a little farther, and another truck honked as I passed. This time, I wondered if I had a flat tire or if something was sticking out of one of my doors. I checked my gauges. They all looked good. I continued driving.

Then another truck honked at me! This time, I confess, my mind went here: “Well, I am aging gracefully. I guess I shouldn’t be surprised I can still get the attention of a trucker. I should be flattered.”

As I drove for the next thirty miles, four out of five truckers honked as I went by. As deluded as I may have been in the previous paragraph, I am not an idiot. Something was wrong, and I knew it. I’m not all that, and even if I were, there aren’t that many cavemen on the road at once.

It was only then that I caught a glimpse of my kids, Emmi and Easton, in my rearview mirror, pulling an imaginary chain in the air as we passed another truck. Oh.

Turns out, all of those cavemen on the road weren’t honking at me; they were engaging in a childhood game* that has been passed through the generations. They were just playing along and honking their horns in response to my kids’ hand motions.

* Children act out pulling an imaginary rope as every truck passes on the highway to make the big ol’ semi honk. If the trucker honks, kids laugh and squeal. If the trucker drives on by with no honk or wave, then kids are sad until the next try.

Awww. In an instant, they went from perverts to participants. From cavemen to child advocates.

See how easy it is to mistake personal perceptions with the greater reality? Or, am I the only one who does that?

YOU'RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME

Once upon a time, Google tried to “protect their brand” by posting alerts and sending letters about the proper and improper ways to use the word *google* in a sentence. Their *helpful tips* were an attempt to rebound from the word *google* slipping from trademarked status into common usage. It was frustrating to read.

The short story? Google was slapping our collective wrist for how we use their corporate name in our conversations. Apparently, their huge success and influence on pop culture was distressing to their trademark lawyers, and they wanted us to know what we could do about it.

Yougottabekiddingme.



To: GOOGLE
From: KEM

You've lost some street credibility and are facing some mocking and ridicule by making an issue out of this. Somebody in marketing or legal forgot about the attributes that got you to your place of influence in the first place. It was never all about your technology or legal name...it was about the value you gave away for free...it was about how you let people explore without prescribing a forced path...

it was about how you pushed the envelope of invention and didn't fit the mold.

You built a loyal fan base by making it feel like it was all about us...and we loved you for it. You changed the way we talk, research and see “the Cloud.” But, then, when you got defensive for a minute and made it all about you, our radars went up. And, now, your fan loyalty is threatened a little. Because, now, you look like everyone else.

In some instances, **a message might be important to your INTERNAL corporate audience but completely absurd for your EXTERNAL audience.** Do you know the difference?

I'm still a fan of Google. And, I'm glad they're not still making a big deal out of how I google that meme or how I use *googlicious* in a sentence (although, they still haven't taken down the original post from 2006).⁵

NOBODY LIKES TO PLAY WITH A CONTROL FREAK

For the first decade of my son's life, nothing made him happier than LEGOs. It seemed he could assemble any pre-made kit in minutes and create masterfully thought-out showpieces with the extra bricks in the time he had left over. I don't even want to know how much money we spent on LEGOs during those "builder" years. (Thank God he grew out of it before the LEGO movie came out. I would have gone bankrupt buying all the merchandise.)

Anyway, it's safe to say I still spent too much on LEGOs to keep the little guy building. I couldn't stop myself. And, when I ran out of options at my local store, and then the regional LEGO store ninety minutes away, I went online to LEGO's corporate site to see what else I could buy.

Here's the actual screenshot from my computer. At first I thought it was a joke, but it was the real deal.



LEGO removed the notice from their home page shortly after they posted it. I was lucky to capture this moment of history in real time. But, they do still include it on their Fair Play guidelines and policies page.⁶ And, fans are still mocking it today with blog posts, articles and comic parodies.

It's not so bad to bury some legal notice at the back of the interwebs to make sure somebody, somewhere got it right. I mean, at least the LEGO team employees should know how to use their name, right? But, who seriously approved this "IMPORTANT NOTICE" to their customers? What message were they trying to send?

Who were they trying to serve—the customer or themselves? I can just imagine the conversation in the boardroom:

"So, hey everybody! Our LEGO bricks are a household name. Everybody talks about them. Everybody plays with them. Everybody buys them for their kids and builds cities with them. But, you know what, people? We're failing at our job because nobody's saying it right! They call them 'LEGOs' instead of 'LEGO toys' or 'LEGO bricks.' The nerve.

"Our customers are getting it all wrong, and we've got to set them straight. We need an important notice on our website. Quick, before one more customer gets it wrong!"

Note to self: don't be a control freak with corporate communications.

“ I’m sorry for my inability to let unimportant things go.

Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*

THINK IT OVER

BUSTING THE MYTH: YOU ARE IN CONTROL

- ☐ How can I stop myself from trying to push my audience to a decision or to my point of view? Are there incremental steps I could lay as groundwork to pull people into the content I have to offer?
- ☐ Where am I imposing my worldview on others? Am I inadvertently putting out a message to meet my needs rather than thinking through the worldview of my guests? How can I habitually give people the benefit of the doubt on a daily basis?
- ☐ In what ways could my message be misunderstood based on the worldview of my audience? What could help prevent that? Has there been an instance where I failed in communication by assuming the wrong thing?
- ☐ Where am I engaged in corporate self-talk? Are there formal or informal feedback mechanisms in place to help identify my communication misses? Something that reveals when I sound ridiculous or out-of-touch to outsiders?
- ☐ Where am I trying to force behavior in someone, versus nurture the potential that's already there?
- ☐ When do I think I have all the answers? Are there places I need to go, people I need to see or experiences I need to feel to keep my mind and heart open? Do I surround myself with "yes" people? Am I avoiding the hard work of differing perspectives, seeking only input and answers that support my thoughts and views?

