

Don't Kill Your Own Message: Here Are 4 Ways To Stop

Years ago, my daughter called, her voice shaky, to update me on her field trip to the nature center with her son Cash (who was 2 at the time). Here's how the conversation went:

Daughter: *"I took my eyes off Cash for like 30 seconds! When I found him, he had something in his hands. I asked him to show me. When he unfolded his cupped hands, pieces of a dead, mangled, yellow butterfly fell to the floor!"*

Me: *"Oh no! What did you do?"*

Daughter: *"We hauled our heiny to the next exhibit as fast as possible! When the coast was clear, I told Cash; 'Hey buddy. You can't hold the butterflies. You can hurt them. They are soft and fragile. OK?' Mom, it was so sad. He looked up at me and said, 'I just hold it a little bit. I just look at it. Teeny tiny. So soft.'"*

I empathized with both sides:

The murderer: How sad that this little nature lover accidentally killed something he adored. In his passionate zeal, he came on too strong. *He didn't realize his own power and it had irreversible, devastating consequences.*

The victim: How sad that this butterfly had its life violently and unexpectedly crushed. I'm sure it thought it was in a safe place. *I mean, is there any place safer for a butterfly than the protected butterfly habitat at the nature center?*

The story represented something else to me. It's really not that big of leap, if you think about it.

Communicators can be murderers. We kill our message. We don't mean to. But nonetheless, we're destroying the very thing we value.

■ How to Stop Murdering Your Message

Here are four questions to ask ourselves if we want to stop killing our own message.

1. Am I Coming on Too Strong?

Do we get in a hurry and come on too strong in our zeal? Sometimes we believe in our product or service so much we jump right to closing the sale. It's a common shortcut and it's tempting: *Just get people to the destination we've prescribed for them as quickly as possible.*

But that bypasses all the hard work we've already done in laying out our case. The customers miss those important details that show *why* our product or service is so good. And ultimately we're not listening. We're being jerks.

Our communication comes across as high pressure and out of touch when we forget to actually connect with people.

- ✓ **Pro tip:** Don't tell the whole story in every promotion. Just share little appetizers to pull people into what you have to offer. Then build a sequence of little content nuggets around a central theme in all the places your audience will see it (e.g., web, social media, mailings, brick and mortar, etc.).

2. Do I Lack Awareness?

As communicators, we need to be aware of the broader context. This is what people are swimming in on a daily basis, and it's painfully obvious when we're oblivious to it. Just look at the corporate account cranking out scheduled social posts in the midst of a tragedy. There's no faster way to murder your message.

Most people aren't happy when they have to call a plumber. So a plumber's communication should reflect that: commiserate, empathize, reassure. A plumber doesn't need pop culture references in their mailer, but showing a little humanity and awareness of where people are at goes a long way.

We need to relate to people to effectively communicate. That means we have to pay attention to what's going on and be aware of why someone needs our product or service.

- ✓ **Pro tip:** Be human. It's OK to acknowledge what's going on in the world and how it affects you, whether it's a national tragedy or just a sunny day. (Talking about the weather might be a cliché, but there's a reason people do it—we can all relate).

3. Is My Delivery Sterile?

In our attempt to achieve professionalism and excellence, our institutional brands can become over designed, polished, and censored. This kind of message murder is slow and insidious as people are quietly turned off. Where can we do a better job embracing imperfections to demonstrate vulnerability and authenticity?

When we create more space for conversations, people are less skeptical and start to respond because they can relate. That authentic approach can seal the deal.

- ✓ **Pro tip:** While your corporate website can be centralized and standardized, loosen control over organic, conversational outlets like social media. Crowd source photos and content to build community, not perfection. Measure engagement, not graphics standards compliance. While the teams will need coaching along the way, be sure to promote connection over content and nurture conversation over correction.

4. Is It Too Much or Too Little?

Everyone knows a lack of water will kill a plant, but so will too much water. The same is true for communication. If we carpet bomb with our communication to the point that it's everywhere and unavoidable, we'll have collateral damage.

But either extreme can be deadly. Too little water will also kill a plant.

A lack of communication will shrivel up our leads and people will not only forget our message, they'll forget us entirely.

- ✓ **Pro tip:** You need to find the sweet spot. And it's going to vary based on audience, medium, and industry. There's a nuance between silent and trite. Look around at how you like being communicated to by other brands. In that, you'll experience the tipping point between the two extremes.

■ Next Steps *The Links*

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Kem is a veteran communications strategist and brand therapist who has spent three decades shaping communication for small business, big business, non-profits, tech, finance, PR, marketing, schools, and churches. Known for her one-of-a-kind approach to making complex things simple and making hard work fun, she's in demand for her ability to produce results for leaders and their organizations.

Fun fact: while Kem spends her time working in all industry sectors, she wrote [Less Chaos. Less Noise.](#) for congregations who need a little help communicating more effectively as they work to bring help to others.

■ KemMeyer.com *The Team*

Kem's handpicked team of professionals are known for being great at what they do. But, what drives them is helping other great people solve problems, put their vision in action, meet meaningful goals, and grow good things. They build systems, design brands, dismantle silos, organize communications, design team-building messaging, and equip leaders with the tools and know-how to bust barriers and amplify results.