

## I've Told Them Seven Times .... Now What?

***'You have to tell a message seven times before people hear it.'*** This comment was running through Joe's head as he prepared to give a speech announcing that his company was moving its headquarters. Joe wondered why he was having to give this speech again for the tenth time. He had been helped by a very good Public Relations firm. Together, they had created the message, worked on Joe's communication skills, and outlined a plan for ongoing communication. Joe had completed everything. He had practiced his presentation until it was clear and perfect, had given the announcement speech five times, set up a special link off of the company website to post the speech, and set up weekly E-mail updates to each employee. Each piece of communication clearly outlined why the company had to move its location — proximity to their customer base and provide lower operating costs. It was a very logical and rational business move. But at this moment, Joe was wondering how long all of this was going to last. Even with all of the communications, Joe was still answering the same questions and still seeing the same level of anger that he had seen after the first announcement. The PR firm said he would have to tell them seven times — and this had to be the tenth time — when would it end?

Joe has done a great deal to prepare for this change within his company. He is trying to do the right thing. He is committed to providing his employees with good, consistent communication and has sought out help in ensuring that he has a good message. But, while the skills and preparation of the talker can impact the conversation, it is the listener who truly controls the conversation. It is the listener who determines if the message really gets through.

For some people, during a change, a good talker with a good message is enough. They can hear the message, evaluate their choices, and move on. For them, listening during a change is a walk in the park. For many others it isn't that simple. For some people, listening during a change is a crawl through broken glass. While crawling through the glass, you can't hear a message, any message—no matter how well crafted or delivered or logical or rational.

Imagine listening to a presentation by your company's new president. At one point he says, 'Our company location move is really going to contribute to our bottom line. We are evaluating the exact amount of office space that we need in order to optimize our move.' Where do you think the audience's thoughts went at the moment he said those words? How many of the people stopped listening and started asking themselves questions like: I wonder if 'evaluating the exact amount of office space' means layoffs? How many people does he plan to get rid of? I wonder when this will happen — my kids are still in college? Oh my, I'm going to lose my job! Having the president repeat the speech 7 times or 70 times won't get the message heard because people have stopped listening. They are in the middle of their own emotional reaction to that one sentence.

The key to being heard lies in helping the listener work through their emotional reaction so that they can hear the message. This has another advantage — the load and responsibility for communication is now shared between the talker and the listener. A listener who develops the skills to work through their emotions, can truly hear the message, and will be able to take responsibility for their reaction to the message. The listener will be less likely to blame the talker, less dependent upon the talker to solve problems, and more likely to take responsibility for finding their own possibilities and solutions. Most people know the right solution and can make the right decisions for themselves during change. They need the skills to work through their emotional reaction. This enables them to break out of the analysis and create possibilities. This also enables them to go back to listening to the talker, but this time sharing the responsibility for communication so that the message truly gets through.



*You have to tell  
people 7 times  
before they hear it.  
Joe has told his team  
10 times, but they  
don't seem to get it.  
What's next?*

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