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**Executive Summary**

*Notes from select sessions at the virtual conference.*

11:05-11:30 a.m.

PANEL

**Beyond State of the Union: WH, Political Speechwriters on Public Speaking for Public Affairs**

*Mike Souder, Speechwriter, Former Deputy Communications Director, US House of Representatives
Katye Riselli, Speechwriter, Former First Lady Laura Bush
Stephen Krupin, Senior Speechwriter, Former President Barack Obama
Desson Thomson, Speechwriter, Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton*

* **It’s important for execs to be execs and for speechwriters to be speechwriters.** Empower people who have honed their craft. Speechwriting a unique skill that merits investment. Don’t force people to do things beyond their skillset--that’s how (preventable) foot-in-mouth crises unfold.
* **Authenticity = perspective.** To succeed in speechwriting, consider the inward, global, and strategic implications of your work.
* **Inward comes first.** If you don’t care for yourself, the quality of your work will show that lack of care. So,be mindful of your own mental health and personal happiness.

Consider: Do you enjoy the work you do? Do you respect your colleagues and clients? If you’re not happy, you’re not going to do your job well. Be careful with the types of clients you work with. Not every paycheck is worth it.

* **A global mindset is a must.** You must know what’s happening in the world. Speechwriters are public affairs people, drill sergeants and therapists. You must be able to read the room locally, nationally and internationally.

You’ll have better insights and avoid off-color statements if you bone up on current events. Increasing current event know-how will improve your life, even. Be a voracious reader, listener and learner.

* **Be strategic, every day.** Speechwriting is about building relationships. It’s about identifying the exec’s goal and clarifying the company’s objectives. It’s about purpose.

Pay attention, and go beyond the headlines. What’s happening in an exec’s life? Adjust your workflow and tactics accordingly to their moods, feelings and looming responsibilities. Play to their strengths, and set them up to succeed.

* **How do I start getting this knowledge?** Be dogged about research, and track your progress. Read old speeches and interviews. Learn your client’s pace, language, cadence and rhythm. Track what works for you and what doesn’t so you can streamline your efforts.
* **Grow your knowledge base.** Interview senior staffers, other writers and friends of the exec. Talk to people you normally might not for fresh insights. Constantly gain new perspectives. Get outside your comfort zone to learn something new.
* **Establish processes.** Don’t just wing it. Set up a speechwriting process to reduce stress (on yourself and others). Efficiency creates value. Make something repeatable. Continue to improve and streamline your writing and editing process.
* **It’s not about mimicking.** Authenticity is about presenting perspective, context and motivations behind “why” someone said something.

**How to turn complex policy into bite-size soundbites audiences love?**

* **Speechwriters must be translators and interpreters.** Trace policy to human impact and lived experience. Don’t get bogged down in data, numbers or non-emotive modes of storytelling.
* **Take the policy out of its vacuum.** What’s the story about why we believe what we do about this? Connect the issue to a larger narrative and story.
* **You can do that with language, but don’t start with pithy lines.** Succinctly capture the essence of an argument, but you must present the argument first.
* **“Think clearly and write well. Leave the soundbite to God.” -- Peggy Noonan**
* **The more complex your subject matter is, the more important it is to have a one-sentence opening.**
* **Don’t start with the soundbite; build your case first. Instead of just making corrections to a speech, have a conversation with your exec. Ask: “What’s the cheat sheet of this thought?” “So you’re saying this…” It’s an interplay.**
* **“Soundbite” is pejorative, but it shouldn’t be. It’s a great way to distill a big idea into something simple.**
* **You need people to listen to you.** Always prioritize and consider: Who are you writing for? It doesn’t matter what you think sounds great; it’s about what will resonate with your audience.
* **Being scripted doesn’t have to mean “robotic”; it’s about being prepared.** Trust is about connection, which comes from preparedness. While extemporaneous chats can help project authenticity, being off-the-cuff and overly informal can backfire and end up damaging trust.
* **Strive to keep execs in their comfort zone, but push them to share more personal and emotional stories.**

**Best tips and takeaways:**

* **Every speech is a speech about America (or your company).** Go beyond the issue at hand to make it personal for your audience.
* **“There’s nothing wrong with America that can’t be cured by what’s right with America.” – Bill Clinton**
* **Make the end of your speech inspirational and universal.** Give them a take-home, and make it personal for people. Movies are always about the bigger “us,” not just the characters.
* **Writing is ultimately storytelling.** Learn other methods, such as photography, videography and poetry, to enhance and broaden your craft.
* **Keep it personal.** Encourage execs to tell personal stories. Audiences will walk with you if you open up and give them something personal.

12:05-12:30 p.m. Eastern Time

**Adrenaline Meets Public Affairs: The Anatomy of a More Nimble Public Affairs Strategy**

*Scott Thomsen, President, National Association of Government Communicators*
*Karen Naumann, APR, Snr. Instructor, Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Defense’s Information School*

* The structure of a more adaptable public affairs plan, top to bottom
* How to optimize audience segmentation and channel selection
* How to assess your plan, monitor results and adjust messaging in real-time
* Lessons from firefighting and FEMA training: How to flip your strategy when
everything changes overnight
* How to understand the psychology behind crisis response strategies
* Insights for predicting stakeholders reactions to your organization's crisis response
* What organizations can do before a crisis to mitigate the effects of one

 **3 things to know for your public affairs plan**

* Know what you want to accomplish (goals)
* Know what success looks like (results)
* Know your audience (demographics and attitudes)
* Knowing all of these things will help your tailor your messaging towards your audiences’ needs

**Messaging**

* Develop the message – customize how your present your information and your call to action
	+ Ex: During a snowstorm in Seattle, in order to keep people off the road for first responders, messaging shifted from “Don’t drive” to “Make smart decisions about whether you need to drive”
	+ Avoid negative or alienating
* Pick the right channels – whether it’s social media, traditional media or printed materials. Unless you’re trying to hit one really specific, niche audience, a multi-channel approach can ensure you hit each segment you’re trying to reach

**Monitoring**

* Monitor your results (and adjust & adapt)
	+ Test multiple options to see what works. If you have three paid campaigns, pour your money into the one that’s most successful
* Be ready for curveballs – current events can disrupt campaigns, so you must have a plan in place when they pop up
	+ Ex: Seattle Auto Show was occurring when the VW’s emissions scandal broke, but some previously scheduled Tweets from SAS promoting VW’s cars were still published
	+ Joint information Centers can help you maintain situational awareness so you can adjust your messaging appropriately

**The impact of ‘crisis’**

* Emergency: Has low potential for adverse impact since it’s typically out of your control
* Issue: Medium potential for impact – if you don’t handle an emergency when it occurs, it could create a large problem
* Crisis: If you mishandle an emergency or issue when it occurs, or if your organization is solely responsible for an issue, then you have a full-blown crisis on your hands.

**Attribution framing and response strategy**

* When something goes wrong, your stakeholders will attribute blame to a party or organization – it’s your job to help frame the situation for them
	+ Victim: Weak attribution (i.e.: network disasters, fabricated rumors, etc.)
	+ Accidental: Medium attribution (i.e.: your organization was hacked, and though it wasn’t your intention to happen, stronger security measures may have prevented the issue)
	+ Intentional: Strong attribution – will be seen as purposeful action by your stakeholders

**Response strategy**

* Denial: Only use this response strategy sparingly and when a crisis has no connection to your organization
* Diminish: Minimize the severity of the crisis, particularly when there is accidental attribution
* Rebuild: Offer material or symbolic forms of aid to demonstrate intention of repeating the crisis

1:15-1:45 p.m. Eastern Time **Authentic Storytelling for Speeches: How to Connect, Captivate and Convert amid Uncertainty**
*Douglass Hatcher, President, Communicate4IMPACT*

* What execs can learn about unifying messages and storytelling structure from presidential speeches, inaugurations and even SOU addresses
* Examples and insights for crafting honest, authentic executive communications
* Three “StoryHacks” to get out of any executive communications jam—lessons from Oprah and the producers of “The Book of Mormon” Broadway hit, among others:
	+ Hack #1:“And-But-Therefore”: Helps create content when you’re stuck
	+ Hack #2: “What, So What, Now What”: Create content faster when under pressure
	+ Hack #3: “Once Upon a Time”: Create content when struggling with a pitch
* When it comes to speechwriting, storytelling structure is everything. “The one thing every good speech has got to have is story structure.”

**The science behind the theory**

* Hatcher goes back to 1944 and an experiment run at Smith College by Heider and Simmel where an animation of geometric shapes was shown to students and when asked what they saw, students told stories rather than describing the movements of shapes. (See the video here:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTNmLt7QX8E>)
* Hatcher explains that when there is “no clear story structure, our minds will create one.” For further reading, check out [“The Storytelling Animal.”](https://www.amazon.com/Storytelling-Animal-Stories-Make-Human/dp/0544002342) Hatcher quotes from the book: “When it comes to storytelling, we can’t not *not* do it.”

**What this means for speeches**

* Without a storytelling structure, not only will our minds create one but each one is going to be different, explains Hatcher. With a clear story structure, an audience will all arrive at a similar version of events, even if the story is very short.
* In a divided country, delivering a story structure that brings viewpoints together is more important than ever. And your audience can’t help it: The impulse to create order out of disorder, is fundamentally human. It is in our DNA.

**Story Hacks**

* Hatcher offers a series of shortcuts that speechwriters can use to create a story with their speech, and goes over one in detail: “And-But-Therefore.”
* Hatcher says he adapted this lesson from Randy Olson and his book [“Houston, We Have a Narrative.”](https://www.amazon.com/Houston-We-Have-Narrative-Science/dp/022627084X) And Olson, in turn, takes the lesson from “South Park” writers Matt Stone and Trey Parker. Hatcher shares this YouTube clip:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGUNqq3jVLg>
* In the clip, Stone and Parker explain: If you are moving between the beats or events of your story, with the phrase “And this”…for example “and this happened, and then this happened, and then this happened”—your story will be crap. Instead, Stone and Parker say it should be crafted as “this happens, and therefore this happens” or ”this happens, but then this happens.”
* In this way, your story gains structure.
* Hatcher connects this story hack to Oprah Winfrey’s acceptance speech at the Golden Globes in 2018, starting at about the 4:08 mark (<https://youtu.be/TTyiq-JpM-0?t=248>)
* Winfrey uses the structure, with a few variations to set up her point:
	+ This year we became the story… BUT it’s not just the entertainment industry that faces the issues revealed in the #MeToo movement…SO I want to tonight to express gratitude for the women who have endured…
* Setup, turn, resolution.
* Hatcher also offers an example of how to use ABT structure in a speech you might be writing, giving the phony example of a 25th anniversary for a company:
	+ **AND:** Today we celebrate 25 years since the inception of the “widget company”… it’s been an extraordinary ride…
	+ **BUT**: I want us to remember the values that got us here…
	+ **THEREFORE (SO)**: I want our faith in each other, XYZ values, to remain as we face the future...
* The “but” forces you to move in a new direction, Hatcher explains. With a but you can’t help but move into the turning point of the speech. It forces the writer to think about something other than the setup. Once you get to the therefore, you really have no choice but to resolve the problem.
* Why does this work? Hatcher says that it’s really just a simplified version of a story arc, much less theory than something like the hero’s journey. He reminds speechwriters to remember that the story of their speech is never about their organization or even the principal or politician giving the speech. It’s always about the audience, the customer, the constituents.

**A word about setting**

* Every story has a setting, a time and place where events occur, and Hatcher encourages speechwriters to take the time to set this up. He returns to Oprah’s speech… this time to the beginning and how Oprah sets the scene for us to join the story.
* She doesn’t begin with a bunch of “thank you's.” She starts with a personal story, a few simple, personal words at the beginning. With this, she shrinks the room and creates a dramatic intimacy that allows the audience to “soar with her,” Hatcher says.
* Her speech begins: “In 1964, I was a little girl…” It can’t get more simple than that.

**Two more story hacks**

* Hatcher also offers two other shortcuts to build a story for any occasion.
	+ **Story Hack No. 2:** “What, So What, Now What”
		- This is a great framework that helps the writer/speaker create content that captivates under pressure. The structure breaks down this way:
		- **What:** This is your main topic.
		- **So what:** Why does this topic matter to you and your audience?
		- **Now what:** What you want people to do about it?
	+ **Story Hack No. 3:** “Once upon a time…”
		- This is the framework that movie studios like Pixar will use to storyboard their films.
		- Here’s the framework:

*Once upon a time there was \_\_\_. Every day, \_\_\_. One day \_\_\_. Because of that, \_\_\_. Because of that, \_\_\_. Until finally \_\_\_.*

It’s a great formula for building a gripping story, but Hatcher says you don’t have to make it that complicated. The simpler hacks (Nos. 1 and 2) will work just as well.

**Rx for Workplace Wellness: Vaccine Communications Tools to Inform Staff and Stakeholders**

*Phil Caruso, Issues Management and Public Affairs Manager*
*Seth Duncan, Chief Data Officer, W20*

* **According to Phil Caruso, a Walgreens public affairs pro, 2020 either burned folks out due overwork or underwork.** Employers should be sensitive to both types of burnout and frustration.
* **After such a tumultuous year, public affairs has been elevated in Walgreens’ corporate pecking order.** Has your status changed? 2021 is about solidifying your seat at the decision-making table.
* **As vaccines become more available, the onus swings to communicators to convince people to get shots.** If you’re not sure where to start, [review the CDC’s vaccine comms toolkit](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/toolkits/essential-workers.html).
* **Vaccine eligibility varies greatly by state, so it’s crucial to keep employees informed on who might be eligible.**
* **Actively counter myths and fake news.** The best vaccine is the one you can get right now. Don’t worry about parsing the differences between the vaccines.
* **How Walgreens is communicating with employees:** They take a “mixternal” approach to present core facts to its workers. Their top comms channels are an intranet, mobile apps, earned media, social media, a [video series](https://www.youtube.com/user/walgreens) featuring pharmacists sharing COVID-19 news, and [LinkedIn Live videos](https://www.linkedin.com/company/walgreens/videos/).
* **Seth Duncan, chief data officer at W20, shared that polling data frequently shows alarmingly low figures in terms of vaccine confidence, but analyzing social media presents a different story.** There’s great enthusiasm for getting a vaccine, but communicators should still strive to dispel myths and build confidence.
* **Analyzing social media posts reveals context of *why* people are hesitant toward vaccines.** Surprisingly, just 14% of vaccine concerns are due to “safety” or efficacy. Most people just don’t want to be told what to do.
* **Polling shows that Black and Latinx communities are more hesitant to get the shot.** As you craft your vaccine comms, be sensitive and aware of historical injustices and reasons for mistrust.
* **Polling shows right-leaning folks are by far the least willing to get the vaccine, though they respond positively to good vaccine news.**
* **You must work to convince those ambivalent folks in the middle.** You won’t convince everyone, but there are plenty of people who could be persuaded to get vaccinated.
* **How to build confidence?** Let people know when and where to get the vaccine. Make it easy for people.
* **Be inclusive in your comms; don’t point fingers or inject politics into the mix.**
* **Make it clear that getting a shot is voluntary.** Choice is precious to people. Emphasize personal responsibility, protecting others and community health benefits.
* **Highlight influential, trustworthy and respected health care workers and experts.** Nurses are among the most trusted people in the U.S.
* **Always ask employees: How do you feel?** Consistently check in with employees to glean their feedback, insights and concerns. Incorporate their feedback into your vaccine messaging.