



Reasonable Voice

Communications for MBA Students

Recently, I had the chance to teach corporate communications to executive-level MBA students at Syracuse University's Whitman School of Management. The class was included as an elective in the iMBA curriculum as part of a long-term effort by the Public Relations Society of America and SU's Newhouse School of Public Communications to inject formal communications education into business schools. Syracuse University is one of about a dozen universities around the United States to embark on this initiative.

For the past several years, I have been hounding public relations and communications students that they need to understand the fundamentals of business in order to earn a seat at the management table and help CEOs articulate their vision. At the same time, business schools are beginning to recognize that future leaders need to have a solid grasp of the critical importance of communications in any organization for them to mobilize an increasingly divergent workforce, compete in the marketplace, and win.

While it might seem like common sense that well-educated, corporate leaders should know the importance of communications within their organization, most have never had any formal education in public relations. While they have certainly taken marketing, and some may have received training in effective presentation techniques, most MBA programs around the country do not include courses on public relations. In this field, there is a science behind audience segmentation, key messaging, media relations, crisis communications and reputation management when dealing with complex business problems. But for many, it's been more natural to focus on the operations of business.

That trend is changing, and future business leaders are stepping-up their game.

It has become much more challenging to control any message. Real-time digital media are dominating our shrinking world, and stakeholders are finding their way directly to organization leaders to provide feedback – whether they want it or not. It's critical that leaders understand the importance of public relations and corporate communications for their employees, their customers, government, and the media.

The caliber of entrepreneurs and CEOs is higher than ever before. To compete in this changing landscape of business, being a better communicator will only make them more successful.

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