

LISTEN AND BELIEVE ME

A Best Book on Communicating to Your Audience

MAKING YOUR POINT: Communicating Effectively With Audiences Of One To One Million, By David Bartlett. St. Martin's Press, New York, 2008. 259 pp.

In the fragile world of communications, in which the opportunities to misspeak are multifarious and the consequences of doing so are complex and profound, it's a blessing to have so comprehensive a handbook as David Bartlett's *Making Your Point*.

The ability to anticipate the consequences of each statement we make in public is, frankly, an art form. But like all art, it's grounded in sound technique. Modern communications techniques, and the extensive and rapidly growing new media that broadcasts every statement from the most profound to the most trivial, brings a risk that can be beyond the ken of even the smartest of us. Thus the art of communication, in this morass of the public world in which we live, demands an artist, and certainly a professional in communications skills. Cherish, then, the public relations professional who knows his business.

If, in the middle of the noise of millions of words a day being spread like dandelion seeds, you have a message you want to be heard, an opinion you want fostered, or even a product or an idea you want to sell, it's the likes of David Bartlett who knows how to do it. Moreover, he knows how to do it so that you're not misunderstood, nor assaulted by negative consequences.

If, despite you're doing everything right, and saying the right things to the right people, you are trashed in the media by people of ill will, Bartlett knows how to respond to minimize damage.

If you find yourself in a crisis that could cause great damage to you or your company, Bartlett knows how to turn crisis away from disaster.

And that's the true meaning of public relations professionalism, and of communications expertise to the point of artistry.

One more point. Emotional response to crisis, and conventional wisdom about communications and media relations, is almost invariably wrong. Why? Because it's not in the nature of most people to see consequences beyond immediate reactions. There, too, is the role of the communications specialist not only significant, but often necessary. It's not solely a function of wisdom, it's wisdom tempered by experience and training.

As someone who has done this for many years, and won awards for doing it, I tell you that there is no better book on the subject than *Making Your Point*. It's amazing how many areas of communications he covers, and how many situations he anticipates.

He starts in the right place, opening with a discussion of the philosophy of communication, including how it works and why it works. The tone of the book is clear on the first page of chapter one, in which he brings Aristotle into proximity with how Johnson & Johnson dealt with the crisis of a poisoned Tylenol bottle.

Bartlett's approach differs from most books on public relations by dealing with situations, rather than merely delineating, chapter by chapter, the mechanics. It's communication by circumstance, but rest assured that the mechanics are there, right down to step by step discussions on how to be interviewed without losing your message. He meticulously covers media philosophy while exposing technique.

Bartlett, a senior vice president of Richard Levick's leading edge communicating and public relations firm, has a formidable background, including having been vice president of news and programming for NBC Radio, director of News and English language broadcasts for Voice of America, and vice president of the Radio and television News Directors Association. Richard Levick Strategic Communications is not only the leading communications firm serving the legal profession, as well as many corporate clients, but has pioneered many of the innovative practices now used in public communications.

Of the many books on public relations and communications, some good, some mediocre (and some downright bad), this is a standout. Every lawyer, every accountant, every corporate executive, every marketing professional should keep this book – well read – at his or her right hand.