

Communications: A, B, C



**Philip
Dine**

We've periodically discussed in this space how NALC benefits from having a myriad of voices at all levels that contribute to getting out our message on key topics, why our union is in this enviable position, how rare that is in the labor movement, and why it's essential to our success on behalf of America's letter carriers.

So, let's not waste time or space reiterating those points. Let's instead get practical, focusing on the A, B and C of effective communications. From my perspective, that's A, B, C *literally*—as in accuracy, brevity and clarity.

Note: To be clear, none of what follows stems from any issues I've noticed; on the contrary, I'm continually struck by how well you communicate with the public and with the media, whether in writing or speaking. The goal here is simply to put some broad thoughts in one place in case it proves useful as you continue to get the word out.

Accuracy is the foundation on which all else in the communications process is built. If those trying to advance a position sacrifice their credibility through exaggeration, dubious statements or flat untruths, it's game, set, match. The most elegant wording cannot make up for the erosion of credibility—because if folks don't trust the messenger, they won't trust the message.

So, stick to the facts, whether in interviews, op-eds, speeches, letters to the editor. Assert only what you're sure of and what is germane to the case you're making; be prepared to back up statements if asked to; steer clear of hyperbole. Departing from any of these guidelines simply isn't worth it. No single assertion, no matter how powerful, will win the day by itself, but an erroneous contention, no matter how trivial, can lose the day all by its lonesome, because many folks will wonder about the veracity of everything else being said or written.

Our messages resonate because they're fact-based and reason-based, calmly presented and logically argued. NALC succeeds in this arena because our members and our leaders have earned a reputation as straight shooters.

Moving down the alphabet, we'll shuffle the last two letters, going next to C, because in terms of making the argument/persuading folks, nothing trumps clarity. Those absorbing your message—whether in print or on TV/radio or in person—should leave knowing exactly what you said and what it meant. Nothing should be confusing or ambivalent or open to interpretation, not the broad points, not a single sentence.

As you're preparing your message, make sure there's nothing that could be taken two ways; if there is, revise it so it can be taken only one way—the way you intended.

Look it over with a skeptical eye—for anything that's vague or unnecessary—from the perspective of someone far less-versed in postal matters than you.

Close the deal by being brief, which isn't as easy as it might seem; shorter requires far more work than longer. Counter-intuitively, it's more difficult to get a message across in 500 words than in 2,000 words. But it's worth the effort, because folks will be more likely to grasp, and carry with them, a concise message than a long-winded one. They'll also appreciate that you respected their time, and therefore be predisposed to view you and your message more favorably.

The trick to being clear and brief, perhaps surprisingly, isn't primarily about the writing. A good 80 percent of achieving those goals stems instead from what precedes the writing—the thinking, the analysis. If you're crystal clear in your own mind about what you want to get across, the writing will reflect that in its absence of meandering or fluff, in the non-nonsense approach. You'll get to the point briskly, your points will be unmistakable—and the whole package will resonate.

So, before you sit down at the computer to write, take a walk, clear your head, and ponder what you'd want to communicate given two minutes in an elevator with someone you hoped to inform/win over. Then use that sparse and disciplined framework to construct your op-ed or speech or interview points.

The remaining 20 percent is indeed about the writing and the word choice—but not about making it flowery, rather the opposite: simple and taut. Don't transition, for example, via "That having been said," but rather with "That said."

That said (smile...), please let me know of any thoughts or questions, and most of all, please continue your unparalleled communications activities. With each passing month, on each new issue or the ones that persist, you are making a difference for your letter carrier brothers and sisters, your union and, indeed, for the country itself.

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The Postal Record (ISSN 0032-5376) is published monthly by the National Association of Letter Carriers. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Department, NALC, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

Subscription included in membership dues. First-class subscription available for \$20 per year (contact Membership Department).

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Circulation: 287,000. Union-printed using soy-based inks.

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