MANDEL

Make every communication count.

CREDIBLE MESSAGING:
THE **MISSING DRIVER**
OF BUSINESS **PERFORMANCE**

The essential skill set for accelerating business results is the ability to communicate ideas with power and impact.

Credibility: cred.i.bil.i.ty, noun

☑ the quality of being believed or accepted as true, real, or honest

☑ the quality or power of inspiring belief
www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/credibility

Accelerating Business Performance: It's About Leveraging Your Company's Best Ideas

If you think about it, your company's success is a function of its best ideas being turned into profitable products, projects, and customer relationships.

Creation of value for customers, delivery of strategic projects on-time and on-budget, and ultimately shareholder value, depend on the ability of your team to:

- ☑ Win support for innovative ideas from busy, sometimes skeptical executives.

- ☑ Motivate the organization to change and to adopt new systems, new organization structures, and new ways of delivering service.

- ☑ Persuade risk-averse buyers to change their thinking and adopt new and better ideas for solving business problems.

Most organizations have no shortage of great ideas. Unfortunately, what they do lack is the internal capability to deliver those innovative ideas credibly, and with impact, inside and outside of the organization.

In short, the ideas might be INcredible, but the messaging is "UNcredible." The result: great business ideas go unheard, large sales go unclosed, and marketable strategies fail to produce desired results.

> "Their strategic ideas may be great. But if execution falls short…"

10%

Only **10%** of company strategies are carried through to successful execution.[1]

Companies only deliver **50-60%** of the financial performance that their strategies and sales forecasts promise.[1]

Credible Messaging: Harder Today Than Ever Before

It's no surprise that for most companies, a lack of credible messaging keeps great ideas from becoming profitable business initiatives.

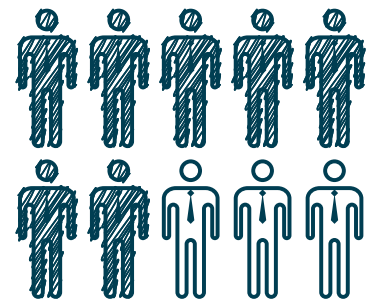This problem is more pronounced now than in decades past. Why? There are three key reasons:

1. **More technology-based innovation.** Many of the most important new ideas to emerge within companies directly involve technology or can't be enabled without it—whether it's a new software product, a web-based service, or an internal IT system. Yet, the technically focused people who dream up those ideas are often the least skilled at presenting them convincingly to non-technical executives who must fund and support them.

2. **Workforce disengagement.** The typical worker is less engaged than in the past—and harder to motivate. According to a recent Gallup report, 70% of American employees are either "not engaged" or "actively disengaged" from their work, *costing the U.S. economy a whopping $450-550 billion a year.*[2]

   Additionally, Millennials (people born between 1982 and 2000) now make up the majority of the workforce and are less comfortable with face-to-face communication than previous generations of workers. Hence, they are less likely to credibly deliver important ideas in face-to-face settings.

3. **Accelerated pace of business.** As the pace of global business has accelerated, the time for multiple cycles of communication about important ideas has collapsed. At the same time, the ability of people to focus on the messages they receive has eroded.

   A 2013 survey by The Energy Project showed that 66% of employees are in jobs where they lack the ability to focus on any single thing or task at one time.[3]

   To get the attention they deserve, important messages need to meet ever-higher standards for relevance and credibility.

> **Can your messaging break through** and **motivate today's worker?**

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Consider the Costly Consequences

Because credible messaging is the catalyst for accelerated business performance, organizations lacking this key ingredient for success often suffer costly failures in many areas:

☑ **Inadequate innovation.** When employees can't present their innovative ideas to management in compelling and persuasive ways, those ideas fail to gain traction.

This affects not only "Big Innovation" (e.g., the launch of a ground-breaking product like the Apple Watch), but also the equally important "Everyday Innovation" (e.g., internal process improvements and enhanced selling approaches that affect profitability and customer satisfaction).[4]

☑ **Poor strategic decisions.** When critical business decisions hang in the balance, senior management wants and needs to hear the best thinking of its brightest trusted advisors. If your key people lack the executive presence to communicate and deliver recommendations at every level of the organization, those recommendations will fail to make a positive impact. The results: strategic miscues, costly mistakes, and underperforming corporate strategies.
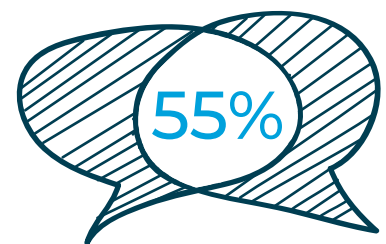
☑ **Failed strategic projects.** Even when strategic projects are approved, "UNcredible" communication can cause them to fail. More than half of project leaders surveyed believe that effective communication with stakeholders and senior managers is the top factor in project success.[5]

The Project Management Institute reports that of the money put at risk in strategic projects, more than half is due to poor communications.[6]

☑ **Lost sales opportunities.** The impact of weak messaging is perhaps most apparent on top line revenue. When sales team members fail to deliver messages with credibility to potential customers, sales are lost. And, those that are won are often smaller and less profitable than they could be.

> **Does your message have the credibility, relevance, and impact to capture the attention of overwhelmed and distracted decision makers?**

55%

55% of project managers agree that effective communication to stakeholders and senior managers is the number one factor in project success.[5]

What Works: A Common, Scalable Framework for Credible Messaging

If you don't equip your employees with essential skills for credible messaging, your company's best ideas won't get heard. And, they won't be turned into successful products, services,
and customer relationships.

Addressing this critical business challenge takes more than typical implementation of communication skills training. It requires that an organization build a strong, common capability among its employees to deliver credible messages.

For an idea or message to be seen as credible, you must be able
to quickly clear three hurdles when presenting it:

1. **Your idea must be understood.** If you and your message are hard to follow, decision makers and customers are unlikely to
    pay attention and even more unlikely to act upon the idea.

2. **Your idea must be seen as having real value.** Decision makers must first connect with the need or problem addressed by your idea. Only then can they appreciate how it delivers compelling and relevant benefits.

3. **You must be perceived as worthy of trust.** Decision makers must feel confident in your ability to act on your idea. Don't be slick and smooth. Be yourself. Let your conviction shine through as you deliver your message.

In this context, building presentation skills is only part of the solution. Companies that innovate successfully have also begun deploying comprehensive, organization-wide frameworks for ensuring that great ideas don't get "lost in presentation" (see sidebar).

Case Study: Improving Innovation with an Organization-wide Messaging Framework

In his book *Collaborative Leadership*, retired Cisco Systems executive George O'Meara shares how he transformed the Cisco Services Sales Group and grew its revenue from $800 million to over $6 billion. His focus was not just on improving "Big Innovation," but also on promoting "Everyday Innovation" throughout the organization.

O'Meara describes his frustration with an "otherwise bright staff who struggled with presenting ideas in a way that would be crystal clear on the problem as well as the idea."

His solution:
Adopt a common, shared communication framework his people could use to articulate their ideas more clearly, and with more credibility.

In the case of the Cisco Services Sales Group, O'Meara stated, "Transformation of any sort will go nowhere without tools to ensure processes are consistent, sticky and transferable."

Take Action: Audit Your Company's Current Approach

There are three criteria for the successful deployment of a shared and scalable framework for credible messaging:

- ☑ **Does it equip people to design, deliver, and defend their ideas?** While traditional presentation skills training should be part of any deployment, people should also be equipped to design the message, deliver the message in non-formal presentation settings, and defend the message.

- ☑ **Is it transferable?** For a messaging framework to be transferable, easy to implement, easily coached by managers, and consistently used, it must be simple to follow and reinforced by an appropriate tool or job aid.

- ☑ **Is it scalable?** For a messaging framework to be scalable, it must be deployed in a level-appropriate way. Recognize that some employees may need only basic exposure to key messaging concepts, others need training in essential behavioral skills, and others require more intensive coaching to succeed in high-stakes messaging environments.

Auditing your company's current approach against these criteria is a logical first step toward creating an organization-wide initiative that boosts messaging effectiveness.

Consider the Return on Your Communications Training Investment

Every company is looking for ways to accelerate business performance. The surest way to turn your company's best ideas into bottom-line profits is to equip people at all levels with the skills to credibly design, deliver, and defend clear and compelling messages.

If that sounds like a prohibitively expensive proposition, consider this:

The impact of just one innovative idea, one large sale, or one well-executed strategic project can more than cover the costs of deploying a common and scalable approach to credible messaging across your organization. An investment in deploying a credible messaging framework will continue to reap results for you, your company, and your customers well into the future.

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Mandel Can Help Accelerate Business Performance

Mandel Communications has helped more than 500 companies in 55-plus countries improve innovation, strategic decision-making, project execution, and sales performance through more effective communication. Companies like Cisco, CIGNA, BMC Software, EMC, Expedia, The Hartford, Hewlett Packard, IBM, Microsoft, Oracle, Standard Insurance, and Verizon have deployed Mandel's proven communications framework to improve their bottom-line business results.

When deployed well, communication skills training can be transformative, enabling people across your organization to design, deliver, and defend more credible messages that better engage and motivate employees and customers, alike.

Notes

[1] http://blogs.hbr.org/2014/08/you-cant-do-strategy-without-input-from-sales

[2] www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/163007/state-american-workplace.aspx

[3] http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/01/opinion/sunday/why-you-hate-work.html

[4] http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/trainingindustry/tiq_2015summer/#/28

[5] http://insights.wired.com/profiles/blogs/3-problems-all-project-managers-face-in-communicating-with-senior#ixzz3eZ9hFpPM

[6] http://www.pmi.org/~/media/PDF/Business-Solutions/The-High-Cost-Low-Performance-The-Essential-Role-of-Communications.ashx

Want to train your Millennials to design, deliver, and defend their best ideas with credibility?

Contact Mandel.

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