

Behavioral/Neuroscience Research

Eight Implications for Effective Risk, Crisis, and Organizational Change Communications

Executive Summary

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When people are fearful, stressed or upset, they typically:

1. ...want to ***“know that you care before they care what you know.”***
 - caring, empathy, and listening typically account for as much as 50% of trust determination
 - trust is often established in the first 9-30 seconds
 - once lost, trust is difficult to regain
2. ...have **difficulty *hearing, understanding, and remembering* information.**
 - *“mental noise”* can reduce our ability to process information by up to 80%
 - 95% of high concern questions can be anticipated and prepared for in advance
3. ...receive information best when delivered in ***small digestible chunks/bytes.***
 - message chunks/bites contain a maximum of 27 words; can be delivered in 9 seconds or less; are supported by 3 facts; are repeated 3 times
4. ...are more likely to recall information they hear ***first and last.***
5. ...process information at ***four grades below their educational level.***
6. ...focus ***more on negative information than positive.***
 - negative statements need to be balanced by three to four positive or constructive ones
 - avoid absolutes (“no, not, never, none, always, every, all, etc.”)
 - avoid words with high negative imagery (they typically go to the visual part of the brain for processing and “stick”)
7. ...focus ***more on perceptions than on facts or data.***
 - 95% of fears and concerns are driven by perception factors such as trust, benefits, control, and fairness
 - Less than 5% of fears and concerns are driven by facts
8. ...actively look for ***visual information to support verbal messages***
 - people typically give greater weight to non-verbal cues than verbal information in determining trust and credibility.
 - people typically assign a negative interpretation to non-verbal cues
 - as much as one-third of high concern information is processed in the lizard part of the brain, which largely processes visual information