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LESS CLUTTER. LESS NOISE.
BEYOND BULLETINS, BROCHURES AND BAKE SALES
kem meyer



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Less Clutter, Less Noise | *Kem Meyer*

Less Clutter, Less Noise: Beyond Bulletins, Brochures, and Bake Sales
Thirty:One Press: Camby, IN, 2009. 280 pages.

Less Clutter Less Noise is a field guide for connecting with your community and transforming lives. Speaking from years of experience as an expert in corporate communications, and now serving Granger Community Church as Communications Director, Kem Meyer reminds us that the most effective communication tool is “simplicity.”



Part One: Are People Letting You In or Shutting You Out?

Many times, conventional wisdom about communications and marketing is just wrong. It mass markets, forces-feeds, and assumes people are just waiting to hear what you have to say.

Are you unknowingly falling victim to believing five myths about getting the word out?

The Myth: You Are In Control

Every person has a unique framework of ideas and beliefs they use to interpret the world and interact with it – a worldview. A person’s worldview holds in it his or her experiences, wishes, biases, values and assumptions. Good communication is not so much about sending the right message as it is releasing the right response. The right message assumes you and the other person will respond in the same way. A person’s worldview shows up before you do, and that is the reality of the message you send. It’s not what you say; it’s what people hear. And, while you might not be able to control what people see or hear, you can do a better job trying to anticipate it.

The Myth: The More Choices, the Better

A Sunday edition of the New York Times carries more information than the average nineteenth century citizen accessed his entire life. Information used to be a rare and precious as gold; now it is so inexpensive and plentiful that most of it ends up being overlooked, ignored, or tossed like garbage. The barrage of data to which we are constantly exposed carries a cost – physically, mentally, and financially – regardless of the generation. People who live in today’s world respond in one of three ways: they become overwhelmed and shut down; they labor over whether they are making the right decisions; or they just ignore you and move on. *More* isn’t what people are looking for; *relief from the pressure of more* is what they’re looking for.

The Myth: Advertising Creates Interest

Advertising doesn’t create interest; at best, it creates awareness. And, that is not always a good thing. Cancer has awareness, and nobody wants that. A recent survey found that nearly 70% of consumers say they are interested in products that enable them to block out advertising. What people want is

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a promise they can trust, consistency, something worth telling their friends about – an experience. Instead of investing efforts in promotions to get attention, we should be getting attention with what happens when people show up.

The Myth: It Worked Before So It Will Work Again

Every organization has to face a changing culture, and your audience is changing faster than you are. In the past, mass marketing reached a captive audience. It was easy to do with only three network TV channels, no Internet, email, satellite radio, cable TV or TiVo. Now, mass marketing doesn't reach the masses because the masses are spread out and tuning out. People are ignoring sterilized marketing copy and are looking for recommendations from their friends. They're supplementing face-to-face interpersonal relationships with online social networks. You can ignore the current reality and use old techniques you're comfortable with, imitate new techniques that discredit you as a fraud, or take the time to learn what's effectively gaining credibility with people in today's culture.

The Myth: People Care About What You Say

You think people care about what you have to say? The truth is that the average person doesn't notice you. And, if they happen to have a different point of view than you do, they'll flat out dismiss you as a non-option. It's not that you're not likeable or smart; it's just a matter of survival for people in today's world. There is simply too much out there and not enough time to take it all in. The last thing they're looking for is unsolicited information or someone to tell them to change their ways. They, however, will take time to read or hear something that reinforces an opinion they already have or speaks to a real need in their life. If they're not looking for it, they won't hear it. But, if you take the time to learn what they're looking for, you can get in on a conversation already in progress.

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Part Two: Best Practices Make a Difference

Someone once said that information is giving out but communication is getting through. This is why we need to consider our approach. We can't be lazy and speak from our selfish, one-sided point of view if we intend to positively influence perceptions and persuade decisions.

A few “best practices” can help change our vantage point from “what I think needs to be said” to “what my audience thinks they need.”

Yes, this might be counter intuitive considering most of us typically think we have all the answers, and people don't always know what the need. But, as you'll see, it really works.

Know Your Audience

If people are struggling to figure out what will make a difference in their daily grind, why would they spend their time and attention on you? Who are you talking to? Do you even know these people? And, for the record, the answer doesn't lie in demographic insights alone. To communicate effectively with someone, you have to get at the psychographics – the attitudes, interests, and lifestyles – to connect with emotion in his or her real world. Only then, will you be able to begin to learn what might make you worth his or her time.

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Remove Barriers to Entry

Distractions are roadblocks and can blind an audience before they ever get the chance to hear or see what's next. Potential distractions exist all around you – from sights, sounds, and smells to facilities, signage, preconceived notions, language, graphics, and information flow. Your best defense? Identify the distraction and eliminate it. And, you're going to need help with that because most distractions for others are invisible to you. Much like the elephant in the room, sometimes the best way to remove a barrier is to acknowledge it.

Reduce the Noise

People are stressed out, fed up, over committed (in time and money) and over stimulated. Under any kind of stress (i.e. traffic, deadlines, crying kids, finances), the loudest signals your brains sends out are about what's happening right at this moment and how to survive it. Anything that's not critical to this moment physiologically is drowned out. It's how God has designed the human brain to prioritize. People need inspiration first, so the information will sink in. Many times that inspiration will come from how you make them feel, not by what you have to say. People argue, "It doesn't matter how we make people feel; our job isn't to make them feel good. Our job is to tell the truth in love." Does it matter how people feel? If your goal is effective communication, then, yes, it matters immensely. A person needs to be reachable before they're teachable.

Tell One Story at a Time

One thing is more important than all the rest in what you're doing. Do you know what it is? Can you communicate it in one sentence? If you don't know what that one sentence is, how do you expect other people to figure it out? Each communication piece is a valuable tool with the opportunity to unify all communications or dilute them. How many stories are you telling? Sometimes the secret in finding the right thing to say is in knowing what not to say.

Untangle the Web

Bad websites happen to good people: it doesn't matter if you build it, pay for it, are hands-on, hands-off, a web master or a web disaster. If you want a Web site that works, make paper first. The secret to making Web sites that work is to make the paper that holds the plan for your Web site. That plan replaces the wrong questions with the right ones. The right questions prevent you from falling victim to one-size-fits-none solutions, empty vendor speak, and technology buzz-babble. Do you want to unleash the power of the Web? Start by asking, "What do we want this to look like," and work backwards from there.

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Part Three: The Responsibility of Getting Buy-in

What starts with the best intentions for leading change often turns to defeat or defensiveness. The candid truth? Most of us are ineffective because we are pushing our own agenda – our way. What we think is the right way. Under pressure to demonstrate results quickly, we have the tendency to skip crucial "soft skills" – the emotional intelligence quotient – of our job. Even with increased awareness of a better communication strategy, few understand how to get buy-in and manage it.

Less Clutter, Less Noise | *Kem Meyer (cont'd)*

Rewrite Your Job Description

Even though you might have all the talent, technique, tools, and tricks on your side regarding graphics, creativity, copywriting, etc. you won't get very far if the people you work with think you're an idiot or a controlling bully. Do you ever notice your best intentions are met with lackluster reactions from those around you? Not only can you do something about it, you should do something about it. No matter what the role in your organization, you can take on the role of the communications director without any title to support it.

Ask, Don't Tell

Effective communication depends on a common vocabulary. Do you know the vocabulary from other departments in your organization or just yours? Knowing how to carry on a dialogue is more important than forcefully proclaiming what you know. One size does not fit all. The most effective team-builders make time to hear from others about their unique audience needs, department hurdles, system problems, and team pain points. You will gain insight and credibility by leading your conversations and running your projects – big or small – with more questions than directives.

Find the Yes Behind the No

When you are asked to do things differently or change the way you have always done something, does it tend to evoke emotion? Especially when we are already under pressure, it's hard not to react to unexpected directives with anger, defensiveness, alienation, or frustration. What do you think happens when we come at others with some new policy, system, or restriction? Like you, others have a hard time not taking it personally. Try a different approach. When you do find it necessary to introduce a new process or guideline, find ways to implement it as a helpful framework with room to move, not a rigid policy. Instead of coming at people, come alongside them.

Bring the Glue

One of the most important keys to the success of any organization is to have all the parts working and pulling together, independently aligned to the same vision. This is easier said than done. Focused on their tasks, individuals have a hard time understanding how their daily decisions affect the bigger picture, how their actions have a domino effect (good or bad). Even when everyone starts in the same place, by the end of one busy day with normal demands, vision drift starts to happen. When you bring the glue, you can more easily keep people connected to the same vision, fostering collaboration and cross training that move people from spectator to participant. Find ways to create mirrors that show the parts what the whole is doing. That is the glue.

Getting from Here to There

Implementing a communication strategy happens through a series of steps that build on each other. But, the concept is all encompassing, and the task at hand is so big. It's hard to know where to begin. After all, you have a job to do, and the ministry around you will not allow for a hard reboot – you can't just stop the bus and rearrange everything. However, you could use some handles, next steps and tools to help evaluate and organize the internal chaos.



Less Clutter, Less Noise | *Kem Meyer (cont'd)*

Back of the Book

Meyer closes *Less Clutter Less Noise* with some practical help for taking your next steps after reading the book. You'll find a variety of links, lists, and examples of stuff she has found useful along the way. This section also includes some sample documents used at Granger to coordinate communications.

Less Clutter Less Noise is written by an "insider" who hasn't lost that "outsider's perspective." Whether you recognize it or not, your community has an outsider's perspective, too.

Isn't it time you connected with them?

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Less Clutter, Less Noise | *Kem Meyer (cont'd)*

Recommended Resources

1. **Read** what Auxano Founder and Team Leader Will Mancini writes in a series of posts on “Six Steps to Vision-Soaked Communication.”
2. **Download** the first chapter of *Less Clutter Less Noise*.
3. **Watch** an interview with Kem Meyers as she discusses *Less Clutter Less Noise*.
4. **View** the Communication Strategy of Woods Church, based on the principles found in *Less Clutter Less Noise*.
5. **Read** “Brevity,” a short post on communications by Auxano’s Vision Room Curator Bob Adams.

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Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Bryan Rose

Vision Clarity Connection

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe was a leader in the global modern architecture movement and his most-known axiom “less is more” has been used widely throughout the last 40 years. “Less is more” is essentially the approach that Kem Meyer uses to address the complexity, confusion, and irrelevancy of most church communication today.

Many pastors and leaders invest significant resources of time and money into a frustratingly black hole trying to engage their community and congregation toward active participation. As Meyer implies, the biggest deterrent to effective communication is not our typical scapegoats of family schedule, a consumerist culture, or even other churches. It is our own effectiveness in communication. Like the beautifully stark modern architectural masterpieces of van der Rohe and his contemporaries, effective communication focuses on arranging the necessary elements with beautiful simplicity.

Church leaders that can live the discipline of communicating vision above making announcements find success in garnering participation, not goading it. For those willing to invest the effort, they will soon discover that *less is more*.

Go Ahead

Find out how *less is more* in your visionary communication:

Less WORDING is more COMPELLING

In looking back at the myths that Kem Meyer describes in Part 1, a common thread is the reliance on words in communication, especially on your website. Spend time at your next staff or creative meeting looking at your visual communication—online, in print, and on the worship service screens. How will compelling visual imagery (remember, no photographs are always better than cheesy or bad photographs), graphs, or diagrams supplement your words? One easy fix may be to replace verbal driving directions with a simple line drawing or Google Maps link. A visual articulation of your strategy or process of making disciples is also powerful when seen. Make it a goal and work with this team to replace 50 percent of your words with images.

Less HYPE is more HONEST

As Meyer points out in Part 2, some of the best practices in clear communication come from knowing your audience, focusing on your “one thing,” and reducing the noise. Review your stage communications from this past Sunday (or set up a camera and record this Sunday’s announcements) with the principle communicators and ask these 3 questions:

- Where are we relying on emotion over vision?
- How did we connect to the audience’s needs emotionally?
- What was our clear call-to-action toward spiritual growth?

Discuss your findings and look forward to next Sunday, adjusting what you say and how it is said based on this exercise. Repeat this exercise for the following 6 weeks and then conduct similar communication reviews each quarter thereafter.

Less OF YOU and more OF HIM

You may be in a season where your agenda needs to be set aside for a time, in which the organizational or intended audience’s needs will direct communication. If you feel like you have “tried everything,” maybe it’s time to stop trying and listen. Listening starts with asking good questions and becomes effective



Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity *(continued)*

by Bryan Rose

in how you receive those answers. These seasons of ministry also need to be bathed in prayer, asking and listening for God's calling for the church. Setting aside self is never easy, but it is always beneficial. Start now by asking God to affirm your singular, clear mission in reaching people and making disciples.

At Auxano, we are passionate about serving the Bride of Christ in her call to communicate effectively and grow followers of Christ. We have designers, highly developed congregational survey tools, and an entire process devoted to clarifying your unique calling as a church so that the lost may connect and grow as disciples. To find out more and schedule a 45-minute coaching call with one of our navigators, visit auxano.com or call **1.800.894.0991**.



More About Bryan Rose

As Lead Navigator for Auxano, Bryan Rose has a strong bias toward merging strategy and creativity within the vision of the local church and has had a diversity of experience in just about every ministry discipline over the last 12 years.

With his experience as a multi-site strategist and campus pastor at a 3500 member multi-campus church in the Houston Metro area, Bryan has a passion to see “launch clarity” define the unique Great Commission call of developing church plants and campus, while at the same time serving established churches as they seek to clarify their individual ministry calling. Bryan has demonstrated achievement as a strategic thinker with a unique ability to infuse creativity into the visioning process while bringing a group of people to a deep sense of personal ownership and passion.

Bryan has a Master of Arts in Christian Education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a B.A. in Architecture from Mississippi State University. He lives outside Houston, TX with his wife, Kelly and children Macy & Matthew.

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