

Want to comment? Your input is important. OLAW welcomes [questions and comments](#) from viewers of this recording. OLAW will post the comments, questions, and answers on the OLAW website. Please go to the OLAW [Webinars and Podcasts](#) page and click on the seminar title for further information.

Note: Text has been edited for clarity.

Contents: Transcript

A 2020 Vision: Strategic Communications and Micro-Messaging

Speaker:

- Paul McKellips, Strategic Communications Director, U.S. Army

Broadcast Date: June 11, 2020

View Recording: <https://youtu.be/MH6fIDLUhPg> (YouTube)

Slide 1: A 2020 Vision: Strategic Messaging and Micro-Messaging

>>Neera: Hello. Today is Thursday, June 11, 2020. I am Neera Gopee, Director of the Division of Policy and Education at OLAW, and today it is my pleasure to welcome our speaker, Paul McKellips to the OLAW online seminars to present: "Animal Research and Public Support: A 2020 Vision for Strategic Communications and Micro-Messaging."

Paul McKellips is a communications specialist who worked in Hollywood from 1986-2002, and since 2003 has been working in Washington D.C. as a strategic communications director with the U.S. Army. He served in frontline combat strategic communications in both Iraq and Afghanistan and was [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] NATO's public affairs trainer to the Afghan National Army. Paul also managed the Foundation for Biomedical Research from 2007-2015. He has been nominated for eleven Emmys and has written, directed and produced four motion pictures and numerous TV shows. His fourth novel, "Bedu, Bedouin Boy, Poet King," was released in early 2020. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the OLAW Online Seminars, and now to hand the microphone over to Paul.

>> Paul: Great, well thank you Neera.

Slide 2: COVID-19

If we look at where we've been just over the last several months, no one could have predicted that a global pandemic would change everything about the way we live our lives. The amazing part of this is it has frontline impact. It has personal impact: the way that we social distance, the way we have to wear face coverings. It has global impact. In just a span of 90 days, we have seen the world focus on things that we never thought they would focus on before, but here we are. And even in the midst of a global pandemic, the animal rights groups still would rather see people get sick and die than allow you to conduct the vital research necessary for a vaccine.

But I'll tell you this, their messaging is not resonating with the public. Even those who might be more sympathetic on a normal day, they are not getting that message through right now. So today I'm talking about effective messaging. What really works, what cuts through the clutter, what doesn't work.

Let's move on. Next slide, please.

Slide 3: I Have Never Met...

I've never met a PhD, an MD, a three-star general, a politician, or a chancellor, who though an expert in their own field, did not believe they were also a communications expert. It is amazing to me that people can have their PhD's in rocket science and in molecular biology and be truly experts in their own fields, but when it comes to communications, almost everybody thinks they are also great communicators.

Next slide, please.

Slide 4: If We are All Such Great Communicators, Then Why Can't We Master Email?

If we are truly expert communicators, then why can't we even master the basic tools of email? And I would submit a little metaphor to you. Just because you sleep in the garage, that does not make you a car.

Let's take a look at the next slide; it is a video and it kind of illustrates for all of us what effective communications is not.

Slide 5: Video 1: Expert Communicators

Captioned video plays.

Slide 6: "Expert" Communications

With email that we've had for years, we still struggle to be expert communicators.

Next.

Slide 6: The Communications Hierarchy

At any given time, all organizations cycle through four different levels of communications. There's public relations. There's strategic comms, there's crisis comms, and there's disaster comms. Each one plays a very effective role at the right time. Let's take a look at the first one.

Next.

Slide 7: Public Relations

The first one is public relations. I think we all understand that. It's the professional maintenance of a favorable public image by a company. It is that state of the relationship between the public and a company, organization, or a famous person. There's a lot of things we have done over the years in animal research to try to bolster and improve our PR so that the public might have a more favorable impression of what it is that we do and why it is that we do it.

Next.

Slide 8: Strategic Communications

Now, how a certain set of audience attitudes, behaviors and perceptions support each of your organization's objectives is what makes communications strategic. We don't just put out public messaging because it seems like the right thing to do, or it seems to be convenient, or it seems to be a good idea. We do it with a certain set of attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions in mind and we're strategically trying to improve those attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions.

Next.

Slide 9: Crisis Communications

Now, some organizations overreact to a crisis. That's happened a lot where we see a crisis and treat it like it's a disaster. Some organizations ignore a crisis and then they find themselves in the middle of a disaster. The best way to treat a crisis is sequentially. What's the worst impact that is out there and handle that one first. But what we cannot do in a crisis is nothing. And often times when we don't know what to do, that's precisely what we do, which is nothing.

Next.

Slide 10: Disaster Communications

Disaster communications is the easiest to understand. When I was at FEMA as press secretary a couple of years ago, it was very clear that when Hurricane Harvey hit Houston, and Irma [hit] Florida, and Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico, and when the California wildfires hit up in northern California and then followed down to Santa Barbara, the last thing that anybody wanted to talk about in the midst of hurricanes and fires was hurricane preparation or what you should do in case of fire strikes. We were in disasters. And in disasters you need to deal with the very basic, most dominant human need that one can think of. So it's very clear, very understandable.

Next.

Slide 11: All Communications Should Be Targeted

Just make sure that your communications are targeted. It's really important that we aim at the right target. When we're sending out communications there's two targets that we need to consider: stakeholders and audiences. They are two different groups; they are two different targets.

Next.

Slide 12: Stakeholders and Audiences

These terms are not synonymous. Audiences are the receivers of messages, just as our job as the audience at the theater, or at the cinema, or at a speech, our job as the audience is to observe the performance, not to participate in it. So, when we send out messaging to audiences, we are not looking for their participation as much as we're looking for their engagement. If you're in the middle of a theatrical production and half of your audience walks out, I don't think your show is very good.

Now, stakeholders, on the other hand, are groups of individuals who are directly impacted by the decisions and actions of an organization or a company. Stakeholders outside of your research setting might be your local neighbors, local neighborhoods. It might be alumni, it might be benefactors, it might be donors, it might be leadership, it might be chancellors and deans. It's very clear to identify the difference between audiences and stakeholders. Pretty clear.

Next.

Slide 13: Before You Craft Any Messages...

So, the question is: "Who is your audience?" Let's start there. Three levels: let's define all of them. Before you can craft any of your messages you've got to write out and define your top three audiences and your top three stakeholders. And you prioritize them according to, number one: who are the individuals? Two: who are the groups of people? And three: who are the

organizations? You want to make sure that as you craft your messages you are targeting the individuals, the groups and the organizations that might be most impacted by your messaging.

Next.

Slide 14: The Secret to Strategic Communications is the Same as Politics...

One of the things that we can learn from politics (and there are very few things we can learn from politics anymore, because it has turned into a blood sport), but there was a time, back in the early '80s and long before that, when politicians were actually getting along and they were statesmen.

I think most famously, in my era anyway, was the relationship that existed between President Ronald Reagan and Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill. They got together every Wednesday for lunch and often didn't even talk about politics. They talked about their Irish heritage, told jokes, and I'm sure they tipped back a few adult beverages with those lunches. But Tip O'Neill wrote a book that [says] all politics is local. And what he learned in one of his many campaigns is that if all politics are local, then the messaging should be targeted locally as well.

That really translates into what we need to do in biomedical research. We sometimes send out these messages that are either not targeted, or they're so universal that we think everybody in the world ought to take that message and apply it to their local setting. Nothing could be further from the truth. If politics are local, then biomedical research and using animals in research must be local as well.

Next.

Slide 15: Case Study: Financial Disaster Follows Global Health Crisis

There's a recent case study that we all experienced firsthand. And this was the financial disaster that happened with the US stock markets as COVID-19 started to rip through our communities. You might recall that by the end of the day on Friday, March 20th, the American stock markets were in a free fall, death spiral, if you will, as fear and human suffering took its toll around the globe. We had gotten close to 29,000 points on the Dow Jones industrial average, but when the stock market closed on March 20th, we were down at the 19,000 level. This was a disaster. We were in total free fall.

Next.

Slide 16: Stock Market Live Friday...

At the White House—let me just point out that when it did crash on that Friday, it was the worst week—the week of March 20th. It was the worst week in 11 years. You all remember the crash of 2008 when the housing bubble burst. And then on top of this oil cratered. Remember there was a couple of days that oil was selling negative. That they had produced so much they were now going to pay people to store it for them and take it off their hands. So we were in desperate shape on Friday, March 20th.

Next.

Slide 17: The Whitehouse Strategic Comms Team...

At the White House the strategic communications team, they worked through the weekend to try to develop a targeted message. Again, they needed to stabilize the financial markets. Now, COVID was certainly bad. There's no question about it, and the dominant crisis/disaster of the

day, but the fall of the financial markets – and we've seen the number of layoffs and all those things-the fall of the financial markets could be of equally devastating, if not worse consequences.

When I was press secretary at FEMA, I knew all of these people on the strategic communications team. I know what they do and which room they go to and they worked all weekend long to craft something. What could they say short of "Hey, folks, we just discovered a vaccine, and [have] no fear, we're in good shape." Short of offering an end all, cure all vaccine, what could they say that would turn the financial markets around? That really became the question.

Next.

Slide 18: The White House Message

So, the White House messaging team took charge and this message was delivered twice on Tuesday, the 23rd of March, 2020. And I think you all remember when it came out.

Next, let's go ahead and play that video.

Slide 19: Video 2: White House Stratcom

[Video plays]

>> President Trump: Ultimately the goal was to ease the guidelines and open things up to very large sections of our country as we near the end of our historic battle with the invisible enemy. It will go on for a while, but we'll win. We'll win.

I said earlier today that I hope we can do this by Easter. I think that would be a great thing for our country and we're all working very hard to make that a reality. We'll be meeting with a lot of people to see if it can be done. Easter is a very special day for many reasons. For me, for a lot of our friends it's a very special day. And what a great timeline this would be. Easter as our timeline, what a great timeline that would be.

[End of video].

>> Paul: Seriously, people, it does not matter whether you like this president or not. That's not the point of it. I'm sure many of you rolled your eyes at that announcement about Easter.

Slide 20: Most of Us Were Shocked and Even Some Were Disgusted by the Messaging...but it Worked!

Did it work? The Easter message was not a macro-message about masks and [personal protective equipment] PPE and ventilators. It was a local message about your local churches being full of your local neighbors on Easter Sunday.

Now, you notice that when Trump delivered those remarks, he was reading them. And of course, he very seldom reads from prepared remarks. I know that firsthand from Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. But he was careful to hit the strategic line that they wanted hit, and then what happened? Well, most of us were shocked and even disgusted by the message, but I'm going to tell you something, it worked.

Immediately the stock market began to rally. The month of April was one of the best in 82 years, and we stopped the blood shed of the financial markets. Now, the layoffs started to happen. I'm not saying it was an end all/cure all, but the purpose of effective messaging is to make it local and create an image that people can resonate with even if they disagree that it's going to happen. The point was not "Oh, do you really think we can be ready to go back to church on

Easter Sunday?" That was not the point. It got us off of thinking the doom and gloom that was COVID-19.

Next.

Slide 21: What is Micro-Messaging?

So what is micro-messaging?

Well, micro-messaging doesn't mean it's not a locally targeted message. You can tell 10 million people what's happening in their neighborhood or you can talk to 75 people. Trump's Easter message was to, what, 340 million people? But really, it was your neighborhood of 75 that changed the dynamic.

Micro-messaging: these are small, subtle messages; they're subconscious sometimes. They're communicated between people without saying a word. [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] MIT researchers find that we do about 2,000 to 4,000 positive and negative micro-messages each day. They include the looks, the gestures, the tone of voice. It is asking your spouse to help with dishes, and you get that eye roll. It is telling a child to get off their gaming device and you get the sigh. These are all micro-messages. We send them and we receive them all day. I think we are less offended when we send them ourselves, really doggone irritated when we detect them from somebody else, there's no doubt about that.

Next.

Slide 22: What is Mass Market Micro-Messaging?

So how do we micro-message about the ongoing need for ethical and responsible use of animals in research? Well, it is micro-messaging with a marketing slant. Mass market micro-messaging has come to refer to marketing strategies which are variously customized to either local markets or market segmentations or individual customers. How do we do that with regard to the need for animal research?

Next.

Slide 23: So, How Could We Micro-Message the Mass Market Audience...

Well, the advances and the supports of the ethical use of animals in research and the improvement of the public perception are all of the things that we definitely need to do. The key is to bring it locally. And I want to give you another example of that.

Next, please.

Slide 24: 89.7 Million Dogs

Right now, we have 90 million dogs, pet dogs, in the United States. And I think there's, what, probably 96 million pet cats in the United States. And if there is a translational comparison between dogs, cats, gorillas, endangered species, and humans, then we need to make that connection, that correlation. We often love our pets more than we care for our adult children who are still at home and down in the basement playing with their X-Box. Our pets are beloved family members. It is sometimes the best way for us to communicate in a micro-messaging, macro-messaging, micro-marketing sort of a way.

Next.

Slide 25: Video 3: Scout/UW-Madison

During the Super Bowl this year we had the privilege, thanks to WeatherTech, to see this:

[Captioned video plays.]

Slide 26: The New Animal Research Communications Trend

Make that transitional jump to the fact that what we do with our animals does have a translation to what happens with humans.

There are some things about our messaging that probably don't work well. And let me point out a couple of them. We have over the last 30 years started this trend of thanking animals for being in animal research. I can tell you from conducting focus groups, I can tell you from conducting focus groups even in my role with the United States Army, that some kinds of appreciation and gratitude just do not resonate with the public. Thanking animals happens to be one of those. Now, clearly, if the preacher turns over to the choir and thanks them for understanding sheet music, the choir says amen. There is a role and a time and a place for thanking animals and expressing that gratitude, certainly within our own confines. At the AALAS meetings, at OLAW, we appreciate the fact that we have animals that can make these advances in science.

However, that messaging to the public, to audiences and/or stakeholders does not resonate. There's also a trend to message the public about the roles animals play in research. Let me just show you the reverse of that. The animal rights groups tried to use the fact that animals were being used in COVID-19 vaccine research, and it fell on deaf ears. It doesn't work on the negative and it doesn't work on the positive of letting the people know about the importance of animals that they play in research. And I know you may find that a little controversial, but I'll explain that.

Let's move to next one.

Slide 27: The Communications Hierarchy

Remember as I said before, there are four hierarchies of communication: Your PR, your strategic communications, your crisis communications, and your disaster communications. No communications go out, no messages are crafted, until you know which of the hierarchies you're in and which of the audiences and stakeholders you are targeting.

Next.

Slide 28: Four Tips for Successful Messaging

I would submit to you that there are four conditions for successful messaging. Number one: always start with the human condition, not the role animals play in trying to solve the maladies of the human condition. If your university, if your group does cardiovascular research, then you need to know all of the statistics and all of the human conditions of suffering that people with heart failure go through. If your organization does research on colon cancer, what are the symptoms and conditions that people go through? If you do glioblastoma research, what can we expect that people suffering with those, from children to adults, what do they suffer with? You start with the human condition because we can all relate to that. We all relate to a family member who got some disease and died. As I have said 100,000 times over the last 15 years, none of us is getting out alive. We all know people and family members who have suffered with a disease. We do, none of us, few of us, an infinitesimal percentage, have ever considered the role that animals have played in whatever medicine, drug therapy, medical device. That's just not part of our calculus. We don't think about that. So, to lead with the role that animals play in research is just counterintuitive. We start with the human condition. What are you going through? And then we back it up.

Number two is we have to target locally. You know, Johns Hopkins University has created this niche with COVID-19 by monitoring all of the statistics. They seem to be the definitive go to source to get the latest information. Well, if you're the University of Cincinnati, for example, and you're doing biomedical research with zebrafish on diabetes, then for goodness sakes, you need to know all of your stats in Cincinnati proper, in the county around Cincinnati, in the state of Ohio, so that you can be the definitive source if any of the media ever want to talk about diabetes research in the state of Ohio or in Cincinnati. You target your information, your statistics, your human condition, target it locally. And trust me, you can get a large, large audience who can relate to exactly what your message is.

Number three, it's all about hope. You have to paint the progress made on the canvas of hope for tomorrow. I know that when companies are about to go publicly traded, I know when we have great results in basic research that might make it to clinical trials and then we've got clinical trials that are moving from phase to phase, we have to be careful about talking about hope. We don't want to "blue sky" anybody. I get that. But for goodness sakes, when the military goes to war, we better be optimistic that we are going to prevail and win and we're going to accomplish the mission.

Likewise, you're at war against diseases. And if you truly understand the human condition, then that's the reason you are funded to do this research, is because you are trying to find the breakthroughs of hope. So, to leave hope out of your communication strategy just doesn't make any sense. It has to be in there, it has to be reasonable, but it has to be optimistic. Lean forward. Lean forward with regard to hope.

And then finally, realize that once a drug, or a therapy, or a device is approved by the [Food and Drug Administration] FDA, no company is ever going to circle back and thank the animals for the role they played in that discovery. It's not going to happen. It's not going to happen. So, for us in research to lead with the role they play in that discovery doesn't make any sense. It's like we realize that we're not going to get any credit or acknowledgment later on, so let's try to sell that now. It doesn't sell. It doesn't resonate with the public.

What resonates is the human condition that's happening locally, right connected to my family, and I'm looking for some hope. Are we making progress? And then realize that once we have that drug, that therapy, that device that's approved by the FDA, that we have contributed to that breakthrough. We have made a difference. And within our circles, and where it's appropriate, we certainly then can thank animals. We can certainly express to those who want to know: "How did we get there?" How did we get to penicillin? How did we get to insulin? Then it becomes very instructional and informational. But when it comes to the hierarchies of communication, those are the things that sell.

Next.

Slide 29: Closing Slide

I hope that something I've said resonates. Communications is difficult. And of course, as I pointed out earlier, it seems all professionals and novices consider themselves as expert communicators. I'm not telling you that there is an absolute right way or wrong way for strategic communications. I am telling you that when you use micro-messaging that explains and shows empathy to the human condition, and when you target it locally so that I can relate to it in my home, in my neighborhood, in my community, in my city, in my county, in my state...if you can target that message to me locally, then it's going to provide me with some hope. I'm not alone. I realize

there are professionals, unnamed professionals, unknown professionals, who are working around the clock to do everything they can possibly do to improve the human condition.

It's not, as they say, brain surgery, and it's not rocket science. It's strategic, it's targeted, and it's local.

Thank you for your time. I hope this has been beneficial here or there. And I look forward to seeing y'all again someday soon.

>>*Neera*: Thank you Paul, for taking the time today to provide such invaluable insight on such an interesting and relevant topic, especially during these unprecedented times.

Slide 30: AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals: 2020 Edition

Our next OLAW Online Seminar, which is scheduled for September 10, 2020, will address the updates to the AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals: 2020 Edition, with a focus on the sections that apply to laboratory animals. I wish everyone well. Please stay safe and healthy. Thank you and goodbye.

###