Small changes in how you communicate dramatically increase audience action.

Twenty five years after Steve Jobs made that comment during an internal Apple prescreening of the Think Different campaign, content proliferation and disruptive events have made it even harder to reach an audience. Clear messaging is still essential, but it isn’t enough to drive action. In fact, executive messages, on average, impel only about half of audience members to do something positive with the information they deliver.

Audience Engagement With Executive Messaging

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47%</td>
<td>Took no positive response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53%</td>
<td>Took any positive response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 1,041 employees and managers
Source: 2021 Gartner Executive Leader Communications Survey

This is a very complicated world. It’s a very noisy world. We’re not going to get a chance to get people to remember much about us — no company is. And so we have to get really clear about what we want them to know.”

Steve Jobs, 1997

Fortunately, research reveals simple ways to drive action in response to executive messaging. Optimizing the context in which executives deliver their message, the subject matter of the message, and the delivery technique can increase the percentage of audience members who take action by between 30 and 65 percentage points.
4 keys to action-oriented executive messaging

1. **Why matters more than what.** Audience members take action when the executive message explains why they made a decision, not just what the decision is.

2. **Live events like town hall meetings produce the highest level of audience engagement.** Messages conveyed through email produce the lowest response rates, though communicating through multiple channels is ideal.

3. **Audience members want to engage directly with executive speakers.** In addition, they prefer messages that are formally structured and emotionally delivered — as opposed to ad hoc and impersonal.

4. **More perspectives are better.** Audiences want to hear from multiple speakers, and have them include authentic perspectives from stakeholders like employees and customers.

Use this checklist to incorporate proven practices for more effective messaging

**Context**
- Are we hosting an event (e.g., town hall) to deliver the message?
- Are we sharing the message through multiple channels to include employees who can’t attend the event?
- Do we include a way (e.g., Q&A) for employees to ask direct questions of the executive speaker(s)?

**Subject matter**
- Does the executive communicate the thought process and inputs that went into a decision?
- Are we including multiple voices and perspectives?

**Delivery**
- Does the message contain emotional language?
- Does the speaker present their perspective in a formal manner?
- Are there employee or customer stories we share to bring the message to life?
- Are any action items or next steps universal and specific? If not, have we created resources that enable managers to contextualize the next steps?

Anatomy of an Actionable Executive Message

- **Topic:** Context behind business decision(s)
- **Voices:** Multiple
- **Participatory Elements:** Direct dialogue between employees and executives (e.g., Q&A)
- **Channel:** Multiple, centered around an in-person or video event

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