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# Critical Conversations in Preparing School Leaders for Fall 2021 #3



Discussion 3: August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021

# ▶ Crafting Communications and Leading Through the Unexpected

*Guiding Question:  
What are you communicating to school staff, students, families, and community members and how are you communicating it?*

# Agenda

- Welcome
- What the research has to say...
- Make a commitment

## Objectives:

- ✓ Identify own communication content and style in relation to school reopening
- ✓ Commit to use at least one research-based recommendation for communicating with students, staff, and/or family members in preparation for school reopening.

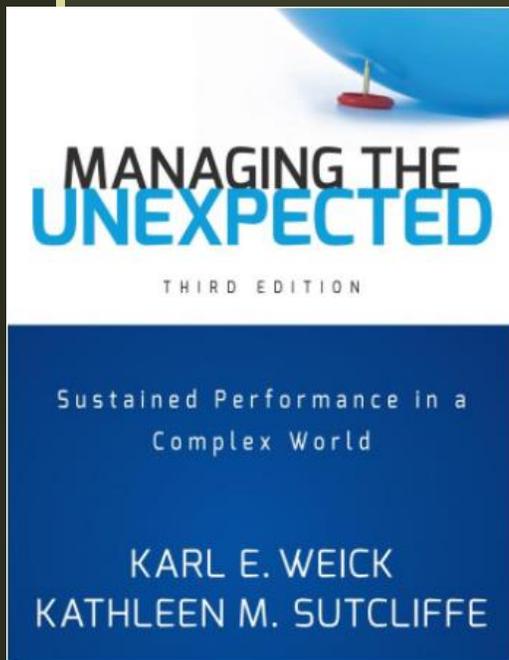


## In a word...

- What word would you use to describe what you have communicated to your staff about the return to school in the fall...
- What word would you use to describe how you have communicated with your staff and community about the return to school in the fall...

# What are you communicating and how are you communicating it?

- *“It takes both anticipation and resilience to manage unexpected disruptions, a combination that we call mindful organizing” (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015).*



## Making a Crisis Worse: The Eleven Biggest Mistakes in Crisis Communications

Jonathan Bernstein

**ABSTRACT.** The author, a nationally recognized figure in crisis management consulting, offers guidelines about avoiding common errors made during crises by organizational communicators. A boxed insert provides additional suggestions for effectively dealing with product recalls. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

The image is a screenshot of a web browser displaying a blog post. At the top, the navigation bar includes the University at Albany logo and links for HOME, RESEARCH RESULTS, RESOURCES, PERFORMANCE TRACKER, NEWS, ABOUT U, and CONTACT US. The main heading is 'BLOG'. Below that, the breadcrumb trail shows 'Home &gt; Content &gt; Blog &gt; Leading Through Risk'. The article title is 'Leading Through Risk' by Brian Rhode and Kristen C. Wilcox. The text discusses the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic for school leaders and mentions research conducted by NYKids. A section titled 'Lessons from Positive Outliers' describes findings on trust and innovation in schools. At the bottom, there is a small graphic with the text 'THE NEW NORMAL' and a globe.

## What the research tells us...

- School leaders' communications with community members and staff are consequential in frontline staff's levels of stress and job satisfaction (Wilcox et al., 2021).
- "What is striking to us about HROs (High Reliability Organizations) is that they develop beliefs about the world and its hazards with fewer simplifications, less finality, and more revision than we see in many organizations." (Weick & Sutcliffe)
- "The essence of resilience is ... the intrinsic ability of an organization (system) to maintain or regain a dynamically stable state, which allows it to continue operations after a major mishap and/or in the presence of a continuous stress" (Weick & Sutcliffe)

# What do you communicate and what and who do you listen to?

From Bernstein on how to make a crisis worse:

1. Play ostrich
2. Only start work on a potential crisis situation after it's public
3. Let your reputation speak for you
4. Treat the media like the enemy
5. Get stuck in reaction mode versus getting proactive
6. Use language your audience doesn't understand
7. Assume that truth will triumph over all
8. Address only issues and ignore feelings
9. Make only written statements
10. Use "best guess" methods of assessing damage
11. Do the same thing over and over again expecting different results



What do you hear/see in this quote with regard to how this teacher experienced communications in her building?

What effects did these communications have on this teacher and others with whom this teacher interacted?

"I feel dismayed by the lack of communication prior to the beginning of the school year. Even now, after so many months, decisions to move to remote, etc. are done at the last minute with teachers left scrambling to communicate with families. I feel that teachers have done such a great job creating a "new normal" that the administration has forgotten that we are all living through a pandemic. Lip service is paid to "taking care of our own well-being" but when push comes to shove, they do not want to hear that we need time to take care of ourselves.

"

## Research-based recommendations...

- ✓ Rapidly respond to known problems to minimize damage
- ✓ Use or craft a real-time information management system to communicate with stakeholders/community members
- ✓ Communicate internally and externally with the priority to draw on available expertise regardless of rank or hierarchy
- ✓ Get ahead of the court of public opinion with own message/vision
- ✓ Focus on listening to and learning from the highly disgruntled

(Bernstein)



## For discussion...

1. What do you expect are the top challenges you might face with regard to communicating with your staff, students, and/or families this fall?
  2. Where are the opportunities to communicate in ways that inspire high performance and engagement more than ever before?
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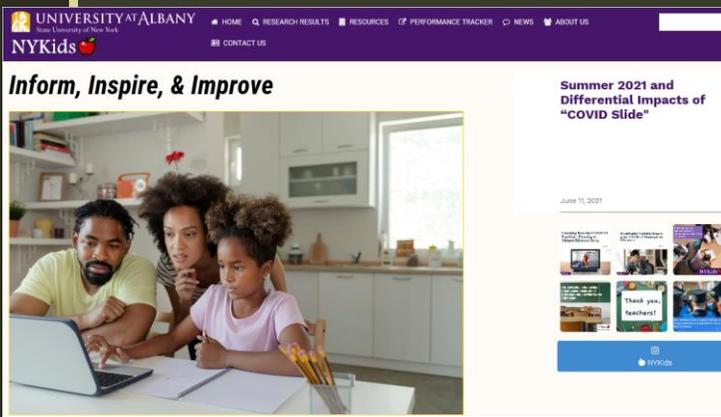
## Commit...

- What is one research-based recommendation you might take up to approach a challenge related to communicating with your school staff, students, families and community members this fall?



# Feedback

1. What is one key take-away from this discussion for you?
  2. What is something you want to learn more about?
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# Key Resources and References

- Bernstein, J. (2006). Making a crisis worse: The eleven biggest mistakes in crisis communications. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 12(3-4), 39-45.
- Weick, K. E., & Sutcliffe, K. M. (2015). *Managing the unexpected: Sustained performance in a complex world*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Wilcox, K. C. (June, 2021). *Discovering Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Education Workforce*. Paper presented at the Addressing Differential Impacts of COVID-19 in New York State.

<https://ny-kids.org/>