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The Communicationist—A new age professional

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'It is false to assume that if we can talk, we can communicate'

- Reuel Howe

Abstract:

As civilizations in the world evolved, so did many professions. There are so many noble professionals like doctors, engineers, lawyers, defense personnel, health workers, etc. who contribute meticulously towards the society we live in. In fact, we live in a world where there are well trained professionals for every field. As a mass communication professional, we have always pondered over where my profession stands in the league of hallowed career options, where our profession enjoys the same respect and adulation like other professions. It took us nearly 20 years to realise that being a communicationist is no less than being a doctor or an engineer. Now, it gives us pride in being what we are - 'The Communicationist'. This chapter highlights the journey of a mass communication student to being a communicationist.

Introduction

If you are reading this chapter, you are either a professional who has something to do with marketing and marketing communication or you are someone with a keen interest in the business of communication. When students start their journey in the field of mass communication they are generally seen as people who could not get into other more popular or recognized careers. I remember when I got into the field, not many around me could relate to what I was doing and how my profession contributed to society. So, who are we—the students of mass communication, public relations' and marketing professionals, media personnel, brand consultants and the like? What is our collective identity? The best word or the term that comes closest to defining us is 'communicationists'. Our fraternity comes under the umbrella of communicationists. In fact, it will not be wrong to refer to communication as our religion.

Power of Communication

To be an effective communicationist, it is important, more than anything else, to relate to—and embrace—this identity and understand its import. A communicationist is indispensable to society, especially in today's age of information explosion. Their job is not less important than, say, doctors, engineers, lawyers or bureaucrats. Unlike doctors and lawyers, mass communicationists may not have to read fat books or burn the midnight oil, but that doesn't make their work light or easy. It took me decades to understand that the role played by us is arguably the most important in society. If an individual falls sick it is a doctor's job to treat him or her, but if a society falls sick we are the ones who can treat it. As we grow in our professional life our duty in the world we inhabit also grows. Now, just

Imagine if the doctors who treat us are not well trained or qualified to do their job. Would we entrust them with our health? Similarly, untrained communicationists or those with half-baked ideas and factually incorrect information can be detrimental to society. However, there is something unique that sets us, communicationists, apart from other professionals. We are the people with the ability and power to define how the world perceives a situation and how it reacts to a situation. We have the capacity to build world opinions and destroy global images; create world icons and manage global images. But that cannot be achieved if our mind is not nurtured and trained to produce quality results.



Fig 5: A representative image of a communicationist

Welcome to the world of communication, where our business is to play with words. These words could be a radio jingle, a newspaper advertisement, a press release, content for a website, etc. Usually these words are complimented with visuals. Understandably, even to produce a few words of substance you must have a conscious and subconscious repository of knowledge. So, to become a communicationist you must consume large quantities of data on a daily basis. How many of you will train your minds to treat the society will be decided now; not in the future. What we do or say today forms an opinion, forms a society. When we see the instability in the world around us, we must understand that our

role in it is going to be challenging and crucial. If we know what we say, we will achieve proper profit for the client and proper profit for the society. In this entire world, it is only our profession that can handle this. We cannot simply stand up and voice an opinion on any issue unless we have studied it thoroughly. We cannot be opinionated; our voice has to be backed by research and facts.

Data Consumption

When I wake up in the morning, the first schedule is to sit with my eight friends—the eight subscribed newspapers. Like a doctor reading up on what's new in oncology or pathology, a student of mass communication must consume data to upgrade her knowledge on a daily and hourly basis. Communicationists do not have the option or leisure to wait for another day, even another hour. Things are changing, events are unfolding within hours and minutes in our era of communication. A twenty-year-old question I continue to ask my colleagues even to this day is: As a communicationist what is the source of your data consumption? We must reflect on what gives our mind enough data to produce effective results. How many of us read newspapers regularly? The idea behind asking this question repeatedly is to reiterate that the foremost requirement to become a mass communicationist is to feed data to our brain.

What comes next is the ability to use this data to present a story in multiple ways

Most of us read newspapers to update ourselves but a communicationist must read newspapers or consume news to understand every piece of news from all possible angles. Communicationists are responsible for

not only managing their own perspective but also those of others. For instance, if a communication professional hired by the Indian National Congress party today, then he will have to think like Priyanka Gandhi. But, if the very next day, his contract with the Congress party ends and he is hired by the Bharatiya Janata Party, he will have to speak for Narendra Modi. A communicationist's skill lies in how well she manages both the situations. But to be able to do so, your mind must, first, know the difference between 'phrasing' and 'rephrasing'—how a story can be told in different ways.

Prerequisites of being a communicationist

Once we realize the worth and responsibility of being a communicationist, we can fully and sincerely prepare ourselves for the job. This leads to another vital question: What preparation do I have to make to become a communicationist?

- a) As clichéd as it sounds, read a lot of newspapers. There's no substitute to knowledge gathering than going through newspapers daily. In this digital era, of course, browsing news websites takes precedence because unlike print media, electronic and digital media are updated on hourly basis. Give your mind enough data to produce the right results.
- b) You must develop skills to analyse and understand data. As a communicationist you should know how to research a subject, find its context in a given situation and present the data relevant to it.
- c) You ought to look at a story from different angles. Even newspapers and websites cover the same incident or event differently. You should know what The Indian Express or The Times of India or

fields, it is pertinent to decide the company you want to join. Don't pick anything out of what the placement guys offer you. Have your goal set without anyone trying to sway your opinion or change your target.

Future Goals

You must know where you want to see yourself in three years. You cannot, and should not, wait for three years to see where you end up. It's akin to traveling without ticket or reservation in a bus or train where you somehow manage to complete the journey but have neither a comfortable seat nor peace of mind. It's essential to have a roadmap and be clear about which company you want to join and which area you want to work in. If you are preparing, or are already well prepared, you will be ever ready for opportunities that may come your way in surprising ways. There are immense opportunities out there and there is always a demand for good professionals. If you have skills for two different careers and are indecisive as to what you should pick, I recommend that you do an internship in each discipline. As a student you have the liberty and time to do that. By working in both fields, you will ultimately know which one is the best for you. Try and have an internship of at least three to six months in both the disciplines and you'll know what you want. I speak from my position and experience, I may even give you advice but ultimately you will have to choose your own path. Your experiences will create your story, no one else's can. It's always good to remember that each time we fall, we learn something new. The world of communication is vast, ever changing, extremely demanding and sometimes overwhelming, but you can navigate it smoothly if you know your identity, do your preparation, realise the power of content and be clear and decisive.