

THE **POWER** OF  
**COMMUNICATION**

SKILLS TO BUILD TRUST,  
INSPIRE LOYALTY,  
AND LEAD EFFECTIVELY

**HELIO FRED GARCIA**

*EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LOGOS INSTITUTE  
FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT & EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP*

## Praise for *The Power of Communication*

“Helio Fred Garcia coached me a decade ago on the fundamentals of effective communication. I probably wasn’t his best student, but I count what I learned from him as one of the most important contributions to my personal growth as an executive. We’re fortunate to now have Fred’s book *The Power of Communication*, which encapsulates his enormous depth of knowledge and breadth of experience in communication—as a practitioner, as a scholar, and as a teacher. The book contains a wealth of real-life examples of what works and what doesn’t in communication, and each chapter provides a recap of best practices and key lessons learned. This book should be on the must-read list of any person who aspires to lead by capturing the hearts and minds of his or her stakeholders.”

—**Jeffrey Bleustein**, Retired Chairman and CEO, Harley-Davidson, Inc.

“*The Power of Communication* is an absolutely terrific book on how to communicate and lead in complex and shifting situations. Helio Fred Garcia has compiled a wealth of compelling examples to illustrate and support a cogent and immensely practical set of principles for leadership communication. The result is a compelling guide for leaders in business and government settings alike.”

—**Amy C. Edmondson**, Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management, Harvard Business School, and author of *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy*

“Helio Fred Garcia is known as one of the most engaging and effective professors at NYU. Readers of this book will learn why. Only Fred could weave together tales about Abbott and Costello, the Marine Corps, and Cicero into a must-read for anyone who hopes to connect with the American public.”

—**Louis Capozzi**, Chairman, MSL Group (retired), and Adjunct Professor, New York University

“Helio Fred Garcia has had an enormous impact on my career, my practice, and my life since we first met more than 25 years ago when he recruited me to teach at NYU. I have watched him have similar effects on thousands of others. He is the man of eloquence Cicero describes. Fred instructs instinctively. His ability, which is what this book is all about, to look at critically important communication and leadership topics and issues from completely new and important perspectives, in this case the United States Marine Corps *Warfighting* manual, is profoundly interesting and helpful.

“The book is story after story, insight after insight, lesson after lesson, inspiration after inspiration. Just when you think it’s impossible to find another important illustration of a crucial communication or leadership principle, Fred gives you another chapter of powerful, sensible, often surprising and charming stories and lessons. Believe me, he is a persuasive orator in person and, as you’ll read, on paper.

“Looking to build your powers of communication, to inspire trust and confidence, and to lead effectively? You hold in your hand the key ingredient to a happier, more successful, and influential professional life. Start reading.”

—**James E. Lukaszewski**, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, President, The Lukaszewski Group Division, Risdall Public Relations

“Professor Garcia’s book is great news for decision-makers, leaders, and professionals in the U.S. and any country in the world. He was frequently invited by Tsinghua University to teach in our senior officials’ training seminars on crisis communication and was always remembered by our executive students as Professor *Reputation Management*. His class evaluations by the participating state council ministers, senior officials, and corporate leaders were always the best.

“Many thought that American methods of solving crises were not suitable for China, but Fred’s lectures rapidly dispelled their skepticism. His vivid examples, drawn from the U.S. Marine Corps as well as corporate experience around the world, made a deep impression on participants, who have since applied his practical and innovative approach to their own work. We truly believe that the book contains some very important global wisdom

to save you in crisis in an omni-media age. The pity is that he can visit China only once a year, but that gives us all the more reason to celebrate the publication of this book, a very clear, concise, interesting, and powerful masterpiece.”

—**Professor Steven Guanpeng Dong**, Ph.D., Chair and Director, Institute of Public Relations and Strategic Communications, Tsinghua University, Beijing; Vice President, China Public Relations Association; former Shorenstein Fellow on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

“Here’s what I’ve come to believe is the indisputable truth with regard to leadership: **If you can’t communicate effectively, you will not lead.**

“Fred has written a book that will give anyone who desires to lead people and/or organizations an invaluable tool for success. He provides an organized, rational approach to communicating with any and all stakeholders.

“Fred has taken the Marine Corps’ cornerstone publication *Warfighting* and applied the approach and the mentality to professional communication—and it works! I found this book to be a tremendous real-world guide for blueprinting and executing a world-class communication plan—and Ethos.

“This book should be kept on the desk of anyone who leads or anyone who communicates publicly. You will use it often.”

—**Lieutenant Colonel Robert Riggle**, USMCR

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# The Power of Communication

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# The Power of Communication

Skills to Build Trust, Inspire  
Loyalty, and Lead Effectively

**Helio Fred Garcia**



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*This book is dedicated to the memory of  
my first and best teacher,  
Dr. Frederick C. H. Garcia,  
Professor of Foreign Languages,  
United States Military Academy at West Point  
from 1959 to 1984  
and  
to the men and women of the  
United States Marine Corps.  
Semper Fi!*

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# Foreword

*By Lieutenant Colonel Robert Riggle, USMCR*

If I were ever in trouble, publicly, one of my first calls would be to Helio Fred Garcia. I've known Fred for 12 years. I've been a student of his, so to speak, since we first met at the Marine Corps' East Coast Commanders Public Affairs Symposium. I think Fred is an outstanding educator and communicator. "Outstanding" is the highest compliment a Marine can give...just so we're clear.

I've been a Public Affairs Officer and occasionally a Civil Affairs Officer in the Marine Corps and the Marine Corps Reserves for the past 20 years. I've always put a premium on the value and impact of communications. At times, however, it felt like I was in the minority among my fellow Marines. I would often refer to a quote from General Dwight D. Eisenhower that said, "Public opinion wins wars." Still... nothing from those around me....

In Vietnam, the United States won every major battle we fought and we still lost the war. Why? We lost public support. The same is true for many corporate and/or organizational "wars" as well. Leaders would do well to heed the warning from General Eisenhower.

I spent 9 years on active duty and the last 13 years in the reserves. If you're doing the math and it doesn't add up, it's because I spent my first 2 years in the Marines flying planes. It wasn't my calling. Despite having my pilot's license when I was an undergraduate at Kansas University, I wanted to be an actor, comedian, and writer. Really long story...short, I quit flying and became a Public Affairs Officer. I have no regrets.

During my time in service to the United States, I deployed to Liberia, Albania, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. I also worked at "ground zero" moving rubble by hand, in New York City immediately following the attacks of September 11, 2001.



While stationed in North Carolina as a young 1st Lieutenant, I attended night school and earned my Masters in Public Administration. I am also a graduate of Officer Candidates School, The Basic School, the Warfighting course, Amphibious Warfare School, and Command and Staff College. I've studied and practiced leadership most of my life. Here's what I've come to believe is the indisputable truth with regard to leadership: **If you can't communicate effectively, you will not lead.**

Fred has written a book that will give anyone who desires to lead people and/or organizations an invaluable tool for success. He provides an organized, rational approach to communicating with any and all stakeholders.

Fred has taken the Marine Corps' cornerstone publication *Warfighting* and applied the approach and the mentality to professional communications...and it works! I found this book to be a tremendous real-world guide for blueprinting and executing a world-class communications plan...and Ethos.

I currently work in the entertainment industry. My first big break was as a cast member on *Saturday Night Live*. Following *SNL*, I was a correspondent on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and I've appeared in several feature films. I've found that not much has changed with regard to my thought process when it comes to communicating publicly. However, as a comedian I have a lot more flexibility with regard to my message than I did in the Marines.

For instance...“Poop.” There, I just said it. As a comedian I can say that all day and no one bats an eye; in fact, it's often celebrated. As a Marine, I would not say, “Poop.” I would say something else.

Fred is going to ask me to remove the previous paragraph, but I won't.

This book should be kept on the desk of anyone who leads or anyone who communicates publicly. You will use it often.

I wish you all luck.

*Semper Fidelis,*

Lt. Colonel Robert A. Riggle Jr., USMCR

“Fair winds and following seas...”

# Acknowledgments

This book is the result of a convergence of circumstances and the contributions and support of a great many people from many walks of life. Thanking and saluting them may take some time, so please bear with me.

This book applies to civilian leadership the strategy and leadership principles of the United States Marine Corps. And there are many to thank both in civilian life and in uniform.

## **Logos Institute for Crisis Management & Executive Leadership**

The book reflects the client practice and intellectual work product of the Logos Institute for Crisis Management & Executive Leadership, and I am both proud of and grateful to the entire Logos team.

The actual book would not have been possible without the dedicated and persistent hard work of two brilliant and tireless Logos Institute analysts, Adam Tiouririne and Katie Garcia. They did the bulk of detailed research on case studies, fact checked, proofread, and otherwise created an infrastructure that made it possible for me to lay out the principles with meaningful and coordinated factual support. Any errors—of fact, interpretation, or judgment—are solely my own.

I also benefited greatly from contributions from Logos Institute senior fellow Oxana Trush and Logos partner Laurel Hart. I also repurposed some prior research from Logos colleagues Elizabeth Jacques and Raleigh Mayer. And I am extremely grateful for the ongoing support and help from my Logos partners Barbara Greene and Anthony Ewing.

## Marines

The idea for the book was sparked in conversations I began with Rob Riggle in 2007. We were both teaching in a Marine Corps public affairs symposium in Los Angeles, and during a break I filled him in on what I was up to. Rob at the time was straddling Marine and civilian life: simultaneously a Marine public affairs officer and a cast member on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. As I recount in the Introduction, I had just started teaching *Warfighting* in my NYU classroom, and I showed Rob how I was applying Marine Corps doctrine to civilian leadership communication. Rob was my first champion for making the work available to a wider audience, and we met several times in New York and Los Angeles to imagine how the project might come to pass. I am extremely grateful to Rob for being an early catalyst and supporter of the project, and for his generous remarks in the Foreword.

In 2009 I was again in Los Angeles to work with Marines, and I met with Col. David Lapan, then head of Marine Corps public affairs, who was about to start a new job as head of public affairs for the Secretary of Defense. I shared with him the idea for this book and he asked me to send him a formal proposal. Before he switched jobs, he got the wheels in motion. Maj. Eric Dent managed the approval process for the adaptation rights to *Warfighting*. And the Marine Corps Trademarks Licensing Office gave the green light to use the Marine Corps logo. (Note: Their approval is not an endorsement of this book or of any product or project.) I am grateful for Col. Lapan's and Maj. Dent's support for the project.

There are dozens of Marines whose support over the years made this work possible. I am certain I have inadvertently left some names out, so apologies in advance.

I was first introduced to the Marines in 1991 by an NYU student, Lt. Col. Walt Burzinski. For more than 20 years since, I have taught in the annual East Coast Commanders Public Affairs Symposium

in New York. The successive leaders of the New York Mobilization Training Unit-17 have been my primary point of contact. I am particularly grateful to Lt. Col. Stephen Brozak, who was a strong supporter and who introduced me to Marine Corps leadership beyond the New York City unit, including the Director of Public Affairs. Other MTU-17 Marines who have been supportive over the years include Maj. David C. Andersen, Capt. Brian Lippo, Maj. Jennifer Jackson, Lt. Col. Frank Gasper, Lt. Col. David Rosner, Lt. Col. Greg Kelly, Lt. Col. Dan Fernandes, Lt. Col. Joseph J. Wiffler, and Gy. Sgt. Joseph Minucci.

For several years beginning in 2004, I taught in the Brigadier General Select Orientation program in Washington. I am grateful for the help and support of Lt. Col. Francis Piccoli, Capt. Alexandra Davis, and Maj. Steven M. O'Connor.

For several years beginning in 2005, I taught guest lectures at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College. I am grateful for the help and support of Lt. Col. Paul Pond and U.S. Airforce Lt. Col. Justo Herrera.

Since 2005, I have taught in the West Coast Commanders Public Affairs Symposium, managed by the Marines' Motion Picture and Television Liaison Office in Los Angeles. I am particularly grateful for the help and support of Lt. Col. Doug Griffith, Gy. Sgt. Santiago Zapata, Maj. Joseph Marron, Lt. Col. Jason A. Johnston, Capt. Barry Edwards, S.Sgt. Ethan E. Rocke, Maj. Dan Huvane, and Col. Ray Johnson.

In 2010 I spoke in the Marine Corps Officer Candidates School. I am grateful to Lt. Col. Carlton W. Hasle for making it possible and to Capt. Andrew Sylling for coordinating it.

Since 2002, I have benefited mightily from the support of successive directors of Marine Corps Public Affairs. I am grateful to Maj. Gen. (ret.) Andrew B. Davis, Maj. Gen. (ret.) Mary Ann Krusa-Dossin, Lt. Gen. R.E. Milstead, Jr., Col. David Lapan, and Col. Bryan Salas.

## New York University

I first assigned *Warfighting* in 2006, the first time the required Communication Strategy course was held in the then-newly-launched MS in Public Relations and Corporate Communication program. I am grateful to the program's Academic Director Professor John Doorley for his encouragement and support of what at the time seemed to be a risky and unorthodox approach. John is also my co-author on the first and second editions of *Reputation Management: The Key to Successful Public Relations and Corporate Communication*, Routledge, 2007 and 2011, respectively. I thank John for all of his support for my teaching and writing over the years.

The strategy course has been taught by other professors, who themselves kept the *Warfighting* content and have encouraged me in my teaching and writing of this book. Particular thanks to professors Claude Singer and Dr. Paul Oestreicher. I am also grateful for the encouragement and support of Professor Bob Noltenmeier and academic advisor Guilaine Blaise.

I joined the NYU faculty in 1998, and for most of that time I have benefited mightily from the friendship, encouragement, and support of Renee Harris, presently the Interim Assistant Dean of the Division of Programs in Business and Chair and Academic Director, of Continuing Education Programs in Marketing, Public Relations, Leadership, and Human Capital Management.

For the past 10 years I have also had the good fortune to teach a crisis management course once per year in NYU's Stern School of Business, where I have also tested and validated many of the concepts in this book. I am particularly grateful to MaryJane Boland, Director, Executive MBA Student Services, for all of her support through the years. And to Janet Vitebsky, Senior Associate Director, and Laura Deffley, Program Coordinator, for all of their help.

The best part of teaching is seeing the change in students as they expand their horizons, enhance their skills, and grow in confidence and

capacity. It's why we teach. I want to offer a special thanks to all my NYU students, especially those who found themselves unexpectedly required to read a military doctrinal publication in a civilian strategy course. Their affirmation of the value of the book to their strategic thinking was a big part of my own confidence that the concepts in *Warfighting* deserve a bigger audience.

## **Wharton/University of Pennsylvania**

Many of the concepts of the book have been validated in guest lectures and workshops I have delivered several times a year for the past 10 years in the Wharton Communication Program, University of Pennsylvania.

I am grateful to Lisa Warshaw, Director of the Wharton Communication Program, both for her support over the years and for allowing me to quote her and to profile the Wharton Communication Program in Chapter 7. Most of my work at Wharton has been in collaboration with Senior Associate Directors Carl Maugeri and Margaret Lambires. And recently some of that work has been in collaboration with Operations Director Dr. Lawrence Quartana. Logistics for all the above have been supported by Administrative Coordinator Jarmila Force and Audio Technical Coordinator Victoria Leonard. I am grateful to the entire Wharton Communication Program.

## **Professional Colleagues**

I am grateful to Dr. Amy Zalman of the Strategic Narrative blog for permission to cite her work on the importance of effective public diplomacy. I am grateful to Barry Mike for permission to repurpose his blog posts about his formative experience as a young speechwriter from his Strategic Leadership Communication blog.

For more than 20 years James E. Lukaszewski has been a mentor, colleague, friend, and inspiration. And I have just learned that Jim,

who had taught in the Marine Corps East Coast Commanders Public Affairs Symposium since 1986, had initially recommended me to the Symposium the year I started. For many years thereafter we were both involved. I am particularly grateful to Jim for his support and confidence over the years.

My friend and colleague Peter Firestein, president of Global Strategic Communications, invited me to speak at a conference in late 2010. That resulted in my meeting his book publicist Barbara Monteiro, who in turn introduced me to my agent, Leah Nathans Spiro of Riverside Creative Management. I am grateful to Peter, both for his friendship and support and for his catalytic role in making the book possible. And to Barbara Monteiro for connecting me to Leah. And particularly to Leah, who helped me flesh out the idea for the book and who secured my publisher's support.

## **Corporate Clients**

The concepts and case studies in the book have been validated in dozens of professional development and executive education sessions at various corporate clients. Because of nondisclosure agreements, I am not able to name them, even in thanks.

One, a leading financial services firm, initially had me teach a strategy boot camp for its communication strategists in 2007, the first time I applied *Warfighting* to a non-university civilian audience. It worked, and the client has since had me teach the module to more than 400 of its staff. For a global pharmaceutical company I have provided dozens of individual, department-wide, and large group sessions over several years. And I delivered a session for all 500 U.S. employees of a European bank.

I am grateful to all my clients (and you know who you are) for their support and confidence over the years, particularly in their adventurous acceptance of somewhat unorthodox content for a corporate setting.

## **Family**

Finally, I thank the three women in my life: my spouse, Laurel Garcia Colvin, and our two daughters, Katie and Juliana. They endured too-frequent absences and always welcomed me home.

Helio Fred Garcia  
New York City  
January 2012



# About the Author

For more than 30 years **Helio Fred Garcia** has helped leaders build trust, inspire loyalty, and lead effectively. He is a coach, counselor, teacher, writer, and speaker whose clients include some of the largest and best-known companies and organizations in the world.

Fred is President of the crisis management firm Logos Consulting Group and Executive Director of the Logos Institute for Crisis Management & Executive Leadership. He is based in New York and has worked with clients in dozens of countries on six continents.

Fred has been on the New York University faculty since 1988 and has received his school's awards for teaching excellence and for outstanding service. He is an adjunct professor of management in NYU's Stern School of Business Executive MBA program and an adjunct associate professor of management and communication in NYU's Master's in PR/Corporate Communication program. Fred is also on the adjunct faculty of the Starr King School for the Ministry-Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, where he teaches a seminar on religious leadership for social change. And he is on the leadership faculty of the Center for Security Studies of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, where he teaches in the Master's in Advanced Studies in Crisis Management and Security Policy. He is a frequent guest lecturer at the Wharton School/University of Pennsylvania, the U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College and Officer Candidate School, the Brookings Institution, Tsinghua University in Beijing, and other institutions.

Fred is coauthor (with John Doorley) of *Reputation Management: The Key to Successful Public Relations and Corporate Communication* (second edition 2011; first edition 2007), by Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. His two-volume book *Crisis Communications* was published by AAAA Publications in 1999. He blogs at [www.logosinstitute.net/blog](http://www.logosinstitute.net/blog); he tweets at [twitter.com/garciahf](https://twitter.com/garciahf).

## Introduction: Leadership, Discipline, and Effective Communication

Tony Hayward faced the press on a Venice, Louisiana, dock. It was May 30, 2010, and the BP chief executive officer had been living on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico for the past month. On April 20, the Deepwater Horizon oil rig had exploded, killing 11, injuring dozens, and beginning a gusher that in 100 days pumped five million barrels of crude oil into the Gulf waters. The Deepwater Horizon disaster had been the dominant story in the news media—it was All-BP-All-the-Time.

Hayward, clearly beleaguered and sleep-deprived, seemed frustrated with suggestions by the media and others that BP—formerly known as British Petroleum—and its leadership weren't doing enough to stop the flow of oil and protect the Gulf ecosystem. He spoke in front of heavy equipment being readied to be deployed for the cleanup. In a tone of frustration, Hayward tried to show that he cared. He attempted an apology, tried to show that he took the situation seriously: “We’re sorry. We’re sorry for the massive disruption it’s caused their lives. And you know we’re—there’s no one who wants this thing over more than I do. You know, I’d like my life back.”<sup>1</sup>

It didn't work. Hayward's statement had the opposite effect. Instead of showing he cared and that he took Gulf residents' plight seriously, the “I'd like my life back” quote sounded like self-pity. Critics pounced. There were 11 rig workers who would never get their lives back; dozens of injured whose lives would never be the same; thousands on the coast whose lives and livelihoods were disrupted. They wanted their lives back, too.

“I’d like my life back” became a defining moment. It crystallized for the media and for politicians the apparent callowness of BP’s leadership. It wasn’t the first of Hayward’s verbal blunders. The *New York Times* had previously quoted him from an internal meeting: “What the hell did we do to deserve this?”<sup>2</sup> Nor was it the last. But “I’d like my life back” defined Hayward, BP, and the Gulf recovery. The takeaway: Hayward cares only about himself.

“I’d like my life back” also became self-fulfilling. It began Hayward’s inexorable decline. Six weeks after the quote he was removed as CEO and given a make-work position; he left the company several months later. In the battle for public opinion—for trust, support, the benefit of the doubt—Hayward lost. It was a failure of leadership on a massive scale. And it began with a failure of communication. And that failure, in turn, was a failure of discipline.

Hayward’s blunder is not unique to him. It should be a wake-up call to CEOs and other leaders, to all whose leadership responsibilities require inspiring trust and confidence verbally. Communication has power. But as with any form of power, it needs to be harnessed effectively or it can all too often backfire.

This book applies the Marine Corps’ strategy doctrine, as embodied in its *Warfighting* manual, to leadership communication. It seeks to help those who engage audiences for a living—whether in positions of leadership or in communication support functions—to do so at a high level of craft.

## Why *Warfighting*?

“The battle for public opinion” is a metaphor. So is “I’d like my life back.” Metaphors matter. Metaphors trigger worldviews and set expectations. As the Berkeley cognitive linguist George Lakoff notes, we tend to live our lives in metaphor, but are generally unaware of the metaphors we live by (see Chapter 8, “Content: Word Choice, Framing, and Meaning,” for more).<sup>3</sup>

Take, for example, the word “strategy.” We may think we know what it means. But it’s actually a metaphor. In ancient Greek, the word *strategos* meant a general or the leader of an army. That word

derived from two other Greek words: *stratos*, or army, and *agein*, to lead. So *stratos* (army) + *agein* (to lead) = *strategos* (one who leads an army). Note that *stratos*, army, was itself a metaphor. The literal meaning of the word is “organized formation,” as in the layers of rock on a cliff wall.

For the longest time, “strategy” or its equivalents in other languages meant only the art of leading an armed force. But in modern times it has become a metaphor for any goal-oriented activity. Business strategy is a metaphor for using the goal-oriented approach of leading an army to lead a company.

War and communication are not the same thing. But many of the goal-oriented principles of leading an effective armed force can be applied to the leadership discipline of public communication.

For example, the 19th-century Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz defined war as, “an act of will directed toward a living entity that reacts.”<sup>4</sup> This simple observation is quite profound. War, at its essence, isn’t about fighting or killing, at least not for their own sake. Rather, it’s about an outcome. A reaction. A change.

So is effective communication. I have long taken the metaphor Clausewitz provides, and have translated it this way:

**Communication is an act of will  
directed toward a living entity that reacts.**

Let’s parse this definition:

**Communication is an act of will...**

Effective communication is intentional. It is goal-oriented. It is strategic. Unlike ineffective communication, effective communication isn’t impulsive or top-of-mind. It isn’t self-indulgent. And communication isn’t just about what one says. It’s about anything one does or is observed doing. It’s about any engagement with a stakeholder, including silence, inaction, and action.

**...directed toward a living entity...**

Stakeholders aren’t passive vessels that simply absorb messages. Rather, they are living, breathing human beings and groups of human beings. They have their own opinions, ideas, hopes, dreams, fears, prejudices, attention spans, and appetites for listening. Most important, it

is a mistake to assume that audiences think and behave just as we do. Most don't. Understanding an audience and its preconceptions, and the barriers that might prevent an audience from accepting what one is saying, is a key part of effective communication.

**...that reacts.**

This is the element most lost on many leaders. The only reason to engage an audience is to change something, to provoke a reaction. Effective communication provokes the desired reaction; ineffective communication doesn't. Ineffective communication isn't noticed, or it confuses, or it causes a different reaction than the one desired. Tony Hayward certainly got his life back, but not in the manner he had hoped.

And whatever the words one uses, we can count on audiences to compare the words to the speaker's own actions as well as to prior words. The words set expectations; the actions fulfill or betray those expectations. Trust arises when expectations are met and is lost when they are not.

So effective communication is hard. It requires discipline. It requires understanding the desired reaction among the groups to which one communicates, which in turn requires knowing all one can about that group. And then it requires saying and doing all that is necessary—and only what is necessary—to provoke that desired reaction. And it also requires understanding the absolutely predictable consequences—both intended and unintended—of words, silence, inaction, and action.

## **About the Marines**

The United States Marine Corps is the nation's mobility force in readiness. The tip of the spear. It's ready to deploy anywhere, any time, on any mission.

The Marine Corps is also a leadership factory. It instills qualities of initiative, teamwork, and dedication to mission. It pushes accountability down to the bottom of the chain of command, even as it holds leaders at the very top of the chain accountable for their subordinates' decisions. Marines follow orders, but not blindly. Commander's intent

is an essential part of an order. Understanding a commander's intent is the responsibility of each Marine. And making that intent clear is the responsibility of each commander, of whatever rank.

And at whatever rank, every Marine is a rifleman. Regardless of any Marine's current function, he or she is accomplished in the use of arms. Unlike in other armed services, the expectation is that every Marine, regardless of occupation (lawyer, pilot, public affairs officer, or auto mechanic) is proficient in infantry tactics and the effective use of firearms.

Every Marine is also a spokesman. I was present when the senior Marine public affairs officer—a brigadier general—described to the students of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College the Corps' expectation of any Marine in the presence of the news media: "Make sure each of your Marines knows this: If you're deployed to a war zone and there's a reporter around, we expect you to do three things:

- Engage. Speak with the reporter.
- Tell the truth. Don't lie, but also don't reveal confidential, classified, or sensitive operational information.
- Stay in your lane. If you drive a tank, talk about your tank. If you fly a plane, talk about your plane. Don't talk about anything that isn't your direct responsibility."

This is a courageous policy, and one most employers probably would not adopt. Most organizations try to centralize press communication. But making each Marine a spokesperson is typical of the Marines. They know that the Marines' reputation can be won or lost through the actions of any single Marine. Not just an officer, but a private right out of Parris Island boot camp. So they hold each Marine accountable. But with accountability comes authority.

## **Communication Is a Leadership Discipline**

Whatever else leadership may be, it is experienced publicly. While it may emanate from within, it is a public phenomenon. A leader is judged based on three fundamental public leadership attributes:

- The leader's bearing: how the leader carries himself or herself
- The words the leader uses to engage others
- The manner in which the leader engages others

These are elements of communication. And they apply well beyond the armed services.

And as a leadership discipline, communication benefits from the structures, concepts, and principles of effective leadership in other fields.

The Marines continue to enjoy a reputation as the nation's elite fighting force. It is no surprise to me that they live up to their slogan: The Few. The Proud. They make reputation a priority, both in what they do and in what they say.

The elements that make a good Marine also make a good communicator.

## How This Book Came About

I have had the good fortune to provide communication workshops and related services to Marines continuously since 1991, just after the first Gulf War ended. I had published an article that summer in *Public Relations Quarterly* noting that the U.S. military had embraced the principles of Carl von Clausewitz both in its execution of the Gulf War and in its public affairs operations to support the war. Clausewitz, the 19th-century Prussian general, is the author of *On War*, one of the most influential books of Western civilization and the basis of most modern military and business strategy. In my article, I noted that any serious student of strategy or communication should be familiar with the principles of Clausewitz. His most famous principle is that **war is merely the continuation of policy by other means: The goal of the war is not to fight, but to accomplish a political objective.**<sup>5</sup> I argued that professional communicators could learn from him. I translated Clausewitz's principle as follows: **Communication is merely the continuation of business by other means. The goal of communication is not to communicate, but to accomplish some tangible business goal.**

When the *Public Relations Quarterly* article came out, I was in my fourth year teaching public relations strategy and related topics at New York University, and Clausewitz was a big part of my course. Unbeknownst to me, one of my students was a Marine, just back from Iraq, and about to switch jobs: from helicopter pilot to public affairs officer. He had taken my course to get a head start. He asked if he could show my article to his commanding officer. At the same time, my friend Jim Lukaszewski had a scheduling conflict and was unable to teach his usual session at the Marines' annual East Coast Commanders Public Affairs Symposium, an annual weeklong introduction to public affairs for all Marines east of the Mississippi who are starting new commands. He recommended me to the commanding officer of the unit that managed the Symposium, who recognized my name from the article. I have taught at that Symposium every year since. For many of those years I taught on a Tuesday and Jim taught on a Thursday. I have also taught at every West Coast Commanders Public Affairs Symposium since 2006. From 2004 to 2009, I taught in the Brigadier General Select Orientation Course in Washington, and for several years I conducted workshops in the Command and Staff College and Officer Candidate School in Quantico, Virginia.

In 2006, I was teaching in Quantico and visited the Marine Corps bookstore. There I found a slim volume called *Warfighting: U.S. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication No. 1*. It's required reading for every Marine. It lays out an approach to strategy and leadership that informs what all Marines do. Think of it as the Marine Corps Bible. While it isn't as famous as Clausewitz, it has several advantages: It is contemporary, it is assigned reading for every Marine, and it is much easier to read.

Flying home on the shuttle, I couldn't put the book down. Just as I had demonstrated in my article for *Public Relations Quarterly* that changing several words in Clausewitz's *On War* provided a framework for understanding communication, changing just a few words in *Warfighting* led to a much richer and deeper understanding of effective public communication, both for leaders and for those who advise them.

Then I had an idea. I was about to teach a new course on communication strategy in the MS in Public Relations and Corporate Communication program at New York University. I had already decided



to assign *Clausewitz on Strategy: Inspiration and Insight from a Master Strategist*. The authors, from the Strategy Institute of the Boston Consulting Group, extract the essence of *On War* and apply it to contemporary business strategy.

I decided to supplement that reading with *Warfighting*, requiring students to read it before the first class. When I sent the syllabus to the department, it raised a few eyebrows. But to his credit, the academic director gave me the green light, and I posted the syllabus online.

In the first class, before discussing the book, I polled the students:

- How many were confused when they saw that the first book in a communication strategy course was a Marine Corps book called *Warfighting*? Nearly every hand went up.
- How many were concerned? Most hands stayed up.
- How many were angry? About a third of the hands stayed up.
- How many are still angry after reading the book? All hands came down.

I found the most counterculture-seeming student who had just put her hand down, and asked, “Why were you angry when you saw the syllabus?” She looked me in the eye and said, “I thought you were going to feed us propaganda, try to get us to like the military, to support the war in Iraq.” And now? She smiled, and said, “I love this book. I have given copies to my parents and friends. I want to know why we don’t know more about this book.”

I’ve used *Warfighting* continuously ever since. And I’ve used it beyond my NYU classroom. I’ve used it in strategy boot camps for the public affairs department of a major insurance company, with the communication staff of a large pharmaceutical company, and even with clergy and not-for-profit executives, sometimes to their initial discomfort. I’ve urged individual CEOs, CFOs, and other corporate leaders to read it to help them both think strategically and communicate effectively.

In all civilian contexts, my students and clients have enthusiastically embraced *Warfighting*, and the comments have tended to cluster into these three categories:

1. This is one of the single-most-useful insights into how to be strategic in communication that I've ever read.
2. I never knew the Marines were so thoughtful.
3. The lessons of *Warfighting* go well beyond fighting wars or communicating. The book is about how to think strategically. It deserves a broader audience.

I agree. I believe that *Warfighting* is one of the undiscovered gems in strategic thinking, with significant civilian application. This book attempts to do for *Warfighting* what *Clausewitz on Strategy* does for *On War*: extract the essence of a military manual and apply those essential lessons to the nonmilitary, professional practice of public communication as a leadership discipline.

## About This Book

This book does three things:

1. It translates core *Warfighting* principles into guidelines for effective leadership communication. These provide an important conceptual framework, and the individual principles serve as guideposts along the journey we will take. But they're merely the starting point.
2. It applies best practices in leadership communication drawn from my 33 years of advising and coaching leaders, and from my 24 years of teaching management and communication in graduate programs in a number of universities. This is the meat of the book—the big takeaway. It could easily exist without the *Warfighting* principles, but I have found in my teaching and coaching that the combination is more powerful than either standing alone.
3. It makes extensive use of case studies and examples, of both effective and ineffective communication by leaders in high-stakes situations.

All three of these strands run through the entire book. Each chapter emphasizes the leadership disciplines particular to that chapter's topic, and closes with two recap sections: The first is the gathering

of all the *Warfighting* principles discussed in that chapter. The second is Lessons for Leaders and Communicators, the chapter's key takeaways.

Organizationally, the book is divided into three parts, focused on principles, strategy, and skills.

**Part I: “Leadership and Communication: Connecting with Audiences.”** This takes up about half the book, and is divided into five chapters. The entire part focuses on the foundational principles of effective communication, all of which are grounded in connecting with and influencing audiences.

Chapter 1, “Words Matter,” establishes the need to take language seriously as a leadership discipline. It covers the need to adapt language as circumstances change and as audiences, adversaries, and critics react to what a leader is saying and doing. It also focuses on the need to listen and to engage for a purpose: to change the way people think and feel, and what they know and do.

Chapter 2, “Taking Audiences Seriously,” is a deep dive into understanding audiences. The leadership discipline here is to think of audiences as living, breathing entities with their own ideas, goals, plans, and desires even to be in relationship with the leader. The key is to recognize that audiences don't think as leaders do, care about what leaders care about, or understand what leaders understand. If we are to move people, we need to meet them where they are, but that means knowing where they are and knowing how to move them.

Chapter 3, “Words Aren't Enough,” focuses on how tempting it can be to say all the right things in high-stakes situations. But saying the right thing without delivering on the expectations that communication sets is a recipe for disaster: for loss of trust, loyalty, confidence, and ultimately of competitive position. Trust arises when expectations are met, and the leadership discipline is to align what a leader says with what the leader does.

Chapter 4, “Speed, Focus, and the First Mover Advantage,” covers shaping the communication agenda by being the first to define one's situation, motives, and actions. The leadership discipline is to say and do what is necessary to move audiences before critics, adversaries, the media, or social media have a chance to, and then to ensure

that all communications, from all sources, are consistent and mutually reinforcing.

Chapter 5, “Initiative, Maneuver, and Disproportionality,” focuses on ways to control the communication agenda, and on outsized risk and reward: how relatively minor changes or events can have a significant effect on the outcome. The leadership discipline is to be both disciplined and nimble, to avoid making small mistakes that cause great harm, and to engage stakeholders in such a timely and effective way that we get a higher return on our communication investment than we otherwise would.

**Part II: “Strategy and Communication: Planning and Execution.”** This section has only one chapter, but it’s a long one. This part focuses on the need to be intentional, coordinated, and sequenced in planning and implementing communication, especially in high-stakes situations.

Chapter 6, “Goals, Strategies, and Tactics: Preparing and Planning,” focuses on the need to think carefully before communicating. It shows how easy it is for leaders to get tied up in the tactics of saying things, rather than being thoughtful about how to win hearts and minds. It also notes that preparing to communicate is often a leading indicator that there are gaps in a leader’s thinking. If a leader isn’t attentive to those gaps, you can be sure that stakeholders, critics, and adversaries will be. The leadership discipline is to have a clear intent and to organize thinking, decision making, communication planning, and communication implementation in the service of that intent.

**Part III: “Building Skills: Getting Good at Communicating Well.”** This section focuses on the core skills that leaders need to become effective communicators. While not intended as a comprehensive how-to, it focuses on three areas that I have found leaders of all stripes and of all levels of ability need to master: how they carry themselves; how they manage meaning; and how the human brain works. Leaders need mastery of all three to be able to move people and to avoid self-inflicted harm.

Chapter 7, “Performance: The Physicality of Audience Engagement,” begins by establishing the leadership discipline of taking seriously the need for continuous honing of communication skills. Even leaders who are good communicators need periodic tuneups or they

will be less effective than they could be. The chapter then covers the basic interpersonal and group presentation skills that convey confidence and that engage audiences well.

Chapter 8, “Content: Word Choice, Framing, and Meaning,” covers how leaders can shape the frame of reference so that audiences understand what the leader wants them to. The leadership discipline is to take seriously the way that words trigger worldviews, and to understand how framing needs to precede facts. All too often, leaders believe that facts and data are convincing. The chapter explores how facts are convincing only if they make sense within a frame of reference. And there’s a first mover advantage: Whoever frames the topic first tends to win.

Chapter 9, “Audiences: Attention, Retention, and How Hearts and Minds Work,” is a deep dive into the human brain and what it means for leaders. The leadership discipline is to appreciate that audiences are human and that human nature—literally the way the human brain works—determines what audiences are capable of. The chapter is an overview of current understanding from the fields of neurophysiology, cognitive psychology, and evolutionary biology to provide insights on how leaders can actually connect with audiences and win hearts and minds.

The book closes with two summaries:

Chapter 10, “Putting It All Together: Becoming a Habitually Strategic Communicator,” harvests best practices from the previous chapters and organizes them into Nine Principles of Effective Leadership Communication. These can provide a quick reference point for monitoring your own communication leadership skills.

The appendix gathers all the *Warfighting* Principles embedded in the chapters and provides them in a single place, for easy reference.

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