How to be better at communication than Sean Spicer

THIS POST HAS BEEN UPDATED.

What is good communication? In essence, it's getting your point across to the people who need to hear it. It's having those people (your audience) understand what you are saying, and be able to act on that information if necessary. Also, the information you pass on must be credible. Good communication, therefore, is built on clarity and trust.

If anything, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer has shown us that some people are better communicators than others. Spicer is not example of how to do communications well, but rather, of what not to do. Thankfully, we can draw lessons from his ineptitude. Following are five points to being a better communicator.

Understand your subject matter very well

If you don't understand something yourself, you have zero chance of explaining it (well) to someone else. Yes, this means you have to do some studying (or cramming). It means you have to ask people who know more about the subject to explain it to you. It may even mean looking at charts and graphs.

If you don't know what you are talking about, someone will be quick to point it out to you. Recently, this happened to Sean Spicer. During a press conference last week, Spicer showcased his ignorance about Hitler and the Holocaust by saying that Hitler didn't use chemical weapons (he did), and then when questioned, corrected himself by saying Hitler only used gas at "holocaust centers" but not against his own people (they are called concentration camps and many Germans were killed

there). When his errors were pointed out, Spicer had to apologize often and profusely. The Anti-Defamation League even sent him a letter offering to conduct a private Holocaust education training for him and his staff. I don't know if Spicer took the ADL up on its offer, but I think he would greatly benefit from it and/or a visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

Use only words that you completely understand and can define

Spicer regularly uses the wrong words. He recently said something couldn't be *quantified*, when he meant that it couldn't be *qualified*. In his defense, this is a common mistake, especially in speaking. When you write, you have a bit more time to figure out the words you are using. The bottom line is this: If you *think* you know what a word means, but you can't define it, don't use it. Also, remember that using big words, especially incorrectly, will make you appear to be trying too hard, and being ignorant too boot.

Check your facts and statistics

If you are going to use any numbers or other facts that can be easily looked up, make sure that they are accurate and correct. Sean Spicer famously trotted out some made up statistics about Trump's inauguration crowds. Those things can be verified, and if you are using incorrect numbers, you are threatening your own credibility.

Don't exaggerate

With a boss who is fond of hyperbole, Spicer also tends to exaggerate. Everything is the best or the worst, terrible or fantastic. As any communicator knows, exaggeration also threatens credibility.

Be likeable

Sean Spicer is a very combative person. This may have served

him well when he was the spokesperson for the party out of power, but it is making him unlikeable. By constantly fighting with the White House press corps, or by belittling their questions, or by refusing to answer questions, or by mocking people, Spicer is ensuring that his attitude becomes the story.

It’s really important.

Trustworthy and reliable communications have become even more important and necessary in this world of fake news, where bots and fringe political groups are working hard to muck up the information that is available. Taking the time to study your subject and work on your credibility will go a long way to making you a better communicator than our current White House press secretary.

Is there anything you would add to the five points I have listed above? Please share in the comments.

UPDATE:

I am not the only one who thinks Spicer is bad at what he does. Today, New York Magazine had this post: By Being Bad at His Job, Sean Spicer Nearly Causes Market Panic. Because Spicer does not bother to learn his subject well, he says inaccurate things, and in his role, his statements have consequences.