

You need a reality check

This morning, I was reading an personal advice column in the Washington Post. It was about a woman whose mother-in-law is constantly bad mouthing her and who is trying to protect her son from the MIL's barbs. The columnist's advice was to keep the MIL away from her impressionable son. But a reader offered a different perspective, saying that kids can see through those things and they can develop good relationships with grandparents in spite of this negativity. I don't know who is right, but it shows the need to look at something from a different perspective or even various viewpoints. In other words, the woman seeking advice needed a reality check.

What is a reality check?

A reality check often provides a perspective we hadn't considered before or that we have discounted. It's why we often seek advice when making big decisions.

Why do you need a reality check?

If you are facing any sort of challenge—marketing, communications, interpersonal—you need a reality check. When you don't get advice or outside perspective, you will make decisions that are not always sound. This is why there's value to doing research and holding focus groups before you launch a product. It's the value of hiring consultants to provide non-organizational viewpoints when you are trying to find a solution.

It's like when you don't get someone to proofread your work and it goes out with a typo or two. (As an aside, last month I saw a big typo in a poster for a large consulting firm's advertising campaign. It was classic...I wish I had a picture). You are so involved in something you no longer have a clear-eyed view of it. You don't see the shortcomings or the mistakes or the errors in judgement.



Pic by Fauxels from Pexels.com

It's the value of professional advice and an outside perspective

In communications, the lack of a reality check often results in you missing the target or having a miscommunication. If you think something is clear because you understand it, it could be that somebody else does not get it. Perhaps you are using jargon that only people in your field use. Perhaps you are using language that is above the grade level of your audience. For example, a few years ago, I wrote some marketing copy for a hotel booking software company. I wrote that using this software would give hotel operators exponential growth. The client hated it! He said that most people won't understand what exponential means. I am not 100% sure he was right, but at the same time, he gave me a reality check about the words I was choosing to use.

Reality checks help avoid mistakes

Reality checks in the form of outside counsel can often save you from making costly mistakes. You get a reality check whenever you hire a professional to do something for you. It

could be market research, or graphic design, or UX design, or copy editing. Let someone who has experience and an outside perspective help you.

Do you need a reality check?

Should you be handling your own communications?

When businesses are very small they tend to not be able to afford outside help. Sometimes, the business in question works in the communications space (writing, editing, advertising, etc.) and thinks it can handle it.

Chances are good that you should NOT be handling your own communications, unless you can answer the following three questions:

1) Do you know what you offer, and can you say it in one sentence? Recently, I was at a business meeting and someone was attempting to describe her business. She gave us many sentences but still it did not make sense. Someone had to ask her to clarify, and she still wasn't able to do it.

2) What are the top three benefits of working with you? Unless you have been asking your customers all along, chances are good that you may not be sure what your customers really appreciate about your business.

3) Are you able to speak(and write) in plain English? Many firms, especially those in the technology sector, speak in jargonese. Most people, including your customers, do not understand jargon, or convoluted sentences. Being clear and

making yourself understood is not so simple!

Hiring outside help can be invaluable in helping you to refine your message, clarify your thoughts and communicate them concisely.