Is it a communications or a leadership problem?

No doubt you have heard about Rick Perry's "oops" moment during the GOP debate on Wednesday night. The 53 second piece, where Perry forgets the third federal agency he would cut if elected president, has been replayed to death. Now, Perry is in full salvaging-his-election-chances mode, as Politico reports in "GOP debate gaffe rocks Rick Perry rescue mission."

In my opinion, this is not a communications problem. It is a leadership problem. Any human being can be forgiven for blanking out or misspeaking. We make mistakes and we correct them. But Rick Perry is not trying to fix one communications misstep. He is trying to resucitate his campaign. I think most people would be willing to overlook Perry's brain freeze moment (although the media certainly wasn't going to let go of a golden opportunity to make fun of him). However, most people see through Perry's swagger and sense that there is not much substance there. It was not that he forgot that he wanted to cut the Department of Energy, but that he thinks that cutting cabinet positions is the way to fix this country. If we focus on what he did say—that he wants to cut the Department of Education—we can see that he doesn't have a communications problem. His message is that getting rid of government will solve the USA's problems.

Perry, like Joe Paterno of Penn State, is someone dealing with a leadership problem. If both these men were true leaders, they would take responsibility for their mistakes and then make a hard decision to exit the national stage. In Perry's case, he should realize that he is not yet cut out for national office, and that his lack of debating ability speaks volumes about his preparedness to deal with off-the-cuff moments that will inevitably crop up in a US president's daily

life.

In Paterno’s case, the fact that Paterno KNEW about Sandusky being involved in child molestation and still did not report it, speaks to a failure of leadership. When Sandusky was indicted, and it became apparent that Paterno was aware of what had happened, Paterno should have offered to step down immediately (take responsibility). Instead, he offered to resign at the END of football season. Penn State’s trustees fired him instead. Then Penn State burst into chaos, and Paterno said nothing. He could have been a true leader and coach and told the students that what the trustees did was the right thing, and that rioting was not what they should be doing.

Both men may have made communications mistakes, but that was not the problem. In fact, good communications would have only come after they both exercised LEADERSHIP. **Great communicators don’t always make great leaders, but certainly, great leaders must be great communicators.**