

THE VALUE OF STRONG
COMMUNICATION PRACTICES
Three factors determine success

ARE BLOGS PASSÉ?
Consider their viability

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We Build Relationships

Communications

Proper outreach
is critical to drive
member engagement
and retention





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1335 Dublin Rd., Ste. 224A,
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PHONE 614-824-4054
FAX 614-824-4117
WEBSITE www.osae.org
EMAIL osae@osae.org

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When was the last time a colleague said something that made your jaw drop?

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY WITH ASSOCIATION COLLEAGUES WHO DENY REALITY

▼
DR. GLEB TSIPURSKY

As a speaker, consultant and coach in emotional and social intelligence, I am often asked about how to handle colleagues who deny obvious reality.

The worst-case scenario is when your chief executive is the one in denial. A four-year study by LeadershipIQ.com, which provides online leadership seminars, interviewed 1,087 board members from 286 companies and nonprofits that forced out their chief executive officers. It found that 23 percent of these leaders got fired for denying reality, meaning refusing to recognize negative facts about the organization's performance.

Other research shows that professionals at all levels can suffer from truth denialism. This thinking error is so common that scholars gave it its own name: the ostrich effect.

Our intuition is to confront colleagues suffering from the ostrich effect with the facts. But research suggests that's usually the wrong thing to do. That's because when someone believes something we know to be false, some kind of emotional block is probably at play.

For example, in an association for which I spoke and consulted, the CFO refused to acknowledge that an accountant she hired was a bad fit, despite everyone else in the department telling me that the employee was holding back the team. Facing the facts would cause the CFO to feel bad, and research shows that we often prefer to stick our heads into the sand rather than acknowledge our fault because of our reluctance to experience negative emotions.

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Rather than offering facts, your goal should be to show emotional and social intelligence and try to figure out what are the emotions that block your colleague from seeing reality clearly. Then, use curiosity and subtle questioning to figure out their goals around the issue.

Once you understand your colleague's goals and values, try to show you share them and build up rapport with your colleague around the issue. Echo any concerns they share to cultivate a positive emotional connection.

For instance, with the CFO, I had a conversation about how she saw her current and potential future employees playing a role in the long-term future. I echoed her anxiety about the association's financial performance and concerns about getting funding for future hires, which gave me an additional clue into why she might be protecting the incompetent employee.

After placing yourself on the same side, building up rapport and establishing an emotional connection, move on to the problem at hand: their emotional block.

The key here is to provide *information*, without arousing a defensive or aggressive response, showing how their current truth denialism undermines their own goals in the long term. It can help to cite a prominent example of a business leader accepting difficult facts to move forward, such as how former Ford CEO Alan Mulally helped save the company through repeated course corrections.

With the CFO, I painted for her a picture of a future where valuable employees, upset about the accountant she hired, left the organization. For a more positive perspective, I also highlighted how she would be perceived as a strong leader for admitting her mistake.

She eventually agreed that the employee needed to go, and I emphasized the bravery and difficulty of her decision. Why? Research shows that offering positive *reinforcement*, without condescension, can be effective with colleagues and bosses alike.

The method can be summarized under the acronym EGRIP: Emotions, Goals, Rapport, Information, Reinforcement. Using this technique will make it much easier for you to address truth denialism among your association colleagues. ▼

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Known as the Disaster Avoidance Expert, Dr. Gleb Tsipursky has more than 20 years of experience empowering professionals and organizations to address potential threats, maximize unexpected opportunities and resolve persistent personnel problems. The author of the national bestseller on avoiding disasters, *The Truth Seeker's Handbook: A Science-Based Guide*, he also published more than 400 articles and been featured in more than 350 interviews, including in *Fast Company*, *CBS News*, *Time*, *Scientific American*, *Psychology Today*, *The Conversation*, *Business Insider*, *Government Executive*, *Inc. Magazine* and many others. Tsipursky's expertise comes from more than 20 years of consulting, coaching and speaking for businesses and nonprofits. He gets top marks from audiences for his highly facilitative and interactive speaking style and the way he thoroughly customizes speeches for diverse audiences, while meeting planners describe Tsipursky as "a snap to work with." His website is GlebTsipursky.com, and his email is gleb@intentionalinsights.org.