

DR. MICHAEL GERHARZ

# ***SUPER FOCUSED*** **COMMUNICATION**

How great communicators use  
relentless focus to make a bigger impact

MICHAELGERHARZ.COM

# 1. What we want to be known for

---

Everything we do in communication starts with what we want to be known for. The world is not going to remember much about us. Which is why we need to make sure that it remembers the right things. The things that we truly stand for and that we are proud to be associated with so that it fuels our motivation and inspires our actions.

This is not to be confused with a fancy sounding marketing slogan. Fancy is great. But it's not the point – let alone the starting point.

The starting point is that people need to be able to find an anchor in our message.

To achieve that, we don't need fanciness but clarity: Clarity about what we want to be known for and why that would matter to our audience.

Only then can we intentionally craft messages towards that goal.

**What do *you* want to be known for?**

---

Write down your answer

## 2. Focusing hurts

---

I get it: Focusing hurts. It means letting go of details. Details that we care about. Details that we feel we can't possibly leave out. Details that are crucial to the conclusion that our product is superior to other offerings.

There's no doubt that the reason you are extraordinary at what you do is because you care. You sweat the details. You connect the dots.

But when it comes to communicating your product, there's a crucial difference as sweating the details means something completely different.

It means condensing the details into a clear and concise message that's *the perfect summary of your details*. A message that represents the details but is not just an enumeration of all the facts. Ideally, it's a message that's distinct from any other message because it's only these details that lead to this message.

And so, focusing empowers.

**Which details are relevant to you but not to your audience?**

### 3. You can't delegate focus

---

Audiences are ruthless. When, after a talk, someone asks an audience member: "What was the talk about?" they are going to answer with a short reply. In their own words. Every time.

In particular, there's no way an audience member will reply with a 30 minute verbatim copy of what we said. We've had our chance during the talk. But once we're finished, the audience is in control. Whatever they pass along, we must live with it.

In a way, that's good news as it forces us to focus. Because if we don't focus, our audience will happily do it for us. It's much better to stay in control and focus our story on a concise message that people can and will pass along. Because only when we do, can we craft our talk such that that's going to work.

#### **What's truly essential for your communication?**

---

Strip away anything that's non-essential and write down what your audience absolutely needs to understand

---

---

---

## 4. How would they say it?

---

Now that you've got clarity about what you want to be known for and what's most important to understand about that. How would your audience say it?

Getting clarity about the pass along phrase forces you to look from their perspective. But be aware that it's always short and it's always in their language.

There's no way that your audience is going to pass along a 30 min talk or a 40 slide PowerPoint deck.

It's more likely that it's one or two sentences.

**What's your pass along phrase?**

---

Hint: If it doesn't fit, it's probably too long.

---

## 5. When everything's important ...

---

When you want to explain something to your audience, keep in mind that when everything's important, nothing's important.

If you don't focus, you're essentially delegating that task to your audience. The bad news is that they will. They will pick one message, maybe two. Certainly not 23. (And if things go really bad, they will just leave without any clear takeaway.)

The problem: You might not like their choice.

The only chance to cut through the noise and get something (read: the right thing) to stick in their minds is to find the courage to focus on what's truly essential.

Most communication is just an enumeration of ideas. Great communication inevitably leads to a central focus. Everything that you say guides your audience towards that focus, step by step.

**Structure your arguments so that they inevitably lead to the pass along phrase.**

## 6. Spreading ideas

---

The easier you make it for your audience to speak about your idea, the more likely your idea will spread, a clever name, a great anecdote, a powerful visualisation etc. Your audience won't do that for you.

For example, a name is a shortcut that stands for the 15 minutes it took you to describe your idea. It's just hard to talk about the idea that works this way and that way and that requires this and that prerequisite so that under the assumption of X we get Y and so on and so forth ...

The idea is much easier to pass along when it has a name. People are much more likely to tell someone of the "Raging Barbie" project than they are to go through the hassle of explaining them 20 minutes of details behind the project.

The greatest names, of course, are those that tell the story of your idea in one or two words.

**Can you make it easier to speak about your idea?**

## 7. Embrace your weaknesses

---

Here's a great example from Wise, an international money transfer service, which once published this customer experience on their site (emphasis mine):

*"Great exchange rates, much better than the competition. **The transfer could be a bit faster.** For me it took five business days to get my funds."*

By surfacing their weak spot, they reinforce their strong spot. They will compromise everything else for being the cheapest and they have no problem telling you so.

Acknowledging your weaknesses, even embracing them, allows you to let your strengths shine. When you can't have it all, then setting a priority, doing it consciously, and being upfront about it, is – in my experience – a much healthier approach than trying to hide your weaknesses.

**What's your biggest weakness?**

## 8. Focus simplifies decision making

---

While most companies have a mission statement, few companies are actually *on* that mission – simply because most team members can't even repeat that mission without reading it from the posters.

Most mission statements are made to sound good, to cover all grounds, or to contain something for everyone. But by being vague, abstract and everything to everyone, they turn out to be easily forgotten and not at all useful for actually making decisions.

The other day, I saw a clever slogan that just did this. It said "Quick logistics". It's short. It doesn't sound fancy. Some might even argue, it's boring.

But it does one thing that all those elaborate 10 bullet point, fancy sounding mission statements don't achieve. It provides focus and direction, and it makes everyday decisions easy. Whenever a team member is faced with a decision, she can simply ask: Does this help to make delivery quicker? If yes, do it. If not, don't.

## 9. The ideal number of priorities is one

---

Having more than one priority is one of the reasons why decision making in some companies feels so difficult.

Imagine we are SuperSafe Corp and we build safes. We want to build the safest, most affordable safes. Now what does that mean when faced with a decision among the two attributes? E.g. when faced with the decision between two different materials, one of which is safer but more expensive, what do we do? Do we make it safer or more affordable?

Making both attributes a priority turns every decision like this into a struggle.

If, however, our priority was to make “the safest safe under 10.000\$”, then the decision basically makes itself: If it fits in the budget, then go for the safer material, else don't. We have turned one priority into a constraint.

When we have two priorities at the same time it means that we want two different things at the same time. This can easily lead us into a conflict. Wanting to do one thing but knowing that there's a border you can't or won't cross, is different.

## **9. ... continued.**

---

**A. List your priorities**


**B. Now take a red pen and circle the one item on the list that is more important than everything else.**

## 10. Stick with it

---

The pink bunny is Duracell's mascot for as long as I can remember. The bunny keeps drumming when other batteries have long given up. That you remember this bunny so well, is no coincidence. It's enabled by a conscious decision by Duracell that's based on their brand's promise.

It's even in their name: durable cell. Duracell has consciously decided on their core value: durability. They have framed a promise that matches perfectly to that value. They have looked for a way to make us visualise that promise. And then they have stuck with it.

Only one message, one promise, one visualisation. Each and every public communication you ever saw from Duracell was in some form or the other related to durability, most of them accompanied by the pink bunny.

**So, what do you stand for? Is it in your name? Do you have a simple promise? One that is easy to visualise and remember?**

**Will you stick with it?**