

# REFLECT, REIMAGINE & REBOOT

YOUR INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS  
PLAN THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

THE  
GROSSMAN  
GROUP

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# WHAT A WILD RIDE 2020 HAS BEEN...

Shortly after celebrating the new year, companies with operations in China jumped right into the challenges related to COVID-19. The rest of the world began to feel the impact of the novel coronavirus toward the end of the first quarter as the seriousness of the pandemic became apparent.







As leaders and communicators, we focused on keeping people safe and trying to help them understand the impact on business. Work went virtual for those who could. Supporting essential workers became paramount. Unemployment hit record levels. Social unrest and attention towards systemic racism came to the forefront. Political intensity rose around the world and especially in the U.S. with an election with global implications. Countries and communities wrestled with how to get children back to school safely. People crave a “return to normal” – even as everything is anything but normal. Many of us have found ourselves in a swirling snow globe of emotions this year, from disbelief, despair, grief and anger to compassion, kindness, hope and possibility.

At The Grossman Group, we started the year – our 20th anniversary year – doing what we do best: helping organizations transform culture, activate strategy, and build stronger leaders and communicators. We quickly shifted as well to support organizations during the pandemic, amid the social unrest, and as organizations made diversity, equity and inclusion the priority it needs to be. Because of the wide range of challenges, our work became even more high stakes as we helped organizations navigate change and leaders connect with their people in new and meaningful ways on difficult personal and work-related topics.



It's in that context that we share with you an approach to take the learnings of this year and communicate inside your organization in an even better and more engaging way going forward. But first, in looking back at a year of tremendous change, we wanted to ask: **How are you doing?**

	 We've changed the way we communicate inside my organization.	T/F
	 My organization is communicating in ways I wouldn't have thought possible before this year.	T/F
	 We now have a backlog of topics we need to talk about.	T/F
	 I feel empowered by this time of change and to reimagine how we communicate.	T/F



We've changed the way we communicate inside my organization.

**If you answered true, you're not alone.**

A recent global survey from Boston Consulting Group, across a variety of industries, found that 73% of companies have made or plan to make a change in their marketing/communication plans given the crisis and in anticipation of rebound.

While no one expected or wanted the pandemic, it's given us all – leaders, HR professionals and communicators – an unprecedented opportunity to learn and examine what works and what's needed for the future.





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My organization is communicating in ways I wouldn't have thought possible before this year.

**Communicators and leaders have stepped into their roles during the COVID-19 crisis in new ways. Why weren't we communicating in ways that were targeted and focused before?**

**Multiple priorities with no clear focus:** The pandemic put everyone on the same page about the topic we should be discussing.

**Competing agendas and stories:** In so many companies, communication is competitive with different leaders and groups vying for attention, so employees have to sort for themselves the relative importance of an employee success story vs. a philanthropy campaign vs. corporate earnings. While some level of “audience-curated” experience is desirable, it more often results in too much noise and employees who tune out.

**“No time for face to face or listening”:** It's ironic that many leaders who didn't have time in the past to hold a face-to-face meeting were front and center on video platforms when that was the *only* option. In the same breath, when surveys seemed too complicated or challenging to deploy, we seized the opportunity to learn quickly how people felt and reacted to create a true dialogue. In the first few months of the pandemic McKinsey recently stated that the world leapfrogged ahead in digital adoption by

5<sup>TO</sup>10  
YEARS

**ORGANIZATIONS  
(AND THEIR  
LEADERS AND  
EMPLOYEES)  
HAD TO GET ON  
BOARD OR FACE  
OBSOLESCENCE.**

“

We now have a backlog of topics we need to talk about.

### If you're like other communicators, you probably answered true.

We've heard from many in Internal Communications a real concern about whether people will fall back on old practices even when they didn't serve them as well. Take, for example, the common problem of too many messages. During the heart of the pandemic, messages were clear and focused. There's concern that messages that aren't "essential" will resurface and start to permeate the organization, creating unnecessary clutter or distraction. What's behind this?

### Maybe it's that....



- ✓ **People assume employees have adjusted** to the current state of working and can take on more "nice to have" topics rather than just "need to have."
- ✓ There is "**organizational amnesia**" about how much noise and clutter there was trying to reach employees.
- ✓ Communicators could **fend off ancillary topics** for only so long before the pressure built and the dam burst.
- ✓ **Renegade communications** are circumventing the established communications process.
- ✓ It's unclear what topics and channels employees did without during the pandemic – **and never missed.**
- ✓ **Habit pulls people back** to doing things the way they've always been done.



“

I feel empowered by this time of change and to reimagine how we communicate.

Hopefully you answered true to this because the time **is** now. There's never been a better time to be in the communications profession, and specifically in internal communications. Don't lose this opportunity!



We're seeing companies make significant strides in how they communicate, **because they had to**. And it's showing in how they're weathering the storm. Through partnership and dialogue with their people, companies are breaking down artificial barriers, remaining productive, and in some cases, being as successful as they were before, if not even more. We don't want the companies and communicators that have done so much good to lose momentum and miss their moment. Keep an eye out for those who are returning to their older habits. If you see leaders stopping their "in person" Q&As or becoming less available, or if you see the "news" is becoming less focused on safety and expanding to a broad array of topics, your organization may be at risk for this.



# 3Rs

We created the 3Rs Model to help you continue to lead in your vital role as a business communicator.



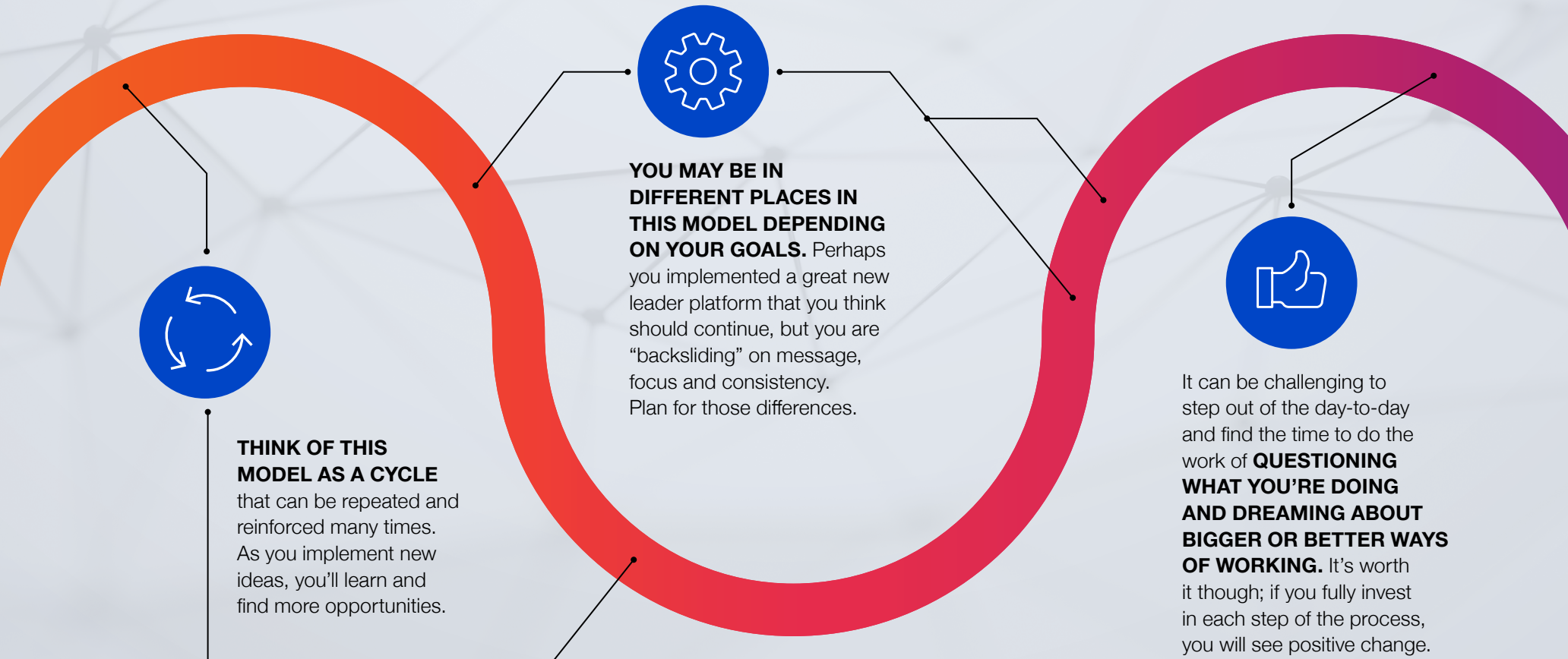
Diagnose where you are and what you've learned from the past year. Think about what worked, what didn't, what you want to keep and most importantly, what your organization **needs**.

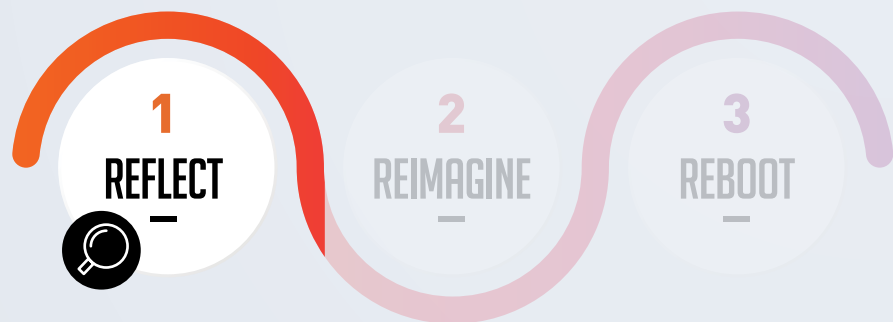
Draw on the data and insights from *Reflect* and envision what's possible. Create your plan for the ideal communications approach and infrastructure given the current business context. Be creative, challenge assumptions and answer the question, **what if?**

A plan without action is just a piece of paper with words on it. This is when you **activate** your plan.



Use the 3Rs Model to help you know where you are and think about where you need and want your function to be.





The Reflect stage is intended to be honest in looking back, and to build a measurable platform for how you want to implement communication 2.0 to meet the needs of the business.

Throughout the pandemic, we've heard a great many anecdotal stories about things that worked and things that didn't. In the Reflect phase, move beyond the anecdotal and do an "after action review" to test your experience. Be honest so that you can think through how to build an even better approach and function for the future.



**1. Do a complete inventory** to start to build a hypothesis about your Communication Plan 2.0. Do this on your own and engage your team and key stakeholders – such as business partners, leadership, key decision makers and employees – in the process. The inventory will help you uncover truths about:

- The strength of systems, approaches and infrastructure in place and ability to adapt
- How to deliver communications to engage employees
- How communications are received
- How well you know your audiences and their information needs
- How ready people leaders are to communicate in times of change
- Whether communications on certain topics are critical or not
- Perceptions of stakeholders who you need as champions or for funding
- And so many other things to help guide sound decision making



## **2. Test the hypothesis with data.**

Move away from personal preferences and probe on what worked. This is about asking these questions of yourself and of the key stakeholders in the business (e.g., business partners, leadership, key decision makers and employees). Depending on the stakeholder, the information would be gathered in different ways (e.g., interviews, surveys, focus groups, etc.). For example, if someone expresses a preference for a certain type of communication, challenge whether it fits into the needs of the company going forward. People will often add requests, but this is the opportunity to apply rigor, challenge the request, and see if it drives the company forward.

Look beyond communications data and get to the heart of your organization's metrics that matter. For many organizations that could mean behaviors that employees need to change or adopt, customer and customer support metrics, business metrics/KPIs and the like.

**1**  
**REFLECT****2**  
**REIMAGINE****3**  
**REBOOT****Your inventory should include:**

- What you started doing
- What you stopped doing
- What you want to keep
- What you lost
- What you need to add
- How you prioritized your efforts
- What you needed that you didn't have in place

**Other data you have or need that is critical to back up your thinking, such as:**

- **PROCESSES:**  
Where there are bottlenecks in workstreams and/or operations
- **PERSONNEL:**  
If you have the right personnel to support your approach and the function
- **PROGRAMS:**  
What other initiatives are needed to help you reach your goals
- **INFRASTRUCTURE:**  
What tools or systems are needed for multichannel analytics, deep targeting, and other approaches necessary for sustaining and efficient communications

**FREE WORKSHEET***Take Your Internal Communications Inventory*





You've done the analysis and gathered the data, and now is the time to ask, ***what if?***

What if we rebuilt...or reimagined...our function, our processes and our infrastructure? If we need to rebuild, what would we need it to be given today's context? The deliverable of this step is a plan that is based in data, a clear understanding of business success that clarifies what is important for the organization. This sets you up for the third phase of the model – which is to execute and implement your plan. Reimagine doesn't mean everything should be new. You likely will have approaches and systems that you relied on that are even more important than before. Use your work from Reflect as a springboard to think about what communications ***can be***.



**1. Begin with the end in mind.** Define success and an end-state vision for you and your function. Be clear in your definition of the role you play and the value you bring to the organization. Keep that definition focused and narrow.

Too often, the value of communications isn't held to an objective standard, but it's determined by the different opinions and visions of different stakeholders – many of whom may not be focused on the same goal or see it the same way. For example, if your role is to help the organization understand and stay focused on the strategic goals of the organization, including business continuity, then that's your priority. Everything else should rank below or in service to that role – or it's not in your area of responsibility. Clearly defining that role and not trying to be all things to all people isn't easy. But what the pandemic taught us is that things that are prioritized get done and get results. Make that priority clear for both you and your company.

### Your end state might be to:

- ✓ **LINK** communications platforms with people-related data from your organization for better targeting, segmentation, analytics and less work
- ✓ **CONNECT** employees to the strategy so they know how they contribute
- ✓ **DIVERSIFY** your channel mix to meet employees where they are (mobile, line manager, virtual, 2-way, etc.)
- ✓ **IMPROVE** cross-department collaboration to drive better outcomes (enterprise approach for faster, easier processes and clearer messaging)



## 2. Put yourself in the shoes of your audience and define what they need for you and the company to be successful.

Your role is to build clarity, not deliver content. That's a big difference. Once you've defined what success looks like, begin building the approach and strategy that makes that success a reality.



## 3. Challenge things that feel like “nice to haves.”

I bet you're already seeing leaders and organizations producing information for their teams that is, at best, unnecessary and at worst, distracting. Do you want a system that makes all those items “feel” equal, or would you rather a system that focuses on what matters most for performance?



## 4. Prioritize ruthlessly.

This may be a new role, but it's critical. We've seen that narrowing the focus of employees to a few priorities allows them to move mountains. If you can maintain this level of clarity, enlist the aid of senior leadership to keep the messages to three or four, max, above the daily job information, you can see your organization rise to the challenges that may have once seemed insurmountable.

**It's not your job to decide what to prioritize.** Do this in partnership with leaders and you can demonstrate that, by being clear in your communications, people will hear, repeat and internalize messages, ultimately helping to achieve your business outcomes.



## 5. Engage important stakeholders in the process.

Don't Reimagine your function in isolation. Bring in key business partners to envision what's possible together for more collective ownership and even better outcomes. Consider ways HR, IT or other functions could be even more connected to what Internal Communications is trying to accomplish. Reimagine how they could contribute expertise – or resources – to address the needs of the business.



1  
REFLECT

2  
REIMAGINE

3  
REBOOT

## MAKE A WINNING BUSINESS CASE

Preparing a clear business case is a best practice that I'd like to see become more common for internal communications functions. It takes the work done in the Reflect and Reimagine steps and puts it into terms that your key business stakeholders understand and support. That way, they see your vision and what solutions you recommend to advance business needs and achieve specific business outcomes.

Your business case can be a means for engaging stakeholders strategically so you get more of what you need to advance business outcomes – whether that's building a coalition of partners, gaining champions, securing financial backing or all of the above.

## YOUR BUSINESS CASE SHOULD ANSWER 6 MAIN QUESTIONS:

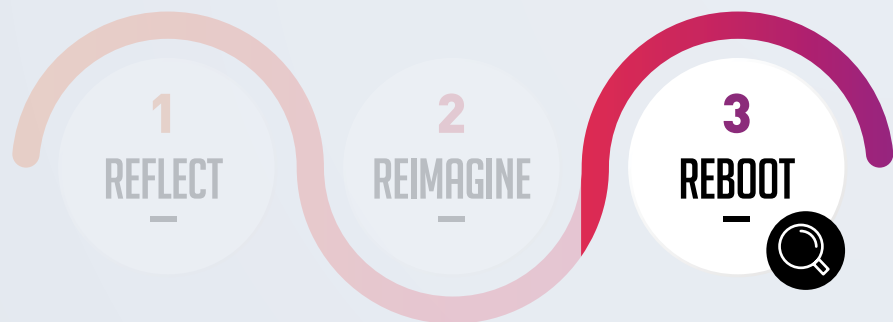
1. What's the need?
2. Why now?
3. What's the value we can create for the business by doing things in a new/different way?
4. What's the cost of not doing something?
5. How do we get this done in the best way?
6. What processes/program/infrastructure/personnel are necessary to achieve the desired outcomes?



**FREE TEMPLATE**

*Build Your Business Case for Internal Communications*





You've done the work. You have a plan to Reimagine your approach and function. Your goal is to create a new and better way forward. Now you need to Reboot, staying strong and diligent in the implementation along the way.



**As you Reboot, ask yourself if you're delivering on the ideas you developed in the first two steps.**

- “Does this support the strategic goals of the organization?”
- “Are we holding true to what the audience needs to stay focused on?”
- “Are we achieving clarity and driving the needs of the organization for today and tomorrow?”

Rebooting communications for the new and better normal is going to have to happen while we continue to work and deliver during the pandemic. Don't let perfect be the enemy of progress. Reflect on lessons learned and implement where your organization needs it the most and when opportunities present themselves.

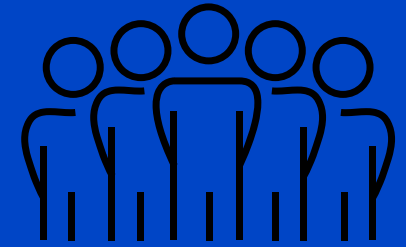
**Change is difficult.**

There may be a strong desire from colleagues or leadership to return to the familiar – even if it's not what's best for them or the organization. Don't fall back into old ways just because it's what you're used to. If you do “go back” to anything, it should be to drive the organization's priorities forward.

Remember that you have allies – specifically leaders and the events of 2020. You have a shared experience and personal examples you can use to reinforce the value of the changes that were made and how sustaining or building on them is the right thing to do.

We keep hearing from leaders who are excited about the level of change they've been able to achieve, the level of connection and the engagement that people have. That didn't just happen. It came from clarity of expectations, being united in a common cause, eliminating distractions and greatly increasing the authenticity of communications that's gotten leaders excited.

As you **Reflect, Reimagine** and **Reboot**, there's one more variable to consider – your team's competencies. What do you need to do to deliver even better in the future? What data and insights do you have about what employees need? All of this is interconnected with your team and how ready you are to deliver. As you think about being even better, consider where you and your team are with these skill sets:



1

**Alignment with leadership:** Getting leadership on board with your plans, and gaining their active participation.

2

**Strategic counsel and support:** Ongoing counsel and truth-telling required to help leadership with the right actions and words.

3

**Technical skills and tools:** Having the right infrastructure and tools to get the message out.

4

**Content creation:** Setting the narrative that reflects the organization's strategy, culture, and priorities and provides inspiration to employees.

5

**Vehicle selection:** Picking the right channels based on audience preferences.

6

**Resources and support:** Having the right people and dollars/resources to deliver – whether in house or with external partners.

7

**Delivery:** Getting the tactical work completed.

8

**Measurement:** Having data to inform the strategy and ongoing decisions. Whether a team of one or many, consider which of these directly apply to your role and function and what you reimagine it to be. Then, check how comfortable and competent you are at these. This will help you know where to focus, and/or where you need more support.



**FREE  
ASSESSMENT**

*Weigh Your Team's  
Communications  
Competencies*

# 4 RESIST —

If there was a 4th R to the model, it'd be Resist ... resist the urge to go this alone. We've been here before with many communications teams and can help.

We recently facilitated a session with the Internal Communications team at a global company to **Reflect**. This allowed everyone on the team to participate fully and equally. The Reflect work led to a synthesis of key observations and learnings. In one day, they committed to a list of what they would Start, Stop and Keep doing. For a group that had been stuck in "swirl" and were challenged to say no, this was a big forward step. They also identified where they needed additional stakeholder input and data.

This led to **Reimagine**. We worked with the team to shape a new vision for the function and map a plan for how to get there. They built a strong business case and socialized their plan across their networks of business partners and leaders to build a coalition to help advance their vision for Internal Communications. Working the smart approach set them up for success to **Reboot** their function.

## ½ DAY PLANNING SESSION

Would your organization benefit from a few focused hours – with the right players in the room – to reboot your plan or build your business case to sell it in? We can help you execute this efficiently through facilitated, half-day planning sessions. The process is simple, and effective.

### HERE'S HOW IT WORKS



Pick a date when your team can get together (virtually works) to work Reflect and Reimagine as a team.



We facilitate so you and your team can work together to identify where you've been, critical business needs moving forward, and what your function could and should focus on for the future. Having us facilitate optimizes your time and allows for your team (including you) to fully participate and co-create so there's shared understanding and ownership. The work done in the session will get you close to the finish line.



Following the session, we'll codify your team's work on paper so any loose ends can be quickly tied and you can execute.



To learn more, contact us [here](#)





# THERE ARE ALWAYS SILVER LININGS EVEN IN THE DARKEST OF CLOUDS.

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This “year that was” changed people in lasting ways and it reminds us that we all depend on each other, even when we’re far apart. Change can happen when people unite around a common goal, and never let a crisis go to waste.

## **CONTINUE TO LISTEN**

Find out what employees need and want

## **GET FEEDBACK**

Gain a deeper understanding of senior leadership goals and priorities

## **KEEP IT REAL**

Say it in plain language – authenticity matters more than ever

## **DON'T DUCK TOUGH SUBJECTS**

Find ways to facilitate respectful conversations

## **BE BOLD AND THINK BIG**

Times of crisis are times of opportunity and change is a great time for change

## **DON'T GO IT ALONE**

Seek out partnerships, work your network and get outside help for ideas and learning

Now that you know the **3Rs**, below you'll also find links to other resources and helpful information.



## REBOOT YOUR COMMUNICATION PLAN IN LESS THAN A DAY

Through a facilitated ½ day planning session with us, you'll walk away with your Communication Plan 2.0 or business case you need to sell in your plan

Email us at  
**[Results@YourThoughtPartner.com](mailto:Results@YourThoughtPartner.com)**  
to get started



## FREE WORKSHEET

Take Your Internal  
Communications  
Inventory



## FREE TEMPLATE

Build Your Business  
Case for Internal  
Communications



## FREE ASSESSMENT

Weigh Your Team's  
Communications  
Competencies

# DAVID GROSSMAN, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, CSP

David helps leaders drive productivity and get the results they want through authentic and courageous leadership and communication. He's a sought-after speaker and advisor to Fortune 500 leaders, and three-time author. His latest book, "No Cape Needed: The Simplest, Smartest, Fastest Steps to Improve How You Communicate By Leaps and Bounds," recently won the Pinnacle Book Award for the "Best in Business" category and the Beverly Hills International Book Award's President's

award. His other books include, "You Can't NOT Communicate: Proven Communication Solutions That Power the Fortune 100," now in its second edition, and its follow up, "You Can't NOT Communicate 2". His leader**communicator** blog is also ranked the fourth blog on communication by Feedspot for the fourth year in a row. David counsels leaders at top organizations to unleash the power of strategic internal communication and drive performance. Clients include Abbott, Astellas Pharma, CVS Health, Health Quest,

Hillrom, Johnson & Johnson, Kimberly-Clark, Lockheed Martin, McDonald's, NYU Langone Health, Sage Therapeutics, U.S. Pharmacopeia and Wyndham, among others. He's Founder and CEO of The Grossman Group, an award-winning Chicago-based strategic leadership development and internal communications consultancy, and taught graduate-level Internal Communications at Columbia University in NYC.



David has been featured in:

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS

TODAY

Chicago Tribune

FAST COMPANY

Los Angeles Times

## LET'S PARTNER

If you're looking to reboot your communications and get lasting results during these times of significant change and uncertainty, we can help. These are just some of the ways we're supporting communications teams today:

- Facilitate the reflect, reimagine process so teams can effectively reboot communications
- Develop strategies and plans to keep employees informed, connected and inspired
- Provide tactical implementation writing and communication support
- Conduct leader communication trainings to help leaders engage their employees, whether they are on-site or remote
- Coach leaders to be even more effective during these uncertain times
- And more



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