

Smart guide

How to be a rock star communicator

Making the leap to strategic advisor





Introduction

In the world of internal communication, you rock.

You are not a mere roadie, hauling amps and other equipment (PPT slides) in preparation for the headliner’s (CEO) big show (town hall).

No, you are bigger and better than that. You’re an artist. You studied hard and practiced well. You know your craft, can make the moves and have the power to bring audience members to their feet.

How, then, can you get the respect and recognition you deserve? By making the leap from roadie (tactician) to rock star (strategic advisor).

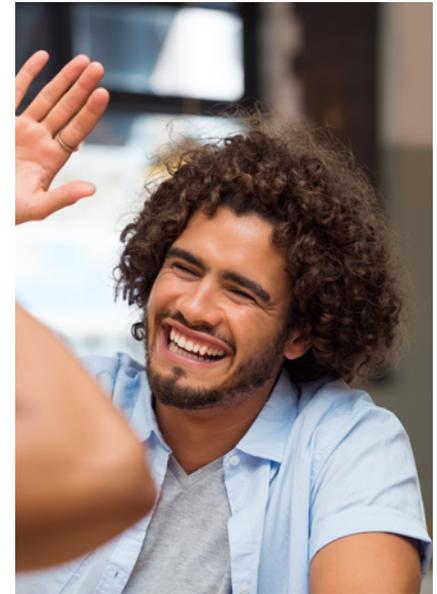
In this guide, we’ll show you how—by focusing on seven strategies to enhance your skills and build your brand. Along the way, we’ll show you examples of communicators who have used these techniques to achieve success. Our objective? To spotlight strategies that will help you be a star.

7 rock star-ready skills

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You’ll know you’re a strategic advisor when:

- You are considered an expert
- Internal clients often ask you for advice, not only about communication, but about other issues
- There is strong mutual trust between you and your clients
- You collaborate with your clients to match solutions to their needs
- You approach clients with unsolicited ideas
- Your clients believe you deliver value beyond your official role or budget



1 Develop your craft

How talented do you really have to be to become a rock star? The Dire Straits song, “Money for Nothing,” claims it’s not that difficult (“Now that ain’t workin’ that’s the way you do it. You play the guitar on the MTV.”). But the fact is, most successful rock stars have a multitude of talents, from musical ability (usually) to fashion savvy to financial planning to brand management to being able to break that addiction (again and again).

We communicators also need a broad array of skills to successfully practice our craft. When Van Halen first started more than 45 years ago, communicators could rely mostly on one skill: writing. But today, we need to be able to marshal—or at least manage—such essential skills as graphic design, meeting planning, facilitation, social media and measurement.



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If you want music to be your livelihood,
“then play, play and play! And eventually
you’ll get to where you want to be.

Eddie Van Halen
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“Dreams” by Van Halen



Sherice’s challenge

Everyone who works with Sherice agrees: She’s a heck of a writer. And when Sherice was a specialist, her writing skills were enough to make her successful—so successful, in fact, that she’s just been promoted to manager.

Now Sherice is not just responsible for writing talking points for her VP’s town hall meetings, she manages his entire employee communication program. And the VP wants to take communication to the next level. He asks for Sherice’s help. “We need a mobile strategy,” the VP says. “And a virtual meeting solution. And to make communication more visual.” Sherice leaves the meeting in a cold sweat. She worries that she has no idea about how to do any of these things.

1 Develop your craft

How developing her craft helps Sherice become a rock star

Sherice resolves to build her knowledge fast. She doesn't have time to become an expert in every skill, but she can quickly get up to speed in key areas by:

- ✓ **Asking a colleague** in Marketing to share what he knows about using mobile devices to communicate with customers. She then meets with an IT colleague to find out how his function can support workforce mobile applications.
- ✓ **Contacting a colleague** in Telecommunications who manages the relationship with her company's web meeting platform. It turns out the web meeting provider offers free coaching to company employees as part of its contract. Sherice signs up for a webinar and spends an hour talking to an expert.
- ✓ **Allocating some of her freelance budget** to hire a graphic designer to create a visual communication strategy. The designer creates prototypes for several key channels, all of which emphasize visuals and reduce the amount of words.



The result

Sherice uses what she's learned to develop key strategies to communicate differently. The VP approves, and, while Sherice still feels like a beginner, she's confident she'll learn as she goes.

2 Build business acumen

From '60s psychedelic rock, to '80s new wave bands, to today's alternative bands, rockers have always had their own language that sets them apart from the establishment.

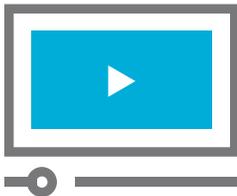
Companies have their language, too—the language of business. ROI, EBITDA and SWOT analysis may sound like gibberish—but strategic advisors have to understand what these terms mean. And, we need to develop comprehensive knowledge about how our organizations and industries work. Only by doing so can we confidently counsel leaders and translate “business speak” into clear language audience members can relate to.



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You gotta wear the right trousers if you're gonna be a rock star.

Chris Martin

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“Don't Panic” by Coldplay



Jason's challenge

Jason is a smart manager who knows all about the latest trends in employee communication. But every time he proposes a new channel to the division president he supports, Jason gets shot down.

After unsuccessfully pitching a social media platform he knows would increase employee engagement, Jason goes to his director for advice. “I agree that it's a great idea,” the director says. “But I think the problem is the president can't see the value in it. He's focused on how much money and time the platform would take, not the potential impact.”

2 Build business acumen

How business acumen helps Jason become a rock star

Determined to convince the president that his social media idea has merit, Jason concentrates on building his business acumen. He:

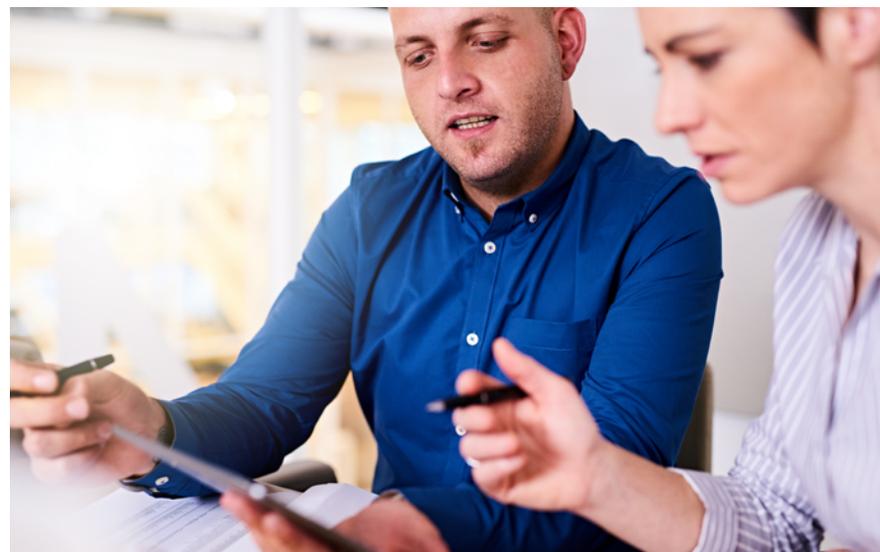
- ✓ **Studies all available information** about the business plan from executive presentations, analysts' calls, the annual report and other sources.
- ✓ **Focuses on the two business strategies** that relate to his proposal: accelerating innovation and increasing efficiency.
- ✓ **Schedules meetings with VPs** leading initiatives to support those strategies and discusses the role internal social media could play in helping them achieve their objectives.



Clients for Life: Evolving from an Expert-for-Hire to an Extraordinary Advisor

by Jagdish Sheth and Andrew Sobel

Clients for Life lays out the core qualities that distinguish the client advisor—from the expert for hire—a tradable commodity.



The result

After gaining the VPs' support, Jason goes back to the president with his revised pitch that demonstrates how the social media platform could support two of the division's strategies. The result? The president now gives the green light to Jason's plan.

3 Investigate everything

In the early days of rock and roll, Marvin Gaye asked the musical question, “What’s going on?” That’s a great question for strategic advisors, too. Internal clients often ask us to communicate without being clear about what the issue is, why it matters, who it affects and what action is needed. So communicators must take the role of investigative reporters, getting to the bottom of a topic to fully understand what it is and how best to communicate it.



War is not the answer, for only love can conquer hate.

Marvin Gaye



“What’s Going On” by Marvin Gaye



Robin’s challenge

Robin’s a first-rate communicator who understands how to engage employees. But she suffers from “dump and run” syndrome: Project owners drop presentations on her at the start of an initiative, leaving her to scour these dense (and often incomprehensible) PowerPoint decks trying to figure out what the initiative is and how it will affect people.

Her latest assignment is a major change initiative. At the first meeting, the team lead hands Robin a deck and says, “I know exactly what’s needed to ensure success for this project: a logo, desk drops, posters and lots of intranet articles. It’s all in the presentation.”

3 Investigate everything

How investigation helps Robin become a rock star

Robin asks for a follow-up meeting with the core team. She positions the meeting objective as developing key messages, though Robin knows that the hidden agenda is to make sure the team has thought through change impacts and implications. As soon as everyone is gathered, Robin starts asking questions:

- ✓ **What** are the initiative's objectives?
- ✓ **What** is the executive team's involvement?
- ✓ **Will** it have a phased approach? Is there a time line?
- ✓ **Who** will be impacted most by these changes?
- ✓ **What** will employees have to do differently to make this succeed?



The Trusted Advisor

by David Maister

In today's fast-paced networked economy, professionals must work harder than ever. The key to professional success, they argue, is the ability to earn the trust and confidence of clients.



The result

Robin discovers the system won't go live for at least three years, still doesn't have buy-in from all the executives, and will likely require workforce reductions or retraining in some regions. Using this knowledge, she convinces the team to delay end-user communication and focus on developing key leaders to be project champions.

4 Use evidence to make your case

What does Gene Simmons look like first thing in the morning? Or, if that's too painful, contemplate Lady Gaga without the steak dress and towering wig and extra-extra thick eyeliner. Ewww, normal! Rock stars know that they need a big dose of fabulous to become the fantastic personas their fans expect.

Communicators need to glam up our act as well. But our stage attire doesn't take the form of platform shoes and tight pants. No, our rock star costume takes the form of evidence: metrics, trends, best practices and other data. The right evidence positions us as experts and helps us make the case to internal clients who often outrank us (and often believe they know everything about communication).



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I was never interested in being a rock star.
I always wanted to be Boris Karloff.

Gene Simmons
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“Rock and Roll All Night” by Kiss



Nishi's challenge

Nishi is more experienced than she looks. Although she's only in her early 30s, Nishi has more than a decade of experience, having first worked as an intern at a public relations agency. She then advanced through a series of jobs with increasing responsibility.

Today, as director of communications for a global industrial company, Nishi is confident and knows her stuff. But her age and youthful appearance often work against her, especially when she finds herself presenting ideas to tough, hard-bitten senior executives (who are almost all guys in their 50s).

4 Use evidence to make your case

How evidence helps Nishi become a rock star

Nishi has developed a plan to build a social media strategy to reach customers, the community, the media and other key stakeholders. But she knows that some conservative executives regard social media as a passing fad. So Nishi concentrates on developing the right evidence to make her case:

- ✓ **She first uses** externally available data about social media usage (from the Pew Internet Research Center and other organizations that conduct ongoing studies) to demonstrate how stakeholders in key demographics use social media.
- ✓ But knowing that general data won't be compelling enough, **Nishi recruits her partners** in Marketing Research to conduct surveys among stakeholders to determine their current social media usage and their interest in using social media to communicate with her company.
- ✓ **She then collects data** from the Customer Service group that indicates how social media platforms would reduce costs by lowering call volume. Nishi asks a buddy in Finance to run projections on cost savings over five years.



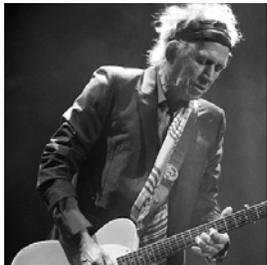
The result

Knowing that the executive team is still a tough nut to crack, Nishi asks her boss, the SVP of Investor Relations, to help. She and the SVP have individual meetings with each executive, getting buy-in for her proposal. When she then formally presents at the executive leadership meeting, her plan is quickly approved.

5 Formulate a plan

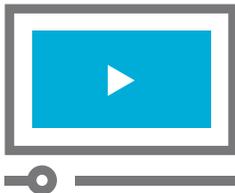
Taking the Rolling Stones on the road isn't an easy undertaking. Before Mick ever steps on stage, management must develop a detailed roadmap for the tour's success, from booking venues to shipping equipment to arranging publicity to managing the wardrobe.

Strategic advisors also understand the importance of planning. You can't just strap on your guitar and hope for the best—you need a roadmap that articulates what you want to achieve and how you'll measure outcomes. That way, you can convince key constituents that your approach is strategic and demonstrate how effective communication contributes to business success.



Everyone talks about rock these days; the problem is they forget about the roll.

Keith Richards



“Time Is On My Side” by the Rolling Stones



Andrés's challenge

As the new communications director for a consumer product line, Andrés knows he needs to make his mark quickly. With a down market and a no-nonsense executive committee looking to create efficiencies wherever it can, his first task is to prove the value his team brings to the business.

He remembers from his interviews that senior leaders are concerned that his department manages a lot of activity but it's not clear how those tactics impact the product bottom line.

5 Formulate a plan

How a communication plan helps Andrés become a rock star

Determined to demonstrate his team's value, Andrés brainstorms with his colleagues to develop a communication plan that includes:

- ✔ **SMART** (Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time-based) objectives over the next three years—with a link to how they support the product line objectives
- ✔ **Strategies** to accomplish those objectives
- ✔ **Tactics** and timing
- ✔ **Resources** (including budget) needed to implement the plan
- ✔ **How they will measure success**



Life

by Keith Richards

Life is a memoir by the Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards, written with the assistance of journalist James Fox.



The result

Andrés presents the plan to the product team, including key senior leaders. Once he has the go ahead, Andrés regularly reports back on the team's progress, including metrics to prove the success of the plan.

6 Break the box

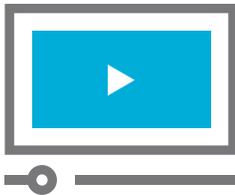
From the Velvet Underground to Animal Collective, from Sonic Youth to Belle & Sebastian, from Suicide to Sufjan Stevens, alternative music defies definition ... but you pay attention when you hear it because it's original, provocative and compelling.

Strategic advisors also know the importance of breaking the box—of departing from “that’s the way we’ve always done it” to find new ways of addressing challenges. You may not know where the next big idea is going to come from, but you’re savvy enough to recognize it when it hits you.



It takes a long time to find your own voice. Along the way, you imitate all the things that influence you—in my case Johnny Cash, Bowie, John Lydon.

Dave Gahan, Depeche Mode



“People Are People” by Depeche Mode



Julianne’s challenge

Julianne’s company is redesigning its corporate offices with an open floor plan to encourage collaboration and enhance creativity. While the project calls for some great new features like an employee innovation lounge, it also means mid-level managers will be moved from offices to open workstations.

Crafting her communication plan, Julianne knows she needs to engage employees, highlighting the benefits of this change while alleviating fears about the negatives. And tried-and-true ways like intranet announcements and email updates aren’t going to cut it.

6 Break the box

How breaking the box helps Julianne become a rock star

To jump-start her creativity, Julianne starts looking outside her everyday business life. She:

- ✓ **Thinks** about what inspires her.
- ✓ **Asks** friends what they do when redesigning their own homes.
- ✓ **Visits** interior decorating websites and blogs.
- ✓ **Talks** to a local interior decorator.



Brand Like A Rock Star

by Steve Jones

Make your brand a blockbuster with strategies perfected by the superstars of rock 'n roll.



The result

They all recommend keeping an inspiration board for collecting articles, pictures, paint chips, fabric swatches and other decorating ideas. Julianne realizes an online inspiration board could be a great tool for the redesign, focusing on gathering employees' ideas for working differently in the new space. Employees embrace the board (which Julianne creates using a microsite) and share their thoughts and images on workspace design, collaboration, being productive and other issues.

7 Demonstrate results

Savvy rock stars know that success can't be measured by how loudly audience members applaud or how many groupies try to sneak into your tour bus. Instead, true success lies in the numbers, such as how many concert tickets you sell and "units" (such as downloads) you move. Subtract your overhead (personal masseuses are expensive) and only then can a rock star determine whether the holidays will be spent at a private Caribbean island or rehearsing for a New Year's Eve TV special (so you can afford the next alimony payment).

Results matter even more when you're not a real rock star, just a successful strategic advisor. We need to take our work beyond the subjective ("I know good when I see it") to being able to demonstrate the outcomes of our communication efforts. After all, the best defense against being treated like an order taker is to have a plan, deliver on it, then prove communication was effective through measurable results.



I won't be a rock star. I will be a legend.

Freddie Mercury



"We Will Rock You" by Queen



Ken's challenge

Ken felt like he's been waiting in the wings forever—a perpetual opening act who never became a headliner. Hired as corporate communication director five years ago to fulfill a succession plan, Ken has since cooled his heels while his boss, the VP of communication, repeatedly delayed retirement. Today, finally, is his boss's last day, and tomorrow morning Ken becomes VP.

But Ken faces a major obstacle. His old boss was a "seat of the pants" kind of guy who never had a plan and didn't measure anything. The former VP used personal relationships to influence senior leaders, but he never tried to rock the boat by proposing anything radical. Ken has ambitious goals for communication, and he's going to need more than charisma to get buy-in from the guys at the top.

7 Demonstrate results

How demonstrating results helps Ken become a rock star

Ken decides to invest in measurement. His ultimate objective is to develop a Corporate Communication scorecard, a quarterly one-pager that captures all the key indicators of his function's performance. But Ken knows that he's going to have to walk before he can run. So he works with team members to slowly ramp up their measurement efforts:

- ✓ For employee communication, the team starts with available metrics, such as post-event feedback from town halls and web trends. But **team members quickly build a measurement system with consistent questions** for spot surveys and an annual employee communication survey.
- ✓ For media relations, Ken pushes the team to go beyond measuring clips as a way of showing success. **The team hires an outside firm to create a report** on such metrics as tone of coverage and share of voice.
- ✓ Overall, **Ken maps out measurement of the big picture.** He explores reputational research that will measure how communication affects stakeholders' perceptions of his company and its products.



The result

Ken begins to bring metrics to every Executive Leadership meeting, so he can draw upon facts to support his point of view. And he makes sure that every plan uses results to demonstrate what strategies are effective, to help him make his case for new ideas. In just a few months, Ken transforms the function from reactive to leading practice.

The leaders in internal communication

We're Davis & Company, the employee communication experts. Since 1984, leading organizations have depended on us to reach, engage and motivate their employees. Our strategic mindset, creative spirit and practical know-how can solve your toughest communication challenges. Give us a call. We'd love to help.

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Take strategic advising to the next level

We can help you to:

- Become an expert in your field
- Increase your knowledge
- Ask the right questions
- Research and use evidence
- Build a solid plan
- Think differently

5 things to know about us



Global. We've created communication programs that reach employees across the world, in nearly every continent (but not, we admit, Antarctica).



Experienced. We have decades of experience in communicating change, initiatives, HR programs and policies, and many other topics.



Collaborative. Our favorite way of working is to meet with our clients and put our heads together.



Client-focused. Our mission is to help you solve your problems. To set you up for success. To make sure you get the recognition you deserve. (We think you get the picture.)



Acclaimed. We've won hundreds of awards and routinely earn the praise of clients and colleagues.