

Essential Communication Skills:

Why C-Suite Executives Must Adapt to Thrive in the Digital Era

In today's digital age, communication is more powerful and immediate than ever before. For top executives and decision-makers, how they communicate with the public can make or break their company's reputation, affect stock market performance, and shape public perception. This is why media training has evolved from being a nice-to-have skill to a critical necessity for anyone leading a business.



Social media is now a critical channel for executive communications, and paramount for networking and visibility¹.

86%

C-suite executives acknowledge the critical role of communication in a digital era².

The media landscape has shifted dramatically, with social media platforms like Twitter, Meta, and LinkedIn enabling news to spread instantly. For C-suite executives, one misstep or careless comment can quickly go viral, risking significant reputational damage. In today's environment, anyone with a smartphone can capture and share real-time content, putting executives under constant public scrutiny. This heightened visibility makes it crucial for leaders to respond quickly and strategically to avoid long-term harm, underscoring the importance of media training.



Why Media Training Matters

Executives are the public face of a company, and their words hold significant weight. Poorly prepared leaders risk miscommunicating or failing to control the narrative, leading to potential PR crises. Media training equips executives to stay on message, manage tough questions, and represent company values effectively, crucial during high-stakes situations like product recalls or scandals. When executives are well-prepared, they can reassure stakeholders, maintain trust, and limit damage, while untrained leaders risk long-term brand and financial fallout.



Risks of Untrained Executives

Untrained executives risk critical errors that can harm the company. Common pitfalls include straying off-message, appearing defensive or arrogant under pressure, and failing in crisis communication. These missteps can lead to negative media coverage, loss of public trust, and significant financial damage, such as stock price drops during scandals.

The consequences of these mistakes can be severe. A poorly handled interview or public appearance can lead to negative media coverage, erode public trust, and even cause financial damage. For example, a CEO who is seen as out of touch during a scandal can cause a significant drop in the company's stock price, costing investors and damaging long-term credibility.

Media training enables executives to confidently control the narrative, reassure investors, and manage crises, safeguarding the company's reputation. It strengthens their role as brand ambassadors, ensuring that all communications align with corporate values and boost investor trust, reputation and stability.

— Vadia Rai
Senior Director



The Benefits of Media Training

Media training equips executives with vital skills that empower them to control narratives effectively. Trained leaders can navigate conversations and maintain focus on key messages, even when faced with difficult or off-topic inquiries. This clarity ensures that the company's core values are communicated consistently, reducing the risk of mixed messages that could alienate audiences.

For publicly traded companies, the ability to communicate strategy and performance with certainty is essential for maintaining investor confidence. A well-prepared CEO or CFO can reassure investors during earnings calls, preventing speculation that may lead to stock volatility.

Moreover, media training prepares executives for high-pressure situations, particularly during crises. With the right training, leaders can project calmness and authority, effectively de-escalating situations and protecting the company's reputation. A single, well-crafted statement can significantly influence public perception during challenging times.

Skilled communicators can enhance their company's reputation, becoming powerful brand ambassadors. By mastering the art of communication, executives craft impactful messages that resonate with audiences and align with corporate values, ultimately benefiting the organization both in times of success and during crises.



Social Media Amplifies Mistakes

One of the biggest challenges today is how quickly news can spread through social media. A single slip-up can be shared, retweeted, or posted across platforms in seconds. Media training helps executives understand how to navigate these platforms, ensuring that they know what to say and, more importantly, what not to say.

Social media has made the line between formal and informal communication blurrier than ever. It's easy for statements made in a casual context to be taken seriously or used against a company. Media training prepares executives for interviews and interactions across both traditional and social media, helping them avoid potential pitfalls that can lead to PR disasters.

Call to Action: To stay ahead and protect your brand, invest in comprehensive media training for your leadership team. Equip them with the tools they need to confidently engage with the media, handle tough questions, and turn potential risks into opportunities for positive coverage.

CEOs' social media activity can impact stock prices; for instance, Elon Musk's tweets about taking Tesla private caused stock surges, while Mark Zuckerberg's public statements on Facebook's future have led to market shifts based on investor confidence in strategic moves.

— **Vadia Rai**
Senior Director

Conclusion

In today's fast-paced media landscape, where a single comment can instantly go viral, media training is not just an option but a necessity for C-suite executives. It equips leaders with the skills to navigate challenging questions, effectively manage crises, and enhance their company's reputation. Confident and strategic communication becomes a critical asset, safeguarding the company's image while also amplifying its goals and values.

Endnotes

¹FTI Communications, "Leading from the Front" <https://fticonsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FTI-Consulting-Leading-from-the-front.pdf>

²Pumble, "Communication in the Workplace Statistics 2024," <https://pumble.com/learn/communication/communication-statistics/#::~:~:text=Workplace%20communication%20statistics%20show%20that,by%20as%20much%20as%2025%25>

VADIA RAI

Senior Director
00971 50 7096545
vadia.raai@fticonsulting.com

The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and not necessarily the views of FTI Consulting, Inc., its management, its subsidiaries, its affiliates, or its other professionals. FTI Consulting, Inc., including its subsidiaries and affiliates, is a consulting firm and is not a certified public accounting firm or a law firm.

FTI Consulting is an independent global business advisory firm dedicated to helping organisations manage change, mitigate risk and resolve disputes: financial, legal, operational, political & regulatory, reputational and transactional. FTI Consulting professionals, located in all major business centres throughout the world, work closely with clients to anticipate, illuminate and overcome complex business challenges and opportunities. © 2024 FTI Consulting, Inc. All rights reserved. fticonsulting.com