

Managing External Communication

Media, Social Media, and More



www.redbrick.ca



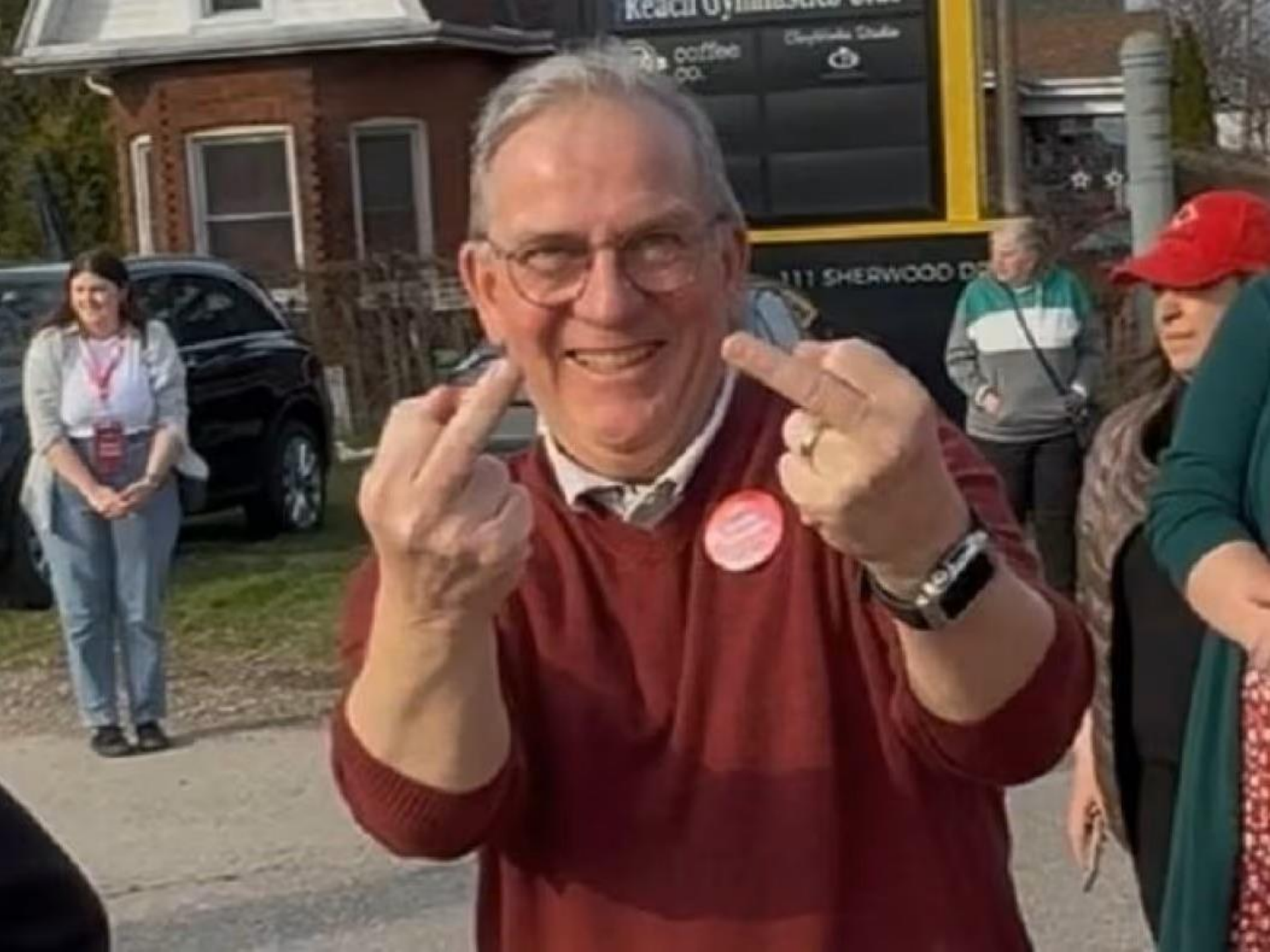
August 2026

Brian Lambie, President
Redbrick Communications



**You'll be judged
by your worst
moment.**





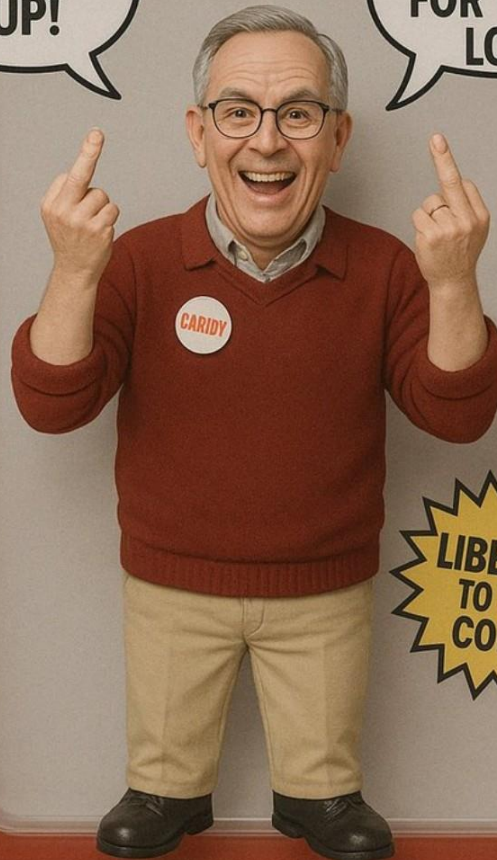
AGES 14+

WARNING:
CHOKING HAZARD! Small parts
Not for children under 3 years

BRANTFORD BOOMER

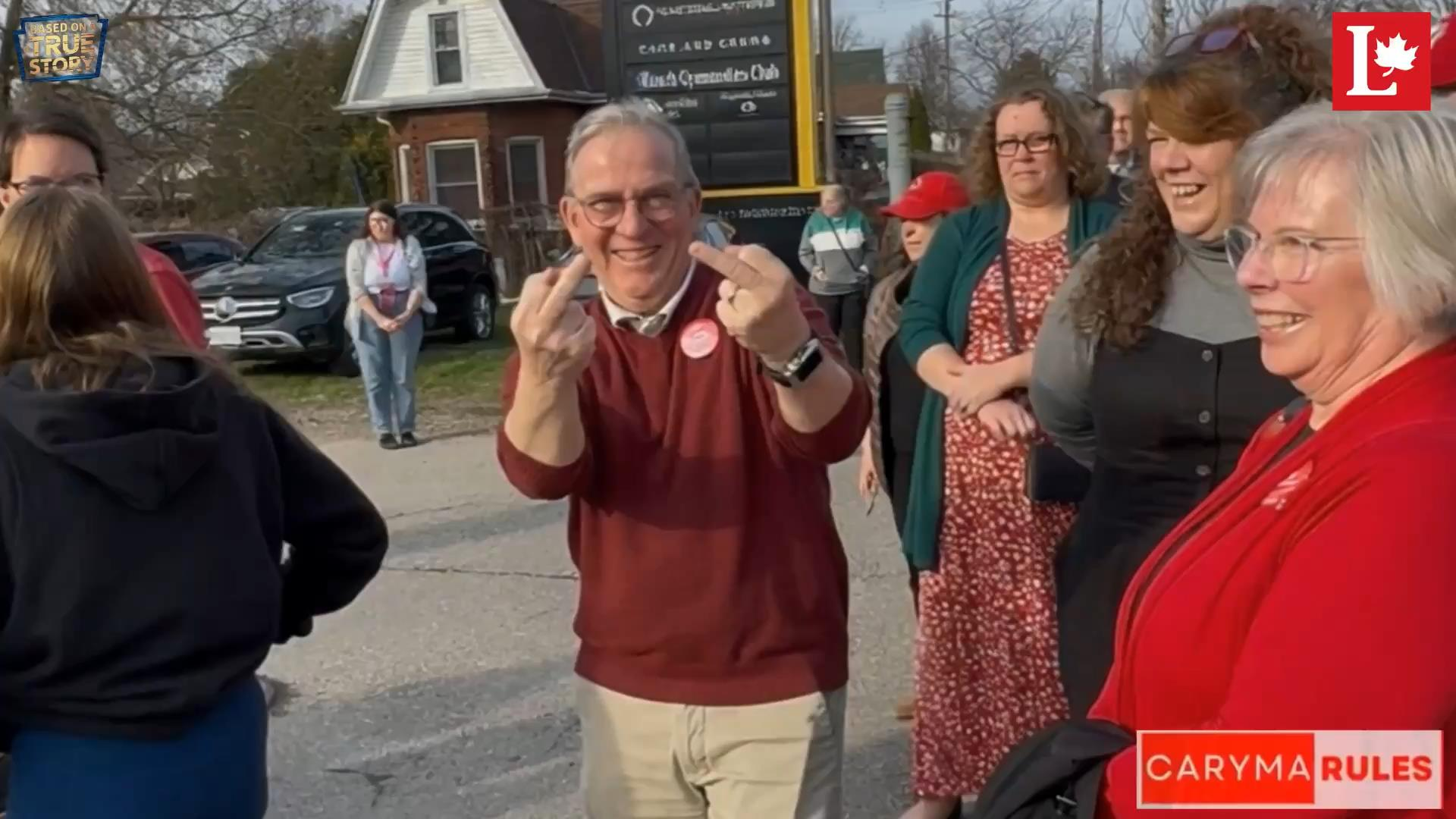
ELBOWS
UP!

NO HOUSE
FOR YOU,
LOL!



LIBERAL
TO THE
CORE!

BASED ON
TRUE
STORY



CARYMA RULES

**Communication is a
learned skill, and
everyone can
get better
over time.**



What do people talk about?

- *Change*
- *Controversy*
- *Human Interest*

(Drama / Emotion / Celebrity)



**If you don't put
time and energy
into getting it
right, you'll put
time and energy
into managing
issues.**



**Use AI to improve
what you already
know and do well.**



Council Role



Roles and Goals

- Mayor serves as the voice of Council, communicating decisions.
- Disagreement = democracy.
- Dysfunction erodes public trust.
- Strong Councils disagree well.
- Strong governments work cooperatively to avoid surprises.



Council Strengths

- Responsive and caring leadership
- Can reach key audiences
- Can demonstrate listening
- Can act on concerns
- Greater freedom to communicate
- Greater freedom to generate interest
- Can help connect audiences to quality information and sources



Staff Strengths

- Professional support and advice
- Planning, management and focus
- Provides detailed information
- Maintains formal communications tools and information sources
- Can deliver quality information in a neutral manner



**Staff can be
boring.**

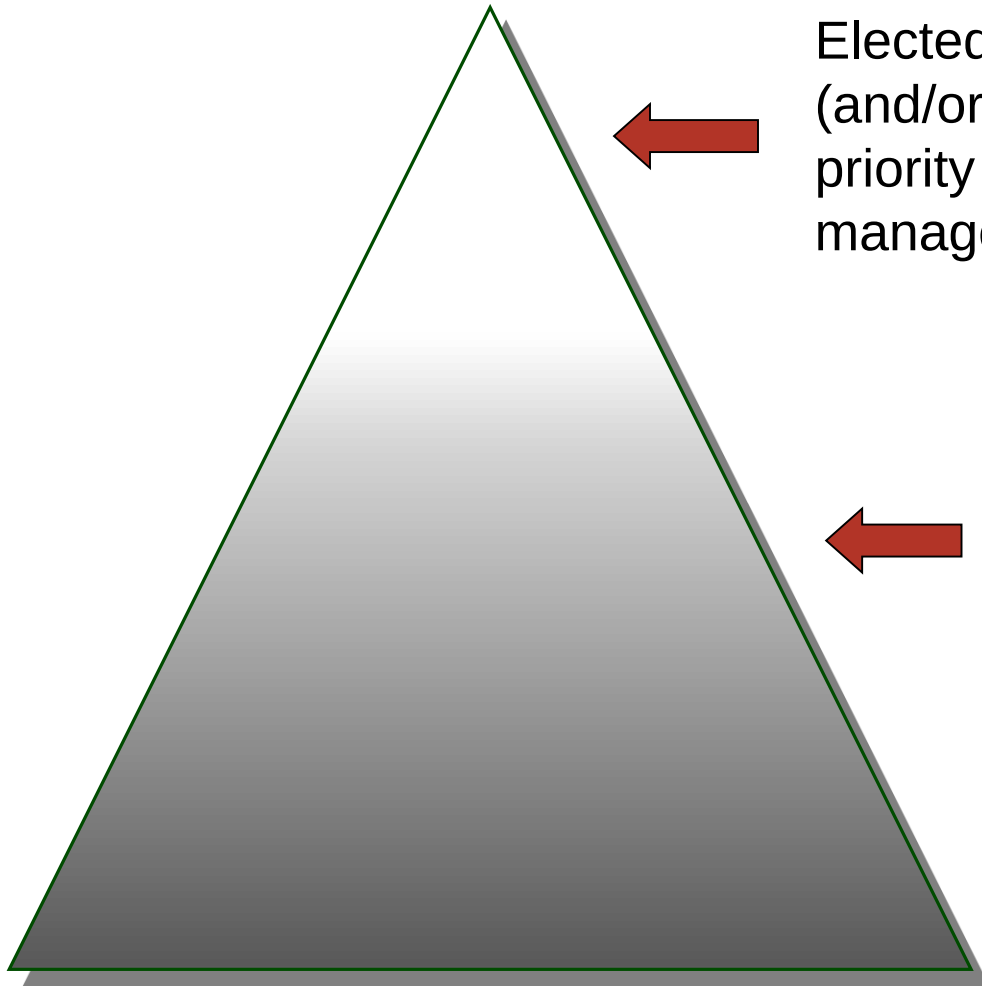


**Staff can be
boring.**

**Keep it
that way.**



Prioritize to Increase Speed



Elected officials tend to lead with (and/or amplify) high-level, high-priority information – and they help to manage expectations.

Staff tend to provide detail, implement longer term processes – and they must deliver on expectations.



Communicating Quickly

- Requires care and commitment to the organization's best interests
- Prevent surprises
- Clear protocols, roles and responsibilities
- Council and staff focus on their respective strengths
- Long range communications planning



Inspiring Civility



Inspiring Calm and Respectful Discussion

Everyone thinks they are a good person, fighting the good fight.

- Anger is often fear in disguise. Find out what a person is afraid of and help to address that, if you can.
- Demonstrate the behaviour you want to see in others – inspire people to be the best versions of themselves.

It's up to you to keep calm and stay strategic – you'll be defined by your weakest moments.

- If a message or action feels good, it may not be the strategic choice. Park your emotions and make choices that get you where you want to be.
- Focus on behaviour – not opinions.
- Use positive language. You won't inspire civility through regulation or restriction.
- Acknowledge feelings, but stay out of back-and-forth debates. Focus on maintaining good governance and good service delivery.
- Use statements that are hard to disagree with and easily understood.
- Speak and write like you're talking to a crowded room. Remember your words could be recorded, repeated, or quoted.

Choose your battles wisely.

- Develop user-friendly tools to help navigate when and when not to respond.
- Share facts clearly, keep answers short, and link to good information sources.
- Talk with people, not at them. Avoid telling people what to do.
- Remember that complaints can help improve services.

Good communication takes confidence.

- Providing effective communications advice is about helping the organization respond in a thoughtful, professional, and credible way.
- Good communication is helpful. It reduces stress and helps solve problems.
- The right messages will survive public scrutiny, protect the municipality's reputation, and build trust.
- Strong messaging helps communicators avoid overstating, or over-responding, and helps to de-escalate anger.

Tips for difficult interactions

- 1 Set boundaries early:** "We welcome many views. Please speak to ideas, not people."
- 2 Start with empathy:** "I hear your concern. Here is what we can do."
- 3 Stay neutral:** Focus on behaviour and facts. Avoid blame and long debates.
- 4 Protect privacy:** Move service issues offline when personal details are needed.
- 5 Use pre-approved messages:** Be consistent across teams and with council.
- 6 Create thresholds with leadership:** Know when to disengage. Map out when to escalate to CAO, Clerk, Legal, or security. Create internal guides for online interactions.
- 7 Document key details:** Record dates, in-person or online interactions, platforms / links, and action(s) taken. Focus forward. Avoid re-engaging, unless required by policy.
- 8 Actions speak louder than words:** Finding the right message is easy when you are doing the right thing.

Balancing Transparency and Accountability

This toolkit includes tips and advice to help staff, leadership and elected officials foster calm, fair and respectful interactions with residents, in-person and online.

Municipalities have a responsibility to be open, transparent and responsive. This includes supporting healthy, respectful civic spaces free of abuse, harassment, misinformation or attempts to spread disinformation. Communities should be spaces where people focus on debating the issues, not on attacking people, institutions or each other.

Governments must serve, lead and, ideally, inspire. Can we lead our communities toward healthy democracy and discourse? Can we inspire civility?

Basic Principles

Redbrick's approach is based on our experience working with municipalities for more than two decades. It is guided by some basic principles.

- Everyone tends to think they are a good person, even when they are behaving badly. Seek approaches that nudge them into being the good person they believe they 'are.'
- Bad behaviour comes from fear. Listen to the actual complaint or concern. Figure out what they are afraid of, and address that.
- Inspire the behaviour you want to see.
- Be strategic. Pick your battles. Most can be ignored. Use decision trees or tools that ignore your emotions.
- People resist messaging that tells them what to do. Avoid over-regulation.
- Bulletproof, non-debatable messages are better than debatable messages. Look for statements that no one will disagree with.
- Acknowledge feelings and stay out of debates.
- Share facts clearly, in plain and positive language.
- Keep answers short and provide a link to more information.
- Use limited staff time wisely and look after your team.
- Recruit opinion leaders who are known on community networks. Keep them informed.
- Focus on behaviour – not opinions. Follow your municipality's policies, safety procedures and escalation steps.

Key Definitions

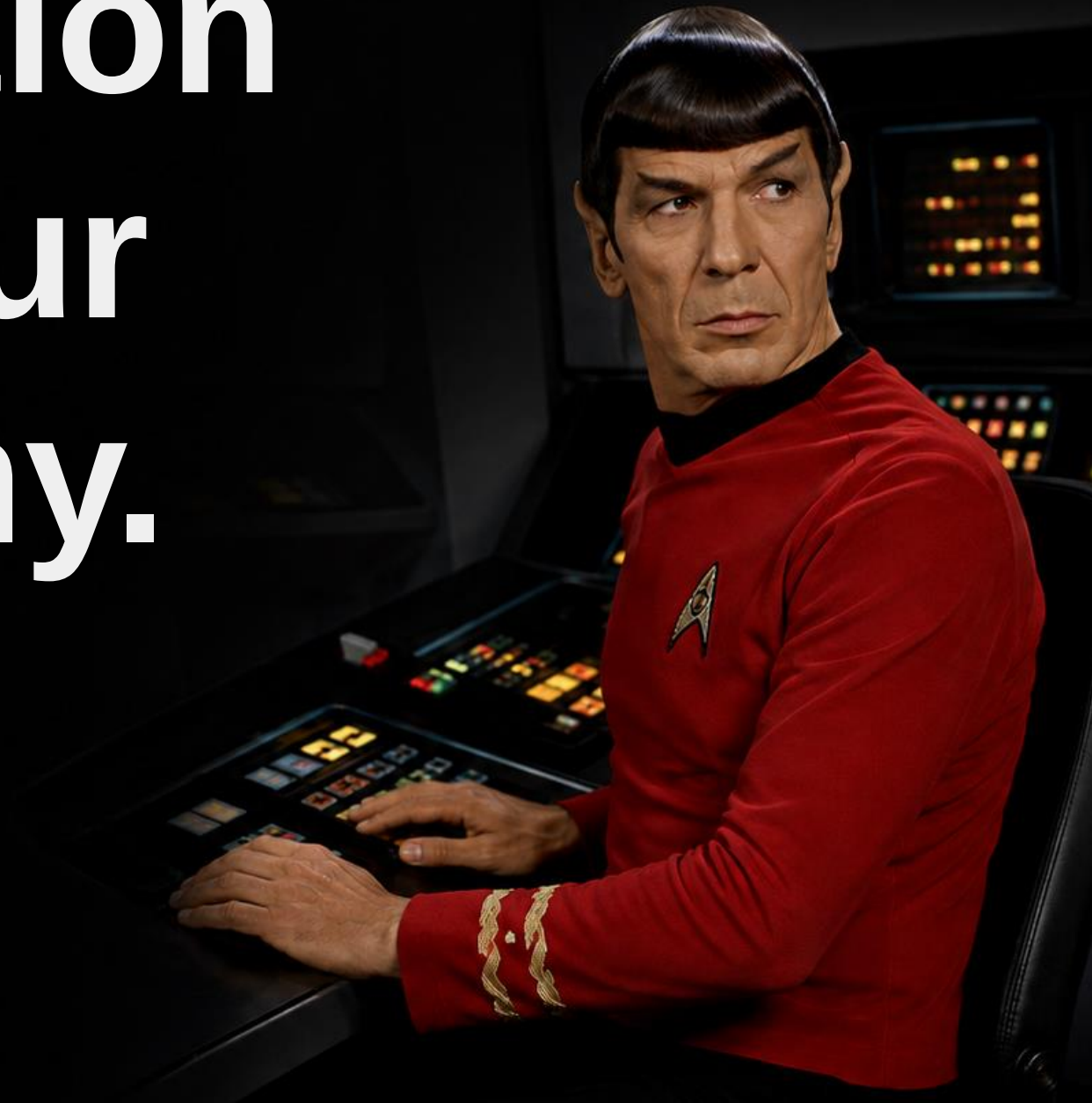
Misinformation is false information shared without intent to mislead. It poses lower risk than disinformation. It is often correctable, which offers a chance to build trust.

Disinformation is false information shared with intent to mislead or disrupt. It poses higher risks, including public safety or reputational risks. Use caution if responding.

Anger or Frustration involve strong feelings about a matter or situation. Risk levels can vary. They can be managed with empathy, facts and a robust feedback process.

Abuse or Harassment involve personal attacks, threats, and hate speech. They always pose a high risk, and your organization must take swift action to stop it, document it and escalate the matter so it can be dealt with by the proper authorities.

Emotion
is your
enemy.



**If it feels good,
it probably isn't.**



Fear inspires bad behaviour.



Critics aren't your
enemy. They **are**
constituents.



Everyone
believes
they're the
good person.



**Most people
like to feel
helpful.**



**You can't order
people to be
kind and decent.**



You *can*
inspire them.



**Nudge people
in natural
directions.**







**People who
have all the
answers only
look at part of
the problem.**



**Tough issues
force us to
balance
conflicting
concerns.**



**Anything said
negatively can
be said
positively.**



Use
non-debatable
messages.

**Your audience
includes people
you hope to hire
someday.**

Plan Ahead (15 Months)

Date	Tweet / Post	Category	Approval	Status
March 26, 2027	Still time to register for our summer gymnastics camp: www.town/newform	Gymnastics	Approved	Sent
April 1, 2027	Don't be an April fool. Jump in our pool! www.town/cannonballpic	Aquatics	Approved	
April 5, 2027	Yes, you can finish the 2027 May Fun Run with just four weeks of training. Here's how: www.town/Cram	Running	Pending Approval	



Fill the Vacuum

Deliver Your News Directly

- Website
- Social media posts and ads
- Subscription based newsletter
- Printed flyers and publications
- Direct mail, email, text
- Signs and notice boards



Success requires
investment,
commitment,
and discipline.

**If you don't put
time and energy
into getting it
right, you'll put
time and energy
into managing
issues.**



Look After Your Team

- Attention is often unkind.
- Staff can feel powerless and abused.
- Staff are often prevented from defending themselves.
- They deserve to know there's a plan -- and that they're valued.



Communicating Under Pressure



There aren't
'a million things that
can go wrong.'

There's about 25.



- Protests
- Cyber attack
- Service disruption
- Labour relations
- Disease
- Substance abuse
- Housing shortage
- Rain
- Floods
- Wind
- Snow / ice storms
- Forest fires
- Economic loss
- Sink hole
- Attack
- Fires
- Explosions
- Spills
- Pollution
- Crime
- Accidents
- Repugnant actions
- Poor management
- Human error
- Infestations



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- Spills
- Pollution
- Crime
- Accidents
- Repugnant actions
- Poor management
- Human error
- Infestations



There aren't
'a million questions.'
There's about 15.



Core Questions

- Trust / credibility
- Financial impact
- Health / safety
- Economy
- Environment
- Due diligence
- Transparency
- Fairness / justice
- Plan / next steps



Core Questions

- Trust / credibility
- What happened
- Financial impact
- Economy
- Health / Safety
- Environment
- Due diligence
- Commitment
- Transparency
- Fairness / justice
- Capacity / Ability
- Consequences
- Accountability
- Plan / next steps

**How do you want to
be remembered**

5 years from
now?



Positioning Statement

- Your story in a sentence
- Think 'best possible, long-term perception'
- Simple
- Credible
- Plain language
- Easy to remember
- Words / actions support it



Message Map

Lead With Positioning

	Key Message	3 Examples	3 Numbers
	Key Message	3 Examples	3 Numbers
	Key Message	3 Examples	3 Numbers
	Key Message	3 Examples	3 Numbers

Repeat Positioning

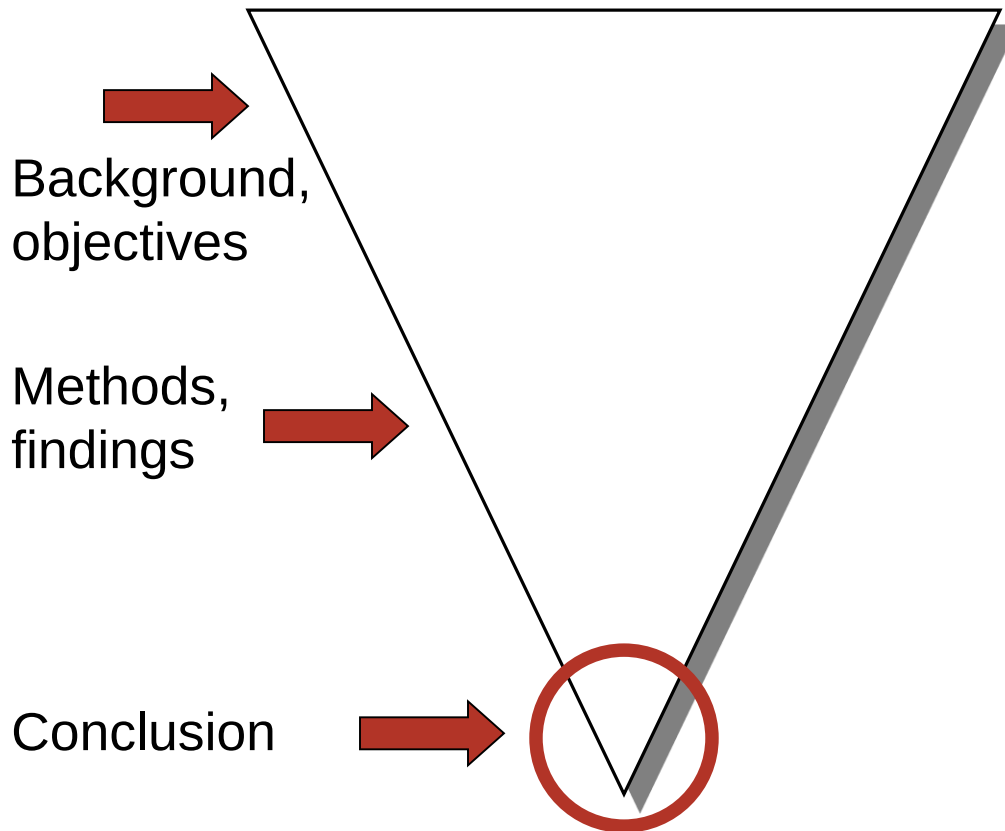


Formats



Thesis Model

Your Council Reports?

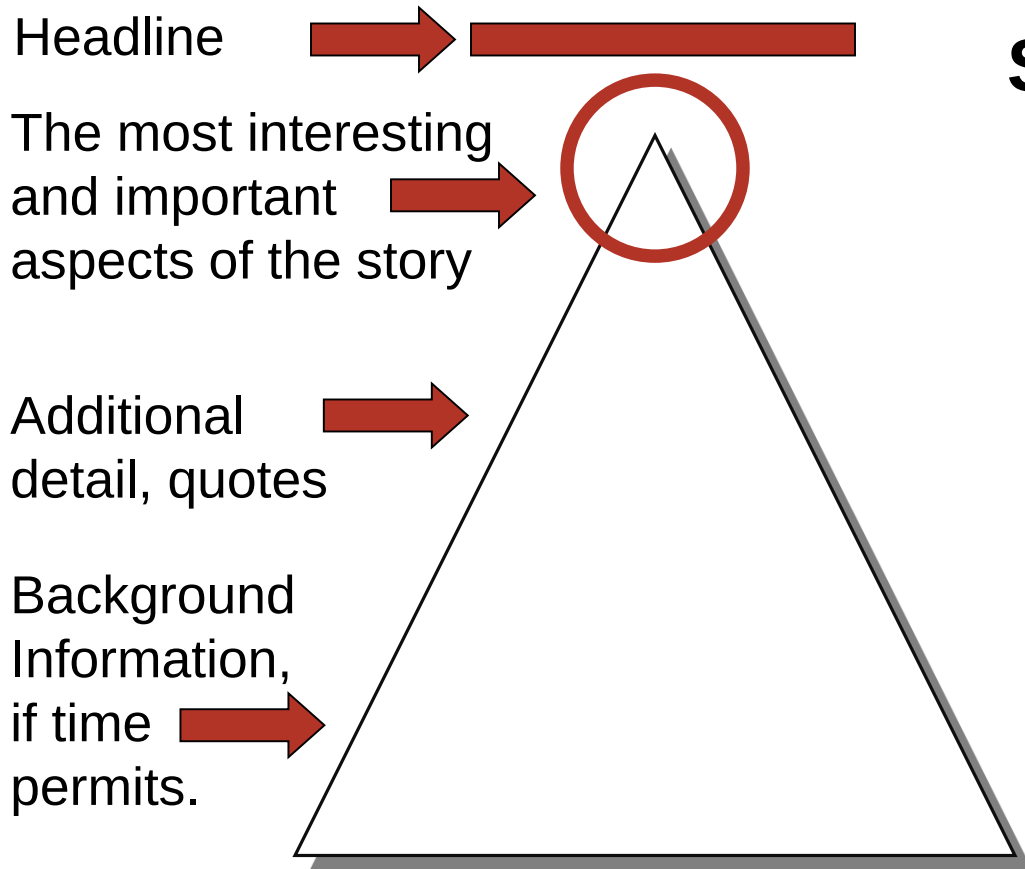


A chronological or academic approach to story telling.

Background up top, conclusions at the end.



The Media Model



Starts with the Point:

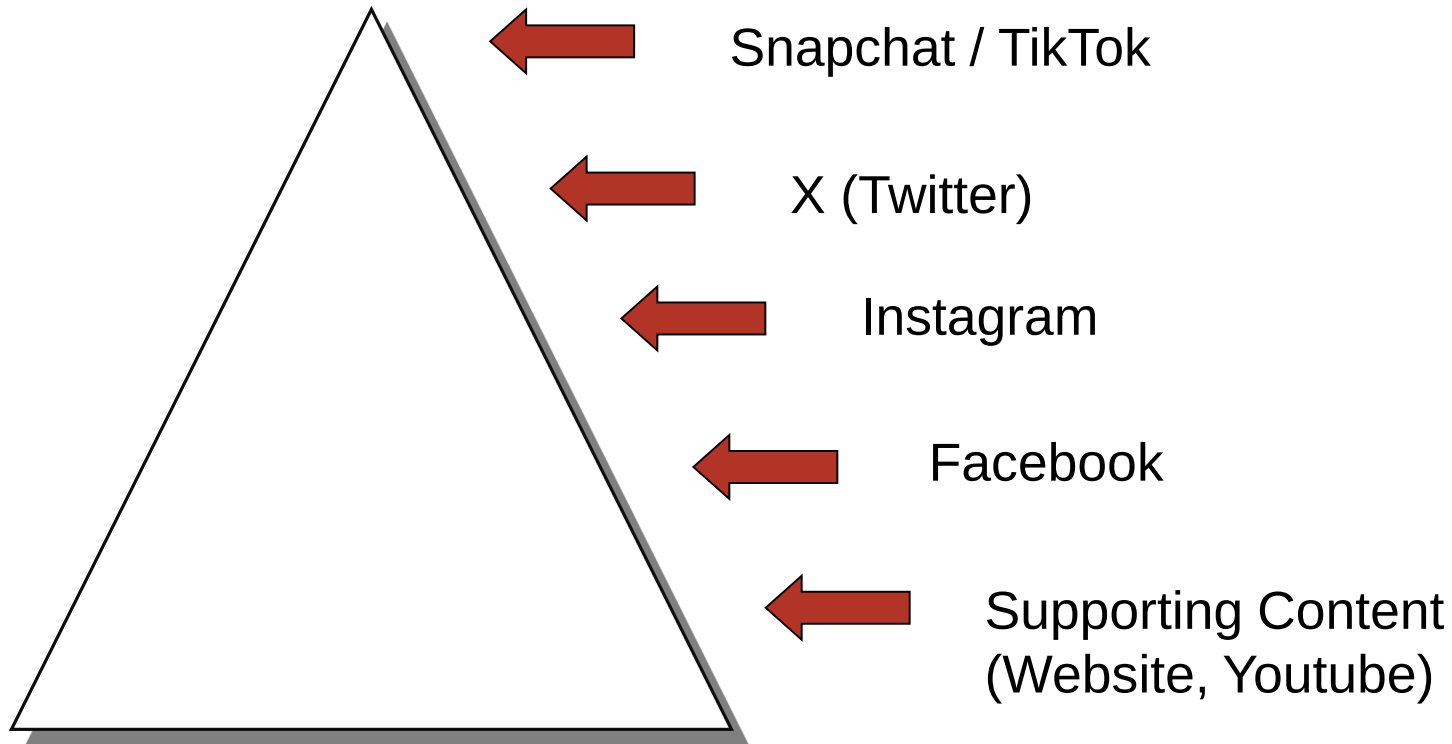
Priority information
up front (the 5 W's).

Details & background
near the end.

Allows audience
to skim.



The Social Media Model



Media Relations



Respond with
Service?

— *OR* —

Deliver
Leadership?



**Most people think
for 5 minutes and
speak for 30.**

**It's best to think
for 30 minutes
and speak for 5.**



**Great media
relations =
90% planning
10% delivery**



When Media Call

React quickly, but do not agree to an interview immediately.

- Create a break: “What’s your deadline?”
- The City gathers information and prepares a well-informed response that meets goals.
- The right spokesperson responds at a mutually acceptable time.



After Hours?

Stock phrases cover most of them.

- This event gives people a chance to share their thoughts and ideas. I'm here to listen.
- (Police / fire / school board) will provide an update when they have it. They are the best source of information right now.
- We have a decision to make. It is going to be a balance. Some want this; others want that.
- Time will tell.



Simplicity Wins



Simple messages travel further, faster, and more accurately. They also inspire trust.



Plain Language

- Stick to simple, everyday words.
- Use examples, analogies, or common sayings to bridge learning curves.
- Avoid jargon (like “resilient”) and acronyms.
- Ask AI for versions at different grade levels and keep what you like.



Grade Reading Levels

Ontario Government target for public communication.	Grade 3 to 6
Target for government websites	Grade 4 to 7
Normal conversation / Facebook groups	Grade 5 to 8
Journalists, news articles	Grade 6 to 10
Most public servants	Grade 12 to 16
Most Council reports	Grade 12 to 20+

Departments should be able to communicate at a grade 10 reading level, or less, when needed.



AI Prompt

Check how easy or difficult this document is to read. Use the Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level and at least two other common reading-level measures. Show each score separately, then give an overall grade-level range based on the scores, vocabulary, and sentence complexity.

Thank you for the ... conference.

This conference is ... mean it is important to (...
ROMA... it is impo ... tant to all of us.

It is an important ... ke Ontario work.

The success of the ... e success of Ontario.

Twice a year... at ... AMO Conference in Augu
come together.

In addition to the program, we have all of the formal delegation meetings
Province. There are usually about 300 of them.

On top of that we have all the informal connections that create solutions

Readability Statistics

Counts	
Words	2083
Characters	10127
Paragraphs	111
Sentences	135
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	1.2
Words per Sentence	15.2
Characters per Word	4.7
Readability	
Passive Sentences	8%
Flesch Reading Ease	53.2
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	9.5

OK

**Reporters share and quote
plain language messages.**

(Grade 5 to 10 reading level)

**They ignore, rewrite,
or misquote
complicated thoughts.**



Strong Messages





Memorable Messages

- Simple
- Unexpected
- Concrete
- Credible
- Emotion
- Story

** Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die,*
Chip Heath and Dan Heath, 2008





Memorable Messages

- What & why
- Colourful language
- A few good numbers & remarkable facts
- Examples, anecdotes & analogies
- Common sayings



Social Media



Courage

Someone will complain
about anything and
everything.



Caution

Dance like no
one's watching.

Text, post, and email
like it will be read in
court one day.



Personal Plan

- Objectives (Why are you on it?)
- How much time and energy?
- How transparent? Real Name?
- Target audience: Quality of quantity?
- Character and tone?
- Subject matter?
- Tools to manage accounts?
- Strategy. Your approach in a few sentences.
- Tactics and guidance on each account.
- Boundaries.



Typical Approach

- ✓ Helpful
- ✓ Humble
- ✓ Not overly promotional
- ✓ Positive
- ✓ Productive
- ✓ Interesting



Clear Policies

- ✓ For all employees
- ✓ For designated communicators
- ✓ Council Code of Conduct



Clear Boundaries



Good discussion. Your interest is appreciated. This tweet shares information from our website. www.HereYouGo



Staff are working on a report. It should be done in about a week. <https://AreYouSure>



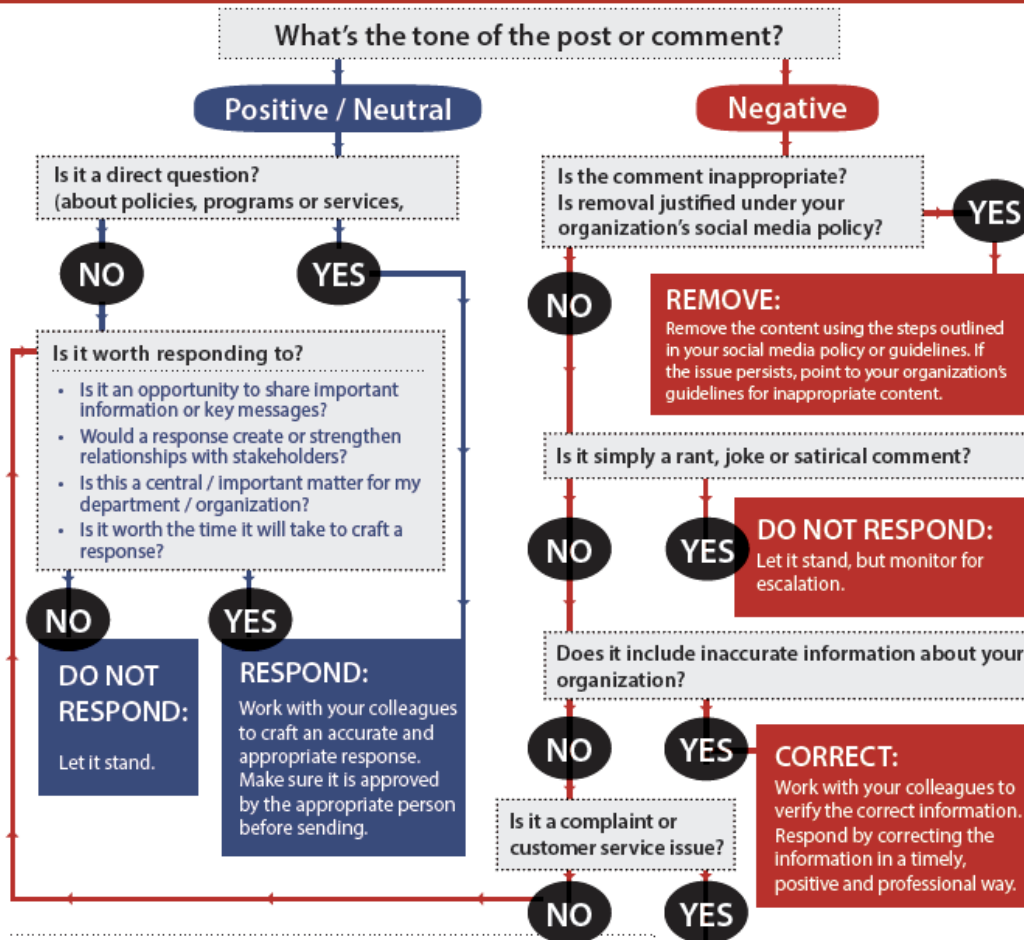
This is a good question for the manager responsible. Hey [@Staff_Personal_Account](#), can you weigh in on this discussion for us?



Boundaries

- Confidential / closed meetings
- Council role vs. staff roles
- Legal agreements
- Personal / employee privacy

Social Media Response Chart



RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

Keep these things in mind when you're crafting your response:

- **Respect Privacy:** Don't share or invite others to share personal information on public channels.
- **Be Credible:** Stick to the facts and avoid value judgments.
- **Respect Ownership:** Cite your sources. If you're sharing or drawing from someone else's information or material, then say so.
- **Be Appropriate:** Your tone should be appropriate to the situation and should reflect positively on your organization.

** Adapted from the United States Environmental Protection Agency's social media response chart.*

For more resources, visit www.redbrick.ca.

Social Media Moderation



1. Pick your battles

- Most can be ignored.
- Stay out of debates.
- Consider target audiences (& staff).



2. Address Actual Problems

- Listen carefully to the actual complaint (or concern).
- Fix real problems.
- Good government should take priority over (good?) debate.



3. Plan ahead

An ounce of **prevention**
is worth a pound of cure.



4. **BIG** dreams call for **BIG** processes.

- Long range planning.
- Traditional stakeholder processes.
- Communicate process repeatedly.
- Show you are listening.
- Make it easy to engage.

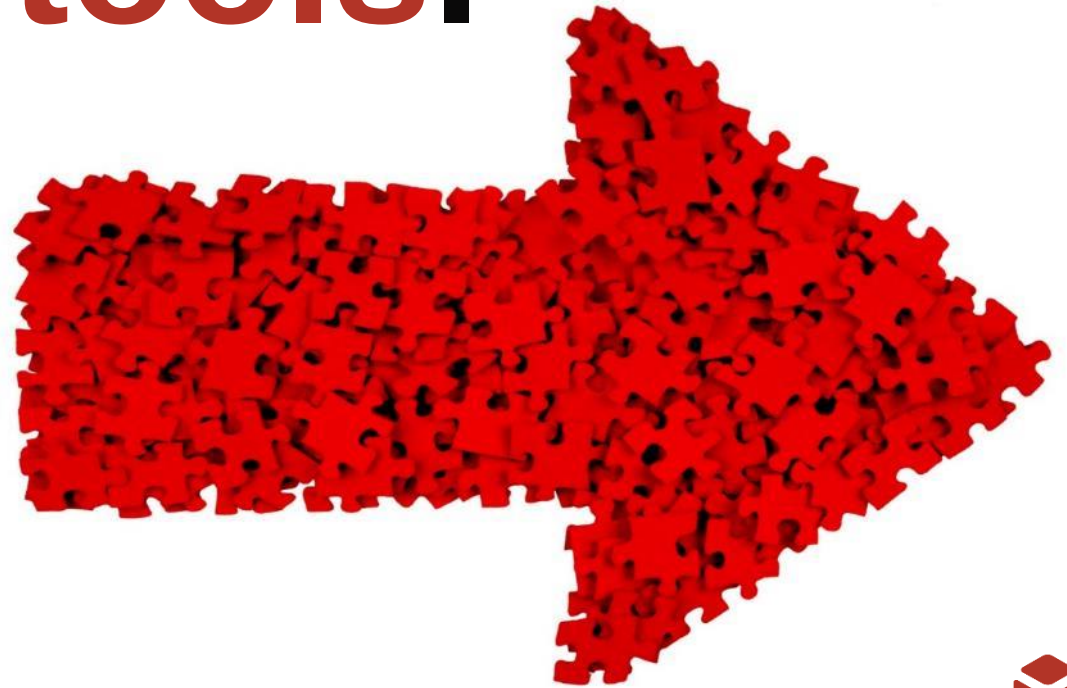


5. Inform **opinion leaders.**

- Social media savvy ‘champions’ who are known on community networks.
- They can do more on Facebook than you can (e.g. closed groups).
- Make sure they are informed and ready.



6. Direct people to **practical** and **helpful** tools.





City of Kawartha
Lakes

@cityofkawarthalakes

Home

About

Photos

Videos

Events

Posts

Notes

Community

Create a Page



Like



Follow



Share



City of Kawartha Lakes

January 25 · 🌐

Another messy winter weekend! Our plow trucks have been working on the roads since early morning. Please fully clear the snow off your car before leaving, and drive carefully. For winter tips, see our website. <https://www.kawarthalakes.ca/.../winter-and-what-you-need-to-...>



18

12 Comments 9 Shares



Like



Comment



Share



All Comments ▾



Write a comment...



City of Kawartha Lakes Please let us know about service requests by going to this page on our website: <https://forms.kawarthalakes.ca/Report-an-issue-or-concern>



FORMS.KAWARTHALAKES.CA

Report an issue or concern - Kawartha
Lakes



Contact Us



Send Message



Invite your friends to like this Page



9,369 people like this



10,154 people follow this



Scottie Martin likes this or has checked in



6,549 check-ins

About

See All



(705) 324-9411



Send Message



www.kawarthalakes.ca



Public Service · City Hall · Government
Organization



Hours 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM

[Open Now](#)



Suggest Edits



Page Transparency

See More

Facebook is showing information to help you better understand the purpose of a Page. See actions taken by the people who manage and post content.



Page created - August 4, 2010

Related Pages



Kawartha Lakes Thi...

News & Media Website



Like



Foodland Ontario

Ellen Timms likes this
Government Organization



Like



KLAWS - Kawartha La...

Emma Murphy likes this
Nonprofit Organization



Like



Make A
Payment



Community
Events
Calendar



Municipal
News



Report a
Problem



Council
Meetings



Pool
Programming



Service
Disruptions



Book a
Facility



**7. Maintain
reasonable
rules and
standards.**



facebook.com/CityofPickering/about_details

f

Q

Home

Video

People

Pages

Grid

Messages

Notifications

Profile

PICKERING

City Anniversary

10-2025

City of Pickering

16K followers • 44 following

Contact us

Message

Follow

Posts

About

Reels

Photos

Videos

Live

More

About

Contact and basic info

Page transparency

Details About City of Pickering

About City of Pickering

Terms of Use/Disclaimer

To ensure that all online communications through the City's Facebook and Twitter accounts are productive and beneficial to all users and to the public at large, we require all users to refrain from:

- making defamatory, slanderous, disrespectful, hurtful, profane, obscene, threatening or illegal statements of any kind
- violating any copyright, trademark or other intellectual property rights of any person
- violating the privacy of any person, including any other user of the City's social media channels

The City reserves the right to:

- remove any material that it considers objectionable
- ban future posts from users who violate these Terms of Use
- reprint or quote any post along with the name and/or username of the person who made the post

City staff make an effort to regularly monitor posts made on the City's website and on its Twitter and Facebook accounts, however, staff are unable to monitor all posts at all times. If you feel that a post is objectionable, you are encouraged to contact us by email or by telephone at 905.683.7575.

The City is not responsible for any loss, cost, damages or harm which may result from the use by any person of this website or the posting of any statements by users on this website or on the City's Twitter and Facebook accounts. Users of the City's website agree to indemnify and hold the City

City of Fredericton Government

30K followers • 59 following

Welcome to the City of Fredericton

Visit us at: www.fredericton.ca

Social media terms of use: www.fredericton.ca/social-media

Government organization @cityoffredericton (506) 460-2020

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Links

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Privacy and legal info

Bio



Welcome to the City of Fredericton

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Reels

City of Fredericton Government's Reels



8. Live Your Values

You create your
brand and culture,
bit by bit, every day.



9. Direct Messages

- Your messages will be shared.
- Focus on the core concern, not the specific text, or assumed 'tone'.
- Conversations often ease tension better than correspondence can.



**10. Find ways to
be inspirational.**

**Avoid being
critical.**



**A picture is
worth 1,000
words.**

















Harkirat Singh shared a post.

December 8 · 🌐



And so it begins! Looking forward to a productive four years!



The City of Brampton

December 4 · 🌐

It's official - meet the 2018-2022 City of Brampton Council.

Need to connect with a Councillor? Contact details... [Continue Reading](#)



132

7 Comments 1 Share

Like

Comment

Share





Harkirat Singh

December 4 · 🌐



Your current City Council! I look forward to working with everyone to move our city forward.



👍❤️😮 266

44 Comments 6 Shares

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share





INAUGURAL 2018

**Region
of Peel**
working with you











1. Courage

Someone will complain
about anything and
everything.



**When a camera
faces a window,
the subject is
dark and grainy.**



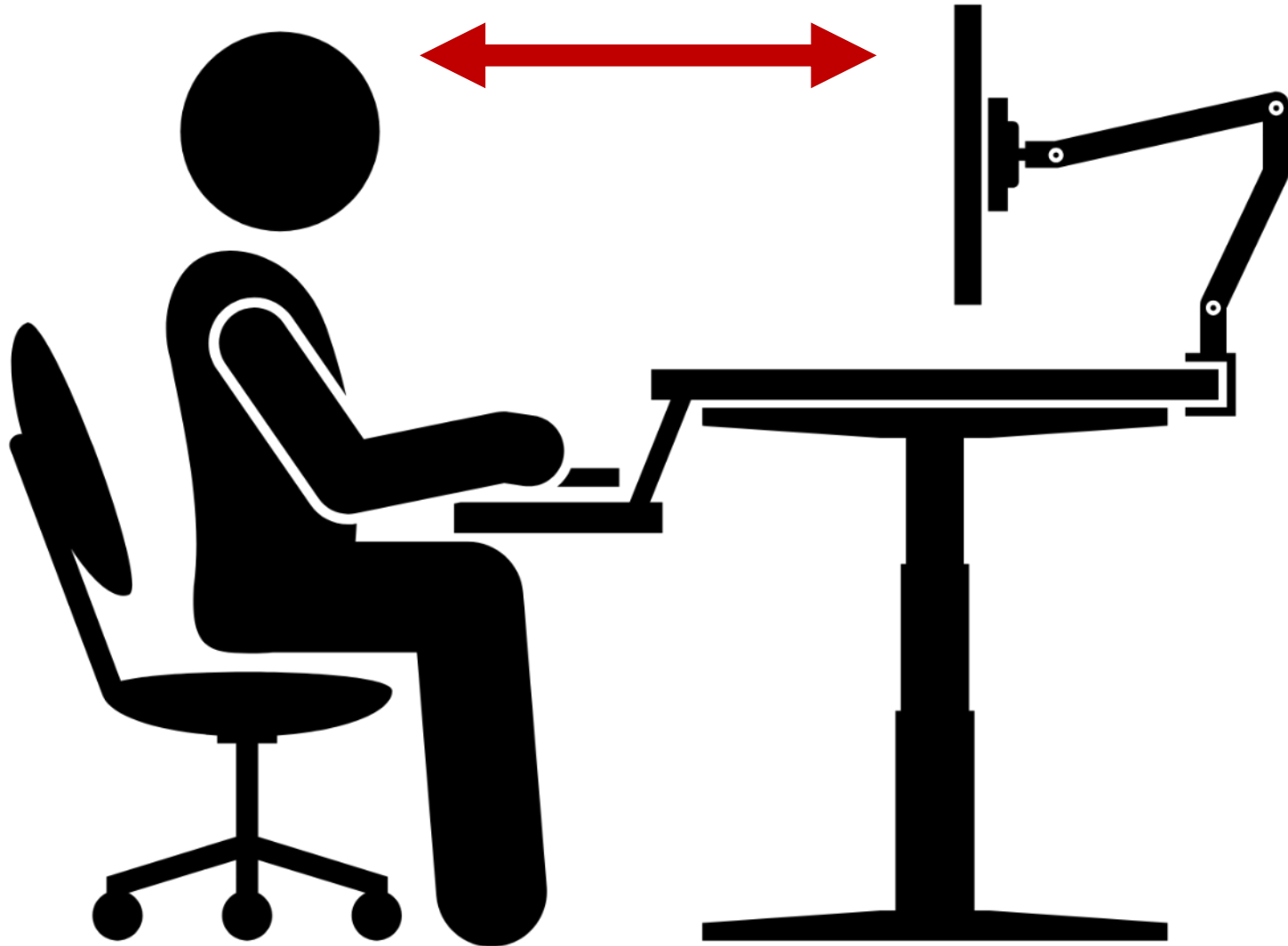
**Face a window
to get better
results from the
same camera.**



**Close drapes
and face bright
lighting for best
results.**



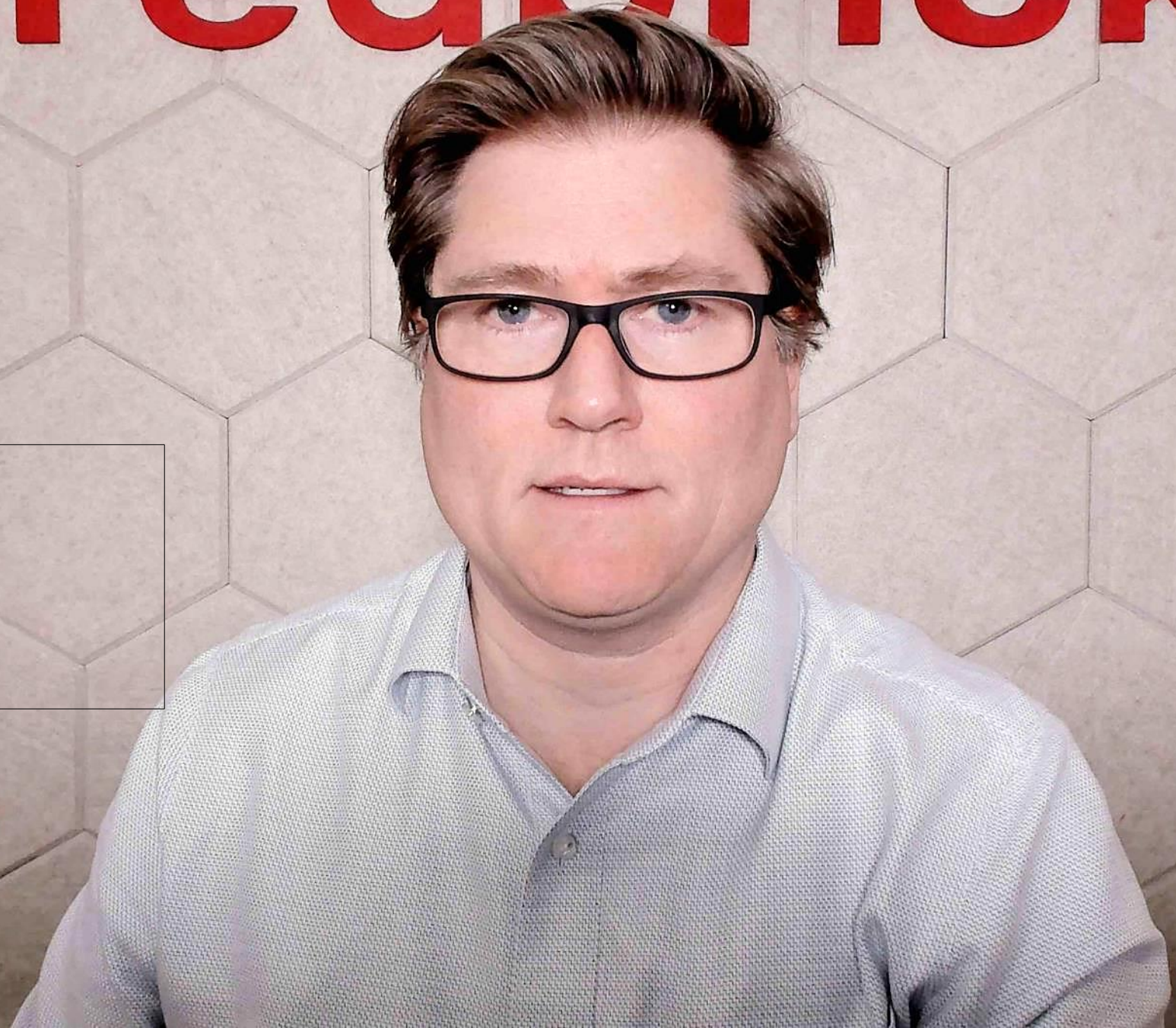
Place your camera at eye level.







readbrick



Maintain eye contact.





COVID Key Messages

Please stay home... to stay safe... and to keep others safe.

- The virus spreads through the air and on surfaces when people come together.
- It spreads easily, and some people get very sick when they get it.
- Staying at home reduces your risk, and it helps to make sure you do give it to others.
- We need to keep case numbers low... to keep people safe... and to make sure hospitals can look after everyone who needs help.
- Case numbers can spike quickly... so our hospitals can be swamped by it.
 - We saw that early on in New York, Italy and Germany.
- Hygiene helps. Stay apart. Wash hands regularly. Clean surfaces in your home. Wear a mask when you are around other people.
- Vaccines will make a difference before this year ends.
- We will not have to live this way forever, but everyone should be careful right now.

**Put notes near your camera,
to improve eye contact.**

redbrick



Delivery



Proven Interview Techniques

- **Flagging** – *“This is a really important point”*
- **Blocking and Bridging** – *Tell YOUR story*
- **Headlining** – *State your conclusion, your key message first*
- **Directing** – *Lead reporter to topics that you want to discuss*
- **The Wrap Up** – *Seize or create opportunities to re-emphasize key messages*



Avoid Proven Pitfalls

- Bridge away from “what if” questions
- Correct misinformation immediately
- Don’t be intimidated by “machine gun” questioning
- Repeat answers for repeat questions
- Don’t rush to fill silence
- Don’t repeat negative language



Avoid Proven Pitfalls

- Finish your answer
- Avoid saying “no comment”
- Don’t argue with reporters
- Don’t make up what you don’t know
- Never, EVER lie to a reporter
- Don’t go “off the record”





redbrick
COMMUNICATIONS



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