

Leadership Lessons

As president-elect of PRSA Dallas, I was excited to kick off 2014 with a panel of distinguished chief communications officers to discuss leadership lessons. The three panelists have great experience working with and for the C-Suite at top companies including American Airlines, Dr. Pepper Snapple Group, Easton-Bell Sports, Energy Future Holdings, Kimberly-Clark, RadioShack, and Zale. I was fortunate to serve as moderator for the discussion and wanted to share my notes as they provide such a rich perspective on upper management's thinking and approach.

Tina Barry's best advice she received:

- Think less about what you want to say and more about what you want people to hear
- Be kinder than you have to be to be the kind of leader others want to follow
- Pursue financial communications to really understand the business and your industry

Lisa Singleton's top learnings from crisis situations:

- Conduct an environmental scan if time permits
- Research on the front end, not just the back end
- Test messages first, and drop those that don't work
- Make sure all parts of the corporation are in alignment, from the C-Suite, to legal and throughout the organization

Laura Moore's top "ah-ha" moments:

- Sometimes you have to go slow to go fast. It's important to really understand where people are before you can move forward.
- Nothing rallies the troops like a good crisis. It's easier to get people to think about change during a crisis.
- "Business athletes" score more and win big. People are valued more when they can play above their position and have business acumen.
- Say yes when you mean no. Be the solutions provider and help people figure out how to get done what they want done. You don't always have to do the project yourself.

Some of my top learnings:

- All relationships are a negotiation.
- Be a continual learner and stay curious. Network and keep up with popular culture.
- Base decisions on facts and data as much as you can. Confirm your instincts.
- If you majored in PR or communications, make sure you also study business or a field related to your target industry.
- Reputation is like coral. It takes years to develop, and can be destroyed in one storm.
- You don't have to explain what you don't say.
- Make sure actions pass the "red faced test."

- Employees are already your ambassadors. The question is whether they have the information and motivation to represent your brand the way you would want them to.
- Doing nothing, or not deciding, is a decision.