

## Five General Rules for Building Trust and Credibility

(Covello and Allen, 1988)

1. **Involve the public as a partner.** People will be more accepting of information when spokespeople convey that they are in the situation together with the public and welcome the public's input.
2. **Recognize the public's specific concerns.** People will be dissatisfied when information does not address their needs.
3. **Be open and honest.** People will be more accepting of information when spokespeople display truthfulness, honesty, and a willingness to address tough issues.
4. **Coordinate with other credible sources.** People will be dissatisfied if organizations deliver inconsistent messages.
5. **Meet the media's needs.** If the media are working on a specific aspect of the story, they will report it to the public with or without your help. Make sure you tell the media what you want the public to know.

### MYTH VS. TRUTH

**RISK COMMUNICATIONS MYTH:** *What you say is more important than how you say it.*

**TRUTH:** In a crisis the public and the media will trust the messages they receive if they believe officials have their best interests at heart. It is critical to demonstrate empathy, compassion, and concern when delivering information.

## Non-Verbal Communication

Another important element to establish credibility is to be mindful of your body language and what it can mean to your audience

**Poor Eye Contact:** dishonest, closed, unconcerned, nervous, lying

**Sitting back in chair:** not interested, unenthusiastic, unconcerned, withdrawn, distancing oneself, uncooperative

**Arms crossed on chest:** arrogant, not interested, uncaring, not listening, impatient, defensive, angry, stubborn, not accepting

**Infrequent hand gestures/body movements:** dishonest, deceitful, nervous, lacking self-confidence

**Rocking movements:** nervous, lacking self-confidence

**Pacing back and forth:** nervous, lacking self-confidence, cornered, angry, upset

### TEMPLATE TOOL: IDK (I DON'T KNOW)

WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW, CAN'T ANSWER, OR ARE NOT THE BEST SOURCE FOR INFORMATION:

- Repeat the question (trying to avoid negative words or allegations).
- Say "I wish I could answer...;" or "My ability to answer is limited...;" or "We are still looking into the situation..."
- Say why you can't answer. Don't say "No comment!"
- Give a follow-up (what appropriate contact person will call with a deadline).
- Bridge to what can be said (convey your prepared messages).

*Frequent hand-to-face contact/resting your head in your hands:* dishonest, deceitful, nervous, tired, bored

*Hidden hands:* deceptive, guilty, insincere

*Speaking from behind barriers (podiums, lecterns, tables):*

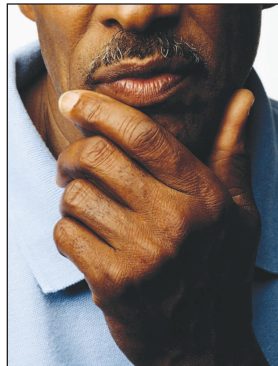
dishonest, deceitful, too formal, withdrawn, distancing oneself, unconcerned, not interested, superior

*Speaking from an elevated position:*

superior, dominant, judgmental

*Speaking from behind a desk:*

bureaucratic, uncaring, removed, distant, uninvolved



*Touching and/or rubbing nose:* in doubt, disagreeing, nervous, deceitful

*Touching and/or rubbing eyes:* in doubt, disagreeing, nervous, deceitful

*Pencil chewing/hand pinching:* lacking self-confidence, in doubt

*Jingling money/items in pockets:* nervous, lacking self-confidence, lacking self-control, deceitful. A good tip: empty your pockets before an interview or presentation.

*Constant throat clearing:* nervous, lacking self-confidence

*Drumming on table, tapping feet, twitching, etc.:* nervous, hostile, anxious, impatient, bored



## How the Public Perceives It: Overcoming Mental Noise

When people process information during high stress or emotionally charged situations, they commonly experience “mental noise.” Mental noise creates an inability to process information rationally. When mental noise reaches significant levels some people are unable to hear, understand, or remember information at all.

As a messenger it is important to understand how your audience thinks, what concerns they may have and what is important to them. When responding to their concerns, keep in mind the mental noise they may be experiencing, and keep your message empathetic, brief, and to the point.

Because of these mental noise factors, peoples’ perceptions of the seriousness of the situation or the actions that need to be taken may not be determined by the facts, but instead by emotions or perceptions of the event. People do not like to be “put” at risk at any time, but especially when they are under high stress. When communicating about an emergency, keep the perceptions outlined in the chart below in mind.

RISKS VIEWED AS...	...ARE MORE ACCEPTABLE THAN RISKS VIEWED AS...
voluntary	being imposed
under an individual's control	controlled by others
having clear benefits	having little or no benefit
distributed fairly	unfairly distributed
natural	manmade
statistical	catastrophic
generated by a trusted source	generated by an untrusted source
familiar	exotic
affecting adults	affecting children