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Organization's Name: Sinickas Communications, Inc.
Category/Division/Subdivision: Communication Skills/Division 17/Subdivision 17.01
Title of Entry: “Communicating Is Not Optional”
Time Period of Project: June, 2001
Brief Description: An article published in the *Harvard Management Communication Letter* intended to help operational managers see how better communication with their employees will help them achieve their business goals.

Need/Opportunity

Last February, I received a call from one of the editors at the *Harvard Management Communication Letter (HMCL)*, a publication from Harvard Business School Publishing. She had read an article I wrote the previous year in the Ragan Communication's *Journal of Employee Communication Management*, “Communications, Meet Operations.” She wanted me to write an article for her publication on how managers can improve their business results through more effective employee communication. Because of my own need for as much free marketing and publicity as possible to help generate business for my communication consulting firm, I was more than happy to oblige.

Intended Audience(s)

About 18,000 to 20,000 supervisors, managers and executives in all types of corporate, non-profit and governmental organizations around the world subscribe to *HMCL* in any given month. It is passed along on routing distributions to many more. Corporate communicators, business press editors, educators and others interested in business communication are also readers.

Goals/Objectives

I had goals for the article at two levels, one for me and one for the readers and editors of the publication.

- 1. Generate additional recognition for my firm because of the Harvard connection.** In addition to being able to add the article to my biographical information for future proposals, I hoped to:
 - a. Obtain two to three mentions of the article in the organizational communication press.
 - b. Expand the reach of the firm's visibility to non-communication executives, who typically have higher budgets, measured in terms of new leads.
- 2. Provide enduring value to article readers and the editors,** as measured in several ways:
 - a. Have readers make more than the average number of reprint requests from the publisher.
 - b. Have at least 75% of my clients, to whom I sent reprints with cover letters, find the article to be of use.
 - c. To eventually be solicited to write an article for the *Harvard Business Review*, which accepts less than five unsolicited articles for publication a year.

Solution Overview

The editors asked me to submit an outline for an article to appear in the body of the newsletter in the August 2001 edition. We reviewed the outline and eliminated a few sections. I believe the editors were pleased with the outline because they increased the word count for the article, made it a cover story and moved it up to June.

After I wrote the article, they edited it to more closely match their style. For example, from reading the article, I could have been a reporter rather than a consultant actively working on many of the clients' projects mentioned. They de-personalized the anecdotes to give the article more authority. They also significantly re-wrote the lead, but I liked their version much better. It even sounded so much like other parts of the article that at first I thought I had written it!

They sent the revised draft to me and accepted most of my comments.

Implementation and Challenges

- **Documentation.** Some of the examples I used are based on examples I read about several years ago. The copyeditor for the publication spent quite a bit of time researching some of those sources. While I was able to find the source material for two or three of the examples (Brad Whitworth's research at Hewlett-Packard and the Denison research), I could not find the *Los Angeles Times* article mentioned at the end of my article. Their copyeditor, whose name I no longer recall, did a terrific job in finding the article, as well as the earlier article that precipitated the corporate communication disaster detailed in the article.
- **Budget.** For the first time, budget was not a challenge. *HCML* actually paid me \$2,000 to write the article.

Measurement/Evaluation of Outcomes

Here's how we did on each goal:

1. **Generate additional recognition for my firm because of the Harvard connection.** I immediately added the article to my biography and my Web site, www.sinicom.com:
 - a. We not only obtained two mentions of the article in the organizational communication press we had hoped for (*Ragan Report*, *CCM Communicator*), but the article was also picked up in syndication and published in daily newspaper business sections. (A clip is included behind the "Research Results" tab divider.) In addition, I was interviewed by *Investors Business Daily* for a front-page, upper-right corner article on June 25, 2001, that they wrote on the impact of communication on the bottom line. I was also able to suggest a number of my clients for interviews, two of whom were also quoted. When I asked how the reporter had heard of me, he said he had read the *HCML* article. Also pleasantly surprising is that a large number of people referring to the article recall seeing it in the *Harvard Business Review*.
 - b. We did expand the reach of the firm's visibility to non-communication executives, but so far it has resulted in only two proposal opportunities, both of which are still pending.

2. Provide enduring value to article readers and the editors:

- a. Readers did make more than the average number of reprint requests from the publisher for my cover article, as of a few months ago (see illustration below). When I called to get recent numbers, my original contact was no longer there and the new person was not willing to share that information.
- b. 100% of my clients who read the article said it was useful or very useful. In fact, 70% selected “very useful” on the survey they completed.
- c. Nothing so far on a request to write for HBR. But I haven’t given up yet. I did receive a holiday greeting card from the Harvard Business School Publishing!

