



EPISODE 21

Strategic Communication: Tips for Today's Business Challenges

- Introduction:** Welcome to Strategic Insights, brought to you by Pride staff. On each episode, we bring you interviews with leading management and employment experts from across the country. Your host for Strategic Insights is Brad Smith. And now, here's Brad.
- Brad Smith:** Hello, and thank you so much for listening to Strategic Insights from Pride staff. I'm your host, Brad Smith, and we have an amazing episode lined up today. Our topic is on strategic communication and really giving you tips for some of today's changing business challenges that we're all facing. And in this episode, I'm happy to welcome world renowned speaker, author and consultant, Ryan Avery. Ryan, thank you so much for joining us.
- Ryan Avery:** Absolutely. Thank you for having me. I feel like I'm part of the team now.
- Brad Smith:** I know it. I know it. For all of those listening, we've had the pleasure of bringing Ryan in for several events. We brought Ryan in to speak to our full leadership team at our annual conference to talk about how to be more effective leaders. We had Ryan do an amazing webinar episode for us that walked through some of his best practices for communication and how to deal with different generations and how, again, to be more effective leaders.
- Brad Smith:** And just a little bit of background on Ryan. At age 25, he became the youngest world champion of public speaking in history. He competed against 30,000 contestants from 116 countries, and he claimed the 2012 world championship for Toastmasters International. He's an Emmy award-winning journalist, seven-time world record holder, two-time bestselling author. The list goes on and on, Ryan. And I'm so excited to have you because you're going to talk to us about how to go from A to "The" in our industry. So, if you don't mind, give us a real high-level overview of what that means. What does it mean to go from A to "The"?
- Ryan Avery:** Well, you're listening all the things, and you made me sound a lot better than I actually am. So, thank you for listing all the good things. I appreciate that. This is the concept I've been studying for 10 years. It's this mindset. It's this understanding. It's changed the way that I parent my children. It's changed the way that I run my business. It's changed the way I wake up in the morning.

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And it's this mindset of understanding, "Do you want to be a, or do you want to be the at what you do? Do you want to follow a leader or do you want to follow the leader? Are you trying to come up with a solution or the solution?"

Ryan Avery: It's this whole lifestyle of looking at things differently versus a versus the. Because what happens is, when we're a, we settle. When we're the, we have standards, and those standards are what we create. And so, what I'm asking everyone to do is look at what life is like when you look at it as, what would happen if I became the at this. And this could be anything. It could be leadership, it could be HR, it could be recruiting. It could be anything you want.

Brad Smith: Now, Ryan, I know becoming the, a big portion of that is improving communication. It's building connections with others. But if you listen to the news right now and you hear the stats from employers across the country, we've seen this massive labor shortage. We hear the term the Great Resignation, and the latest data that just came out showed almost 4.5 million people voluntarily left their positions over the last month.

Ryan Avery: Yes.

Brad Smith: So, what are you seeing in the market right now, and what do you think has led to this mass exodus?

Ryan Avery: A lot of things, the first thing is, we're seeing pay increase. We're seeing increases. "Okay, well, I'll pay you more money to stay." I've talked to leaders who don't even want to hire people. They simply don't want to lose people anymore. So, they're giving more money. That's an okay strategy. It's not good long term. It's not good for, really, the business or anyone, or simply all the things. And the other thing that I'm seeing, there's really two main components of it that people think it's money based. And so, they put money on the table.

Ryan Avery: What they forget is, people don't necessarily, to a certain point, care about money. What they care about is meaning. And people want to have meaningful relationships, meaningful connections, meaningful understanding of what their position does, than the value that they add to the world or to the industry that they're contributing to.

Ryan Avery: So, my first suggestion is, instead of plopping down money, which is a good thing, if you have it, is also contributing and sharing, in a meaningful way, what that person does to contribute to society, or the industry, or the world. We've seen this. It's this really important aspect of cause versus compensation. People want to know how their role plays a better cause for bigger industry rather than having more money.

Ryan Avery: The other one, the number one reason why people are leaving right now, by the way, according to open source, is they stop feeling appreciated. They no longer feel appreciated at what they do or who they are. And again, it goes back to meaning, instead of money. And I share this with executives. It's not about these big bonuses anymore. Companies, this very triangular in the shape of, If you attended my webinar, it's very triangular in the shape of, "At the end of year, I waited until December to see what my big bonus would be."

Ryan Avery: Well, instead of big bonuses, what if you gave small bonuses throughout the year, on a regular basis, in a more meaningful way to that person? So, the appreciation was customized versus generalized. What if you gave someone a raise entry that likes to do running, and you paid for their running event? What if you paid for their family of meals for a week because you know that the parent is sick and hasn't been able to have a good, healthy meal, and you take care of them, you appreciate them at their home. So, yes, paying is good, but looking at the costs and looking at appreciation are really important things that we need to do right now to keep our people happy and motivated.

Brad Smith: So, looking at cause and looking at appreciation, I know a lot of companies are putting a focus on that. And in some cases, though, leaders become so inundated with the day to day and battling fires that this might fall through the cracks. What are some of the big mistakes that you are seeing right now? And how can leaders become better communicators and really show their team meaning, show their team that they are appreciated?

Ryan Avery: Yeah, I mean, I share this over and over and over again. It's this huge mistake leaders are making because it was a very old school way of doing things. And it's this concept of managing your team versus motivating your team. So, leaders feel like they have to go in and they have to manage the business and manage the people. You can manage your spread sheets, you can manage your budgets. People don't want to be managed anymore. They feel motivated. What does that mean? Motivation, when you break down the word, it stems from the Latin prefix *motive* or *moti* or *mot*, which means to move. -*ation* is a suffix in Latin, which means to take action. So, by definition, the word means moving someone to action. It does not mean getting someone to pay attention.

Ryan Avery: Managers, they get rooms full of people together and get them to pay attention. The motivators understand what gets their team to move. And then they talk about that, they focus on that. It's this concept. It's this really old school style of leadership, of managerial style. And it's used to be command and control. It was all about commanding and control. I step into "leadership," and I am the manager. I need to command and control the things that need to get done.

Ryan Avery: Nobody likes that anymore. Nobody wants that. Motivators, what they do is they direct and drive. Really good motivators, they know how to direct, which means I want to get to a certain location, and they make sure that the car, or the company, is driving. Do they need to be in the driver's seat? No. The responsibility is that it is driving, that it is moving forward.

Ryan Avery: So, one of the biggest things that we can do is stop managing our people and motivating them by directing and driving and seeing what actions they can use to be better at what they do. The other one that I would say that I wish, and this has been around forever, all the research that I've done, and all the experience that I've had, not enough leaders are talking about failures. They are afraid to talk about the mistakes that they've made and realizing that failures are one of the best ways we can learn, that we can relate, that we can add value to, and celebrating those failures.

Ryan Avery: Like, I hear leaders who are like, "We're always moving forward. We're never moving backwards, blah." Like, what? No, that's so stupid. I move backwards all the time. I back out my car out of my garage in order to move forward on the road. But some people think that moving backwards is a negative thing. In fact, no, I actually see a wider perspective when I go backwards. I meet new people. I relate to more people.

Ryan Avery: We celebrated our company, the things that we do. We have a rule, though. Don't make the same mistake twice. So, yes, you can make the mistake. Yes, we can talk about it. We can learn from it. But share the failures. Don't be this. I also saw this stupid shirt the other day. It was like, "I'm always a leader, never a follower." I was like, "That's so dumb. What? No, you should be following other people to see what they're doing and what they're not doing, and how you then, and we can, do a better job at leading."

Ryan Avery: So, those would be my things. Celebrate failure. It's okay to move backwards as long as you're moving forward. One more thing. I could talk with you all day. I found that we, as leaders, we're willing to take one step back to take two steps forward. What I find the best leaders are willing to do, they're willing to take 30 steps back to take 200 steps forward, but it's a lot harder to do that. So, you got to ask yourself if you're willing to do those kinds of things.

Brad Smith: I love that concept of embracing failure and learning from that. And I also think that goes a long way into building transparency in your organization and building trust from those under you.

Ryan Avery: Absolutely. Yeah, I'm not perfect. Not even close. My team will tell you. But we make mistakes all the time. We don't make the same mistake every time. And we make sure that we grow and we learn from those things. Absolutely.

Brad Smith: So, Ryan, one of the changes that we've all had to adapt to is doing more remotely. So, over the last two years, we've seen a shift to online communication tools and trying to lead from afar. And that's been a challenge for some leaders and some companies. So, what can those that are leading an organization and team members do to improve virtual communication and really increase our confidence?

Ryan Avery: Yes. We use this acronym in our company called CLAP, C-L-A-P. So, anytime we turn on our cameras, anytime we get into a virtual meeting, we make sure that we CLAP. CLAP stands for this. C stands for content, and what I mean by that is the content in which you are presenting should be in front of you and nothing else. I don't have my to-do list in front of me right now. I have other keynotes that I have coming on today, and virtually. I'm not talking about that. I'm here with Pride staff. I'm here with this. That is all I'm talking about. So, my content in front of me.

Ryan Avery: L stands for lighting. We've got to make sure that we're lit in a way that makes us show that we're professional. I know this is audio right now, but if you could see, I have desk lamps pointing at me and I make sure that my lighting is well. Do I do events in hotel rooms? All the time. And if you looked at the chair, on top of the bed, on top of the ice maker or ice bucket with my camera, it looks weird, but they don't see what's around me. They make sure the lighting is good.

Ryan Avery: A stands for audio. We make sure that our audio's okay. And not simply our microphone. We're talking about our audio around us, the dogs barking, the construction in the background. What does that audio sound like and look like, and making sure that if I need to know how to have that mute button ready.

Ryan Avery: And then P stands for positioning. Positioning is we want to make sure that our camera is eye level with our eyes. We don't want to look down on someone and we don't want too above someone. We want to be relatable. We also want to make sure our positioning of our background represents who we are and our professional career and our personal self.

Ryan Avery: I am a strong believer in how we're perceived is what we receive. So, if you have this messy background, or if you have this background of this virtual thing that's always different, that's how you're going to be perceived. So, making sure that we clap before any presentation allows us to feel more confident, allows us to relate to the people that we're interacting with, and allows us to be focused on the content at hand.

Ryan Avery: The other thing that I've been noticing lately, too, and again, it's audio, but you all know this, is everyone ends, and then everyone moves forward to look at the end button. And they're like, "Oh, what?" And it's that face where you're

looking up their nose. What I do, before I get on the call, when I get on the call, the very first thing I do is I go to end meeting and then I scroll over the leave meeting. And then that way, when I'm done, all I do is I press my mouse while I'm still looking forward, so people see me in a way that is presented and great meeting. Right? So, how you end is very important, as well, on virtual meetings. Those would be my tips.

Brad Smith: So, I just learned a few tips, and now I'm going to have to hover my mouse. So, thank you.

Ryan Avery: Everyone's hovering their mouse on the camera.

Brad Smith: So, Ryan, obviously, virtual and shifting to online meetings and remote meetings was one challenge. But what are some of the other more common, big communication challenges you see today? And how can we overcome those?

Ryan Avery: The biggest one is, I'll have this conversation with people, or leaders, especially, who hire me to come in and train them or work with their communication or improve their communication. And people believe that communication has changed throughout. Communication is different. No, it is not. Communication is the same, and it will always be the same. Break down the word. Comm- meaning with, -uni- meaning one, -ation meaning to do. So, it always means to get people to do one thing. It's always will be that.

Ryan Avery: What has changed are the methods of how we communicate. And one of the biggest issues I see is companies having way too many types of communication methods. They have Slack and they have email. They have texts and they have phone call and they have fax, and they have all these different ways. And so, you're playing telephone, literally, with different methods and things get lost. What is the streamline process in which you of information to your team and to your clients in the very simplest form? So, don't have too many methods of communicating.

Ryan Avery: The other thing is we surveyed over 1,200 full-time American employees in nine regions around the US, and we found out from them that 85% of them would be significantly better at their job if they had and knew how to strategically communicate. Yet, out of those same group of people, 75% of them had never been offered any type of communication training. Think about that for a moment. We've all done sales training. I'm not talking about sales training. We've done leadership training. I'm not talking about leadership training. How many people have had strategic communication training, where when we improve our communication efficiencies, we can be more effective with what it is that we do and who we communicate with?

- Ryan Avery: Yet for some reason, people see it as a soft skill. What's the number one issue we all face inside? What's the thing that causes the most problem? Miscommunication. The Holmes report, they came out with, they found out that \$26,000 is lost per employee every year, due to miscommunication in the workplace. So, you times that by, you have 100 employees, you're losing \$2.6 million simply because you haven't figured out how to effectively train your team how to communicate efficiently and streamline the process. These are some big issues I'm seeing that are causing real hard dollars to businesses.
- Brad Smith: I love that. And when you look at organizations, you're dead on. A lot of people invest heavily in leadership training, but we need that fundamental. We need to be better communicators. Now, building on that a little bit. If you look at any organization, you do see some leaders that are great communicators. That things just seem to fall in place for. They're always at the forefront. Would you say that these are people who invest heavily in training, who have invested heavily in reading leadership books? Or do you see some leaders just kind of get lucky?
- Ryan Avery: Unfortunately, yes and no, to that answer. I believe there are some people, and this is where the issue might arise. I believe there are some people who are naturally good at communicating. And so, we look at those people and we go, "Ugh, they have it. I don't."
- Ryan Avery: However, there are a lot of us who, that is not our natural ability. We have to do the training. We have to do the reading. We have to practice. And then, we get luckier because of those things, because we have used the strategies that are offered to all of us. So, I would say, don't look at the people who are naturally good at it. Look at the people who have trained to become better at it. And it's more inspiring.
- Ryan Avery: I wrote this Entrepreneur article called "The Misconceptions of Luck" and there's two types of luck. There's unreliable luck and there's reliable luck. There's a difference. Unreliable luck is all about chance. Reliable luck is all about choice. You see, unreliable luck is success caused by chance. Reliable luck is success caused by making strategic choices.
- Ryan Avery: And a lot of us in business, we are strategic in so many ways, yet we wing it with our communication. We improvise when it comes to coming and leading teams and speaking at an event and bullet pointing it out. And you wonder why you weren't as successful. Well, because you didn't put as much energy and time in it, like you do your business, as you do your presentations.
- Ryan Avery: So, one of the best choices that we can make are looking at the actions we're taking, the relationships we're building and the proximity to what it is that we want to accomplish. If you want, I can dive into that more, but really looking at

what actions am I taking? What relationships am I building? What proximity to what I'm trying to accomplish? How close am I to that?

Brad Smith: I love that process. And I think if we all follow it, we're going to be better communicators. We're going to be better leaders. We're not going to rely on luck, but luck is going to start to happen for us. We're going to manifest that by embracing.

Ryan Avery: Absolutely. People say I'm lucky to do what I do. Well, yes. In a way, I am. But I have created that luck because of the actions I've taken, because the relationships I've built, and to the proximity of where I position myself within the industry and to the people who are in it. Do I have a leg up because of certain elements of my lifestyle and who I am? Of course. But ultimately, I'm luckier because of my actions, because of my relationships, because of my proximity. And again, that's choice. I don't leave those up to chance.

Brad Smith: Right. I mentioned earlier that, with the pandemic, we saw huge exodus of talent. And a big portion of that were Baby Boomers that have retired early, that have left the workforce. In fact, there were more retirements over the last two years than at any other point in US history. So, with that can come a loss of knowledge. And we hear that from a lot of companies that we work with. How can companies adapt now, so that there isn't a loss of knowledge transfer as we continue to see Baby Boomers leave the workforce, and younger members take on more leadership roles?

Ryan Avery: Yeah. So, definitely setting that at mentor programs and not ones that are, "Oh, yeah. They talk to each other." I'm talking actual, strategic mentoring programs and not basing it off of generational or age, but basing off of experience. And what I mean by that is, there's a very big difference between having 20 years of experience and 20 years worth of experience. Like, I work with a lot of leaders who believe that they are good at what they do because they're doing it for a long time. And that's not necessarily true. They're good at it because of the experience that they've had within that timeframe, not because of that timeframe. So, setting up mentorship programs that allow people to transfer that knowledge and also to inspire the people who have that knowledge to think differently and learn differently and to adapt and stay innovative. So, your company isn't saying, the Blockbuster Syndrome as I call it, is like, "This is how we do things."

Ryan Avery: So, you want to have those both interactions of, "Here's some innovative ideas and here's some thoughts. How can we tie those together?" So, does your company have a mentorship program set up where you're interacting with people cross departmentally, too, very important. Not simply in your department, that allows you to learn and to share that knowledge.

Ryan Avery: The other thing, too, is we live in the digital world. You can record this. You can keep recordings of it. You can do a good job of asking questions and then recording it for onboarding. I work with a lot of HR specialists, and we do such a good job of onboarding, and then people get bored and we forget to reboard them. We forget to reteach them things and give them things and let them know the changes that are happening in the company. So, that's another thing we can do, as well, is reboard our people who have already been in our company for a while.

Brad Smith: Ryan, such great insight today. And I hope all those listening found some amazing takeaways that they can implement in their companies, in their own leadership transformation. Any closing words of wisdom for our listeners today?

Ryan Avery: Here's what I know about communication, studying it for literally a decade. How we communicate is how we operate. So, if you want to improve your operation, improve your communication, and you will see the success that you will get. Don't leave it to unreliable luck. Leave it to reliable luck. Get the training, go in, make sure you're motivating people. Make sure you're sharing with that appreciation and understand how we communicate is how we operate.

Brad Smith: I love that ending. Thank you so much, Ryan. Thank you for your time. For those that are listening, that are having leadership challenges, that are having recruiting or hiring issues, reach out to your local Pride staff office. We're here to help. We are very invested in your success, and that's why we bring great speakers like Ryan Avery in to help with leadership, with training, with running effective businesses. Ryan, for all of us at Pride Staff and everyone listening, thank you so much.

Ryan Avery: Thank you.

Closing: Thank you for listening to Strategic Insights, brought to you by Pride Staff. Whether you're looking for high level workforce consulting or staffing help to meet demands, Pride Staff is here to help.