

Welcome to the twenty-seventh edition of Jennifer Selby Long's *Traveling Light*. Are you blessed with the talent and opportunity to lead? *Traveling Light* will skyrocket your impact and lighten the load in your life. It's based on the work of executive coach and management consultant Jennifer Selby Long. Copyright 2008 Jennifer Selby Long. All rights reserved.

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Develop Trust by Speaking Up During Uncertain Times

Nobody trusts a silent leader, and yet, during troubled times, so many executives roll up their sleeves and get to work, alone and with each other, to address the challenges of the business. They feel like they are spending a huge amount of time communicating (and, boy, does it seem like a real pain), but on a scale of 1 – 10, it's actually a 2 or a 3, when the stakeholders need a 9 or a 10.

In order to lead, you have to open your mouth and let the words come out, over and over and over again – even if the business environment is quickly changing. If you do, others will trust you much more than if they have to guess at what you're thinking. The leader who speaks up clearly and frequently about challenges and opportunities gains a trusting and loyal following, extending far beyond his or her immediate network.

Another key reason to communicate frequently right now is that if you don't, the informal network known as the grapevine will communicate on your behalf. Don't leave it to the grapevine to explain your strategy for managing through a challenging situation.

Despite studies many years ago indicating that the grapevine is generally accurate, I have not found this to be the case and I believe these widely-quoted studies are outdated. Sure, some facts may move through informal channels relatively unscathed, but in the Information Age, the interpretation of these facts goes wildly off course at lightening speed.

There's no reason to stay heads-down in your office. Your silence and absence from public view feeds everyone's worst fears. Even if you're not in hiding, odds are you need to communicate a lot more, right now.

There are many means to go about it, such as:

- Weekly managers meetings
- Bi-weekly all-hands meetings
- Weekly or bi-weekly email updates
- Teleconferences or webinars
- Blogs
- VODs and podcasts

The list could go on, but these are the most common tools. You need only pick a few that fit your style and the needs of your employees and other stakeholders. In general, the more distributed and virtual your organization, the more tools you need to use in order to reach them.

Notice that weekly or bi-weekly communication is not too frequent in many cases. The less people hear from you, the more nervous they get, so speak up. For many businesses, the situation is changing rapidly, and the worst choice is to wait for the time “when things settle down” so you can “announce something substantial.” Remember that everyone in the trenches realizes that the situation must be fast-changing, and they trust you more when you communicate about ongoing changes than when you remain silent.

When you communicate, be sure to cover what’s going well in the business, challenges presented by the economy, and your plan to address these challenges.

Provide context to ensure that everyone understands that this is a quickly changing environment, so the information may change from one communication to the next as you respond to these changes.

Talk about what you anticipate will happen and how you’re planning for it. If you need to cut certain projects or programs, explain why.

Ensure that you allow at least 30% of your time for Q&A. It’s helpful to collect questions on an ongoing basis or 1 – 2 days in advance of meetings so you have a sense of what is on their minds and can prepare your comments accordingly. A number of simple, readily-available tools manage this task, such as Zoomerang and Survey Monkey. This is easily done with employees, not so easily done with outside constituencies.

In the last issue of *Traveling Light*, I wrote about the Chinese word for change, *Wei Gi*, *Wei* means danger and *Gi* means opportunity. **Change = Danger + Opportunity**. In uncertain times, your stakeholders can readily see the dangers in your business. It’s up to you to ensure that they have accurate, objective information about the dangers and opportunities provided by the changing economic landscape.

News

Here I am giving my talk at the Portland chapter of the International Association for Psychological Type, and committing the cardinal sin of looking at my slide instead of my audience. I thought my clients would find it fun to see me do what I constantly tell them not to do.

The second shot is with Pam Rechel, the dynamic and engaging president of P-APTi. Thanks again to Pam and all the wonderful folks in the Portland area who helped to make this session a hit.

On Wednesday, I had the pleasure of interviewing internet strategy guru Chad Barr on the subject of how he built his million dollar consulting business and how he continues to nurture it and grow it to new heights. The call was recorded and I will make it available soon. My readers will be the first to get the link.

Happy Halloween to all the ghosts and goblins out there!

Announcing the birth of my blog! Yes, I've joined the world of bloggers at <http://jenniferselbylong.com/>. The blog is a concentrated resource for all of my articles, book reviews, and news, organized by topic. It's now the fastest way to find an article from a past newsletter.

We'll continue to post past articles and newsletter at <http://www.selbygroup.com/news.html> as well.

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