

Figure 1: The four pillars of communication



in the process are the same. As a missionary who travels out of the country, it reminds me of malaria medicine. You take it to prevent getting malaria, but if you fail to take it and get malaria? The prophylaxis you should have taken to avoid it is the same medicine you take to treat it. There's no prescriptive difference.

The first pillar

The first pillar is to be truthful. Steven Covey said that "we operate at the speed of trust," and it's true.² Simply put: if you have a reputation for not telling the truth, then people — whether your employees or external stakeholders — won't trust you. And if they don't trust you, then they won't respect you. And if they don't respect you, they won't want anything to do with you. Being truthful and authentic in how and what you communicate is hypercritical to developing

trust for your organization and establishes you as honest and reliable. There is a direct correlation between brand reliability and financial success. Things like being predictably truthful, telling good stories frequently, telling them first, and getting ahead of the curve when there's less-than-flattering news are a part of the secret recipe. Fully understanding these standards and their subtleties is the difference between insulating your brand from legal liability and risk or causing your firm to operate outside its risk tolerance.

So, to be clear, this pillar instructs us to be authentic and truthful in our original communications. And then, if we are confronted with a crisis, it further informs us to be truthful when mitigating that crisis. And therein lies the issue. It's perplexing to see how many organizations' first inclination is not to tell the

truth when mitigating a crisis. They are what I call "emergency liars." They lie to fit the narrative of the emergency they're currently experiencing to make the pain go away. In actuality, it will make the matter worse downstream. Sooner or later, the truth comes out, and they'll have to go through all kinds of painful gyrations until they finally wind up admitting the truth, which they should have done from the beginning. Many times, they will doggedly refuse to ever be truthful, thus allowing the brand to be viewed as poorly structured and led, lacking accountability, lacking courage, and insulting the intelligence of every sentient being capable of detecting that they're being blatantly lied to — all things that decimate a brand's reputation and financial health, especially in America!

Every single organizational communication must have the