

Award: 2017 Golden Flame Awards - Atlanta
Division: Division 1: Communication Management
Category: Category 4: Change Communications
Entry Title: Launching the American Cancer Society's Case for Change
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Entrants' Organization: American Cancer Society

Project Description

In June 2016, the American Cancer Society (ACS) kicked off a campaign to launch our CEO's vision for a "new ACS" to staff and leadership volunteers across the country, and to introduce a compelling case for change that explained why achieving a "new ACS" would be critical to advancing our lifesaving mission.

The new ACS was a concept our CEO had been talking to this audience about for a few months and we were getting feedback that staff and leadership volunteers weren't sure what the new ACS was or why we needed to become the new ACS. Essentially, we needed to transform our organization into the new ACS, one that was more nimble, relevant, and competitive in the nonprofit marketplace.

The communications strategy truly shifted the mindset of our staff and leadership volunteers from a place where they questioned why we needed to change to a place where they were supportive of the needed changes and committed to the organization as a whole, as verified in a survey in March 2017.

Business Need or Opportunity

In early 2016, ACS' new CEO Gary Reedy began talking to staff and leadership volunteers about the need to become the new ACS. Our revenue had steadily been declining year over year. Our CEO believed that making strategic organizational changes and becoming bolder in our approach would make us more relevant and help us regain market share.

ACS had already been through a fairly recent and significant organizational makeover – which was internally given the name "transformation" – prior to his arrival. Though staff and leadership volunteers were supportive of the CEO's goals to make changes to overcome the obstacles we faced, we received feedback – via our monthly live web program – that staff didn't understand why we needed to change again (see sample of staff feedback in work sample on page 19).

Out of this feedback, we recognized a clear need to educate our staff and leadership volunteers on why ACS needed to change in order to achieve our mission of saving more lives from cancer.

Stakeholder Analysis

In June 2016, ACS had approximately 5,600 staff and 300 leadership volunteers, located both at our headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, and throughout the U.S. and its territories. Our leadership volunteers include the ACS Board of Directors, Division Board members, and ACS CAN Board of Directors (leading our partner advocacy organization).

Primary Audience – All Staff: At the time of the launch of our "new ACS" campaign, staff in the organization were experiencing change fatigue. In 2013, ACS completed a major organizational transformation that at the time was called the largest nonprofit restructure in American history. The vast majority of staff in the organization had to reapply for a job at that time, and most of the leadership changed over. And in 2015, we welcomed a new CEO. After hearing our new CEO talk about becoming the new ACS in his first few months, our staff were sharing feedback that they thought our CEO was inspiring. But at the same time, they were struggling to understand why we needed more change.

We needed to build the case for changing the organization once again and help staff understand why it was so important.

Secondary Audience – Leadership Volunteers: Our leadership volunteers (ACS Board of Directors, Division Board members, and ACS CAN Board of Directors) played a critical role in helping lead the first organizational transformation of ACS and were deeply vested in the work and the outcome. They were

perhaps even more sensitive than staff to hearing about any shortcomings of the first “transformation,” and therefore also needed to hear the rationale behind changing the organization again so soon after the first attempt. Since our leadership volunteers are considered leaders of our organization as much as our CEO and senior staff, giving them the same attention as our staff was critical.

Goals and Objectives

Goals:

- Formally launch the CEO’s vision for the new American Cancer Society.
- Introduce a compelling case for change and why it’s critical to advancing our mission.

Objectives:

- Increase awareness and understanding of the CEO’s vision for the new American Cancer Society to 75% following the live web event.
- Move staff and leadership volunteers from questioning why the organization needs to change again to 75% feeling like there is a compelling case for change in order to advance our mission following the live web event.
- Provide staff and leadership volunteers with extended time to ask questions of our CEO and other staff leaders, contributing to a greater understanding of the need for change.
- Begin to build a change management competency among staff and leadership volunteers recognizing that while organizational change isn’t easy, it’s necessary to maintain the health of the organization.

See work sample starting on page 20 for additional objectives and full communications plan.

Solution Overview

To generate excitement and buzz around the CEO’s vision for the new ACS and launch a compelling case for change, we created a promotional campaign to tie everything together. The campaign was called “Our path forward to the new American Cancer Society” and was visually represented using imagery with a winding yellow brick road-inspired path headed toward a green pasture with beautiful blue skies. A new logo was created for internal use that ties together our ACS logo and the key words “our path forward.” The phrase “our path forward” was used to unify the organization around this effort and signify it will take all of us working together to build the new ACS (work sample page 2).

Once we had our promotional campaign in place, we identified the critical elements of the communications plan to successfully launch the CEO’s vision for the new ACS and the case for change. The central components of the communications plan were the development of the actual case for change (work sample page 3) and a live “town hall”-style web event to be held in June 2016 (work sample page 4 to watch a sizzle reel).

At this event, the CEO would formally unveil his vision for the new ACS and deliver a compelling case for change. There would be time to hear from other senior leaders, followed by an extended Q&A session with the audience. The extended Q&A was provided in response to staff feedback from a live event in February 2016 where staff indicated that they wanted more time dedicated to getting their questions answered live by the CEO around this work (work sample page 5). Online attendees were able to submit questions at any time during the live event directly through the event viewer template on their screens, while attendees in the theater had the opportunity to ask questions with one standing microphone (work sample page 15 for screen shot).

A series of messages were shared prior to the June live web event, one of which included a newly created case for change teaser video that was intended to inspire hope and optimism in our organization and mission (work sample pages 6-9). Following the live event, we launched a new ACS page on our intranet and volunteer portal with helpful resources to further help staff and leadership volunteers understand the case for change and to prepare themselves for the new concept of ongoing organizational change (work sample pages 11-12). We also created a new method for staff and leadership volunteers to get their questions answered by our CEO or other staff leaders. Feedback portals were created on the

intranet and volunteer portal (work sample page 13). Our full communications plan and tactics list is available in the work sample on page 20.

Key Messages:

- As a new ACS, we'll be better positioned to reach our goals and for future success.
- The new ACS is simply a better version of ourselves.
- We transformed, but we didn't change. While transformation yielded many positive changes for ACS, we failed to change how we work.
- Change won't ever stop. It is essential to grow relevance, revenue, and have greater mission impact.
- Change readiness needs to be a cultivated skill and part of our organizational DNA.

Implementation and Challenges

Producing materials to launch the CEO's vision for the new ACS and the case for change involved staff at different levels and from various teams. The actual creation of the case for change was the most challenging aspect of our communications plan. It had to be drafted by the Internal Communications team and required buy-in and approval from several c-suite executives and other high-level stakeholders.

We had to decide what data was appropriate to share and at what time. How much was too much or too little for staff and leadership volunteers to know? We also had to think about balancing the realism needed to make a compelling case for change while still keeping it optimistic and hopeful to inspire people. A key symbol, the ACS sword, was added to the end of the case for change presentation – as well as several times in our case for change teaser video – to rally excitement around our cause. Such symbolism is a proven best practice in change management executive communications.

The final case for change delivered by our CEO was 15 pages long with lots of slides showing details around our declining revenue and market share and the gap that needed to be closed. The long version of the case for change is proprietary and can't be shared externally, but a one-pager version was created to share with staff and leadership volunteers (work sample page 3).

Our budget for a live event produced in the theatre within our building is \$5,000. This accounts for the theatre rental fee plus audio and lighting equipment needed for an optimal web event experience. Our IT department covers the vendor cost for the transmission: approximately \$1,500 per event. We have an in-house multimedia team and studio, which cuts down on live event expenses.

Measurement and Evaluation

Our goals to launch the CEO's vision for the new ACS and a compelling case for change were extremely successful, based on the post-show survey results where we asked viewers how they felt about the CEO's vision and the case for change. And the follow-up staff pulse check survey in March 2017 also indicated that staff strongly supported the organization and the direction in which it was headed. When we kicked off the communications plan, we were truly at a crossroads where our staff and leadership volunteers were either going to be excited about the direction the organization was headed and fully support the change needed, or they were going to be opposed to change and be barriers to our success.

The case for change teaser video (work sample page 10), used to inspire optimism and hope in our organization, was a huge success. Prior to the live event, the video had 1,084 views, which is consistent with previous videos sent to this audience. The live web event had 4,609 live viewers representing a 35% increase in attendance over similar live CEO events, topping our viewership number for a live event to introduce our CEO when he started in 2015. An additional 502 people watched the replay.

Audience	Live Attendees	Percent Increase	Replay Attendees
Staff - Web Viewers Staff - Live Audience	4,323 225 Total=4,609 / 77% of all staff	16% increase over similar events	486
Leadership Volunteers – Web Viewers	61 / 20% of all leadership volunteers	19% increase over similar events	16

During the event, attendees submitted 173 questions, a 60% increase from 108 during the February event which was also a high number for our live events. The questions were grouped into themes in real time so that we could answer as many questions as possible during the live show. Those that we didn't get to were answered in an FAQ document made available on our intranet and leadership volunteer portal.

We think our communications plan was very successful, based on the strong live event attendance rate and survey data showing that staff and leadership volunteers had a good understanding of the vision for the new ACS and felt the case for change was compelling. We had 297 participants complete the survey, 4% of whom were leadership volunteers, with the below results. The detailed survey results are available in the work sample on page 16.

- 88% strongly agree/somewhat agreed that after watching the live program, they have a better understanding of the vision for the new ACS.
- 96% strongly agree/somewhat agreed that the case for change delivered by the CEO was compelling.
- 97% strongly agree/somewhat agreed that being receptive to and ready for change is an important skill for our staff and volunteer leaders.
- 93% rated the audio and video quality of the broadcast great/good.

During the live web event, we launched a series of resources to help staff and leadership volunteers better understand the need for change and to help them adjust to the idea of continual change moving forward. Staff and leadership volunteers could access the resources via links in their web viewer window (work sample page 15). In our regular monthly live programs, resources are accessed an average of 140 times. The following resources were accessed an average of 758 times during the live show.

- The New ACS FAQs: 1,008 downloads
- Strategic Growth Initiatives Overview: 758 downloads
- Strategic Growth Initiatives June 2016 Update: 770 downloads
- The New ACS page on Society Source (staff intranet): 820 page visits
- My Society Source (volunteer portal): 432 page visits

Additional resources were made available after the live event to both support the case for change and help build a change management competency. From June 2016 to June 2017, the new intranet page had 23,682 total page views and the new volunteer portal page had 832 total page views. The change management resources had a total of 4,006 downloads from June 2016 to June 2017. Analytics on all document downloads are available in the work sample on page 17.

The strategy to launch the CEO's vision for the new ACS and introduce a compelling case for change was hugely successful, as seen in the results of a staff survey in March 2017. The survey results indicate that our CEO successfully delivered a clear vision for the new ACS and a compelling case for change.

We received feedback that our staff appreciated the transparency offered when the CEO delivered his case for change. It was a careful balance to offer realism regarding the organization's current state but remain hopeful about where we will end up. Following the live event, we created two-way communications opportunities for staff on our intranet page that also contributed to the strong support in the middle of organizational changes. And last, the change management resources that were made available helped prepare our staff and leadership volunteers for organizational change. We were blown away by these results!

- 94% of staff said the organization is heading in the right direction
- 96% of staff remain committed to the organization