

Communication and Peer Advantage



By Leo Bottary, Co-author, [The Power of Peers](#)

One ground rule for [communication](#) that I learned in a most unfortunate way, back in the ninth grade, is when you send someone a message (verbally, or in writing), you also are responsible for the receipt of that message by your audience (as intended). I didn't learn this important lesson in a classroom or working for the school newspaper. I learned it during a track meet, and as you'll soon discover, you'll see why I've never forgotten it.

To make a long story short, I was on the track team for that one year. I typically ran the mile, but at the last meet of the season I also was asked to fill-in as the third leg on our undefeated one-mile relay team. "No problem," I thought. I had practiced this many times and was looking forward to contributing however I could. I ran the third leg, starting slightly back in second place. By the time I was ready to pass the baton, I had taken the lead. Our anchor leg was the fastest kid in the city. No way we could lose. As I was passing the baton, I felt a brief moment of excitement, until of course the baton hit the ground. So much for our undefeated season. I was devastated. Searching for answers as to how this may have happened, my coach offered me some clarity, stating, in no uncertain terms, that it was my fault. "You should never let go of the baton until you're certain the receiver has

grasped it," he said.

It's hard to miss the relevance to communication. Like it or not, the responsibility lies with those delivering the message, not those receiving it. You can't just say, "It was in the email," or "Sure, it's right there in paragraph eight." You should never let go of the baton until you know the recipients have received the message. It's only at that point you can relax and let them run with it.

Revisiting this regrettable chapter from my junior high-school days, albeit painful, provides a fitting metaphor for why the receipt of any communication, as intended, is the sender's responsibility. I realize why this may seem unreasonable to some people. Maybe the person wasn't listening, or just ignored an important text or email. Things like this happen all the time, right? So why is that the sender's fault? The thing is, it's not about assigning blame, it's about accepting responsibility. It comes down to verifying and not assuming. It's how great leaders assure they're actually communicating.

In our book, [*The Power of Peers: How the Company You Keep Drives Leadership, Growth & Success*](#) (Bibliomotion, Inc.; March 22, 2016)), we suggest that if you surround yourself with the right people, engage them in a structured and strategic fashion, and accept the responsibility that comes with being a leader, you'll reap the benefits of what we call [*peer advantage*](#). Taking ownership of communicating effectively is just the tip of the iceberg.

About the Author: Leo Bottary is co-author of The Power of Peers: How the Company You Keep Drives Leadership, Growth & Success and vice president, Peer Advantage for Vistage Worldwide, where he directs a thought leadership initiative on the power of peer influence for business leaders. Leo also serves as an adjunct professor for Seton Hall University's Master of Arts in Strategic Communication & Leadership

program (MASCL), where he leads online learning teams. In April 2015, he was named adjunct teacher of the year for Seton Hall's College of Communication and the Arts. Prior to joining in 2010, Leo enjoyed a 25-year career counseling leaders in strategic communication. During that time, he served as a senior vice president (Corporate Practice) and national director of client service at Hill & Knowlton. He also founded an award-winning public relations agency, which he sold in 2000.