

Cool, Calm and Cuomo: What We Can Learn About Crisis Communications from New York's Governor

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A short while back, the *New York Post* published an article about how New York women are crushing on their state's Governor, Andrew Cuomo, and YouTube star Randy Rainbow released a parody song, in which he identified himself as a #CuomoSexual. Extreme as these examples may sound, whether you get excited when an alert for his press conference hits your social media feed or roll your eyes at the very thought of it – yes, like any politician, Governor Cuomo has his detractors – there are admirable takeaways from the way he is navigating the current COVID-19 pandemic and communicating with New Yorkers. Below are a few of the public relations lessons we can learn from Governor Cuomo:

1. **Be authentic and accessible.** Make like the Gov and remove the rhetoric from your communications. Your audience is smarter than you think and will appreciate the lack of double talk, insider lingo and evasive replies. The reason many people are enamored with Governor Cuomo's addresses are because they are honest, compassionate, thoughtful and right on their level.
2. **Share stories.** It has been proven that humans remember messages with greater clarity when they are underscored with stories. In fact, famed cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner has said that we are 22 times more likely to recall a fact if it is wrapped in the package of a good allegory. Governor Cuomo's stories about his mom,

Matilda, conversations with his daughters and even lighthearted sibling rivalry banter with his brother, Chris, memorably highlight more serious points about staying at home, exercising health precautions and minding the safety of our most vulnerable loved ones.

3. **Keep consistent.** Listen to Governor Cuomo's press briefings and you will hear a message that is clear, concise and incredibly uniform. He repeats the same simple phrases often, such as "We over me," and with as much passion and conviction behind them as possible, which drives the point home, persuades and makes listeners feel like they are part of a movement rather than the recipients of a message.
4. **Look like the authority you are.** Dress the part, whether you are holding a press conference televised on every major station or a webinar from your socially distanced home office. Confidence and polish command respect and inspire trust.
5. **Use visuals to underscore your message.** Charts, graphics and boldfaced words, even with a dash of humor in the mix, help people understand complex matters with greater ease, particularly if these visuals are simple and limited to one key concept per slide. If you want your message to be absorbed, it should speak to multiple senses, including sight, sound and the all-important sixth sense Governor Cuomo appeals to: spirit.

One last bonus tip: If you want to deliver a message with influence, leave petty politics out of it. Staying above board, and framing arguments through cooperation and positivity, will unite your audience rather than divide them.



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