



Linking Theory & Practice

Introduction to Linking Theory & Practice Section

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Co-Editor

Organization Management Journal (2011)
8, 166. doi:10.1057/omj.2011.27



Organization
Management
Journal

Spin doctors are well known for inventing political sound bites – statements that are easily remembered, direct to the people, and used by politicians to influence the media. An interesting characteristic of spin doctors is that they are almost invisible for the wider audience. They are hired by the politician only to promote a favorable interpretation of his or her political strategy and not to interfere with the political debate. Only occasionally is the work of a spin doctor seen by the wider public, as in the movie “In the Loop” in which a spin doctor tries to bend a thoughtless comment of the British Secretary of State for International Development in the right direction. The following article, “Top-level communication: Behind the scenes with famous French spin doctor Jacques Séguéla,” reveals the ideas, strategies and routines of spin doctoring from the point of view of the practitioner. Jacques Séguéla, who has become a famous spin doctor over the years involved in political campaigns in France, Israel, Poland and other countries since the early 1980s.

By presenting the interview with Séguéla as a whole, the authors, Christophe Haag, Jean-François Coget and Tessa Melkonian, are able to identify important lessons for spin-doctoring at first hand. Interestingly enough the interview reveals that there is little difference in the practices of French and US spin doctoring. Although local, cultural and national identities matter for the communication, Séguéla applied the same recipes for political campaigning across the world. One of the most recent developments in this respect is the importance of the Internet and 2.0 communication tools. These tools can help the politician become more creative, but also make him or her vulnerable to disinformation.

The most challenging part for a spin doctor is, however, to find a balance between authenticity in top-level communication on the one hand and the belief that politicians must be good actors on the other hand. It is this balancing act that, according to Séguéla, needs “smooth manipulation” in times of political uncertainty. At the same time he insists on the importance of integrity for political leaders. That is why the article ends with key lessons for communication strategies based on three decades of spin doctoring experience. Readers will find these lessons not only useful to understand spin doctor practices, but also to complement their knowledge in leadership traits, behavioral integrity and trust.