

SALES STAR


Leslie Ungar: Putting the “Charge” Back in Communications

[By Akbar Ali]

As president of Electric Impulse Communications Inc., Leslie Ungar is a woman on a mission: to make companies and individuals realize their potential and then set them on course to achieve that top-notch performance level which is, put simply, electrifying. She has worked with established corporations and budding businesses in every conceivable industry, leaving her clients with the singular conviction that they are their own best solutions.

Ungar traces the beginnings of her career all the way back to the sixth grade when she wrote a play about Custer’s Last Stand. For those of you who can’t recall, Custer’s Last Stand (also known as the Battle of the Little Bighorn and as Custer’s Massacre) was a battle between the Lakota-Northern Cheyenne Indians and the Seventh Cavalry of the United States Army. By the end, the cavalry, commanded by Custer, had been annihilated, though Ungar is quick to point out that “the only thing that lived through that debacle was Custer’s horse, Comanche.” Why was this play the beginning of Ungar’s passion for communication?

“I believe that Custer’s Last Stand was just an example of poor communication,” she declares matter-of-factly. “History is littered with bad people who were great communicators and great communicators who changed history.”

And changing the courses of individual lives and companies through communication is what she’s all about. Ungar always knew she would be good at communications before she even considered it a field she would want to pursue.

“My experiences confirmed my decision even before it *was* a decision,” she asserts.

Long before the advent of the Internet, Ungar was a member of the Cleveland City Club, a well-known “bastion of free speech” utilized by every presidential candidate in the run-up to the announcement of his or

her candidacy. Ungar’s thoughts on these

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. When you have your own business, fun loses its priority. Although as a leadership coach I extol clients to celebrate their wins, I find it a true challenge. Fun is landing that great new client.

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. The CD version of the *National Speaker’s Association Monthly Magazine*.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *People*. (Any magazine like that is a guilty pleasure I indulge in only when I travel.)

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. Depends on the time of day and time of year. When I am on the treadmill, there is no favorite; the faster I change the channel, the faster the time will go. *Dancing with the Stars* is a fascinating example in communication and leadership skills.

Q. Who is your role model?

A. I think role models are hugely important. When JFK died, I wanted to be stoic like JFK. Then Bobby Kennedy died, and Martin Luther King Jr. died, and my generation lost its role models.

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. Watching my dogs problem solve; getting out of bed and going downstairs because my dog figured out how to get me to give her a treat.

speeches produced a great number of personal observations which she ensured would reach the politicians, even when they weren’t solicited.

“I used to send each candidate my comments about their speaking because, of course, I was convinced they needed to know what I thought,” she recounts.

Ungar went on to the University of Akron in Ohio, where she obtained both her undergraduate and graduate degrees in communication and rhetoric.

“Although my dad has asked for 30 years after I got my degree, ‘What is rhetoric?’ it was a great experience — even the oral defense of my thesis,” she affirms.

While at college, she was heavily involved in extracurricular activities, especially the student government, which was modeled on the three branches of the U.S. government. Ungar assumed the position of chief justice of the Student Superior Court.

After graduation, Ungar went into the family business, initially planning to stay for just one year. In the end, that one year became 18 years, laying the groundwork for what would eventually become Electric Impulse Communications.

“In the early years I held onto my belief that the world was just waiting for my idea of a company to specifically address communication challenges. I even named the

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concept Speakeasy and had letterhead made. Then the family business took precedence. I learned that family businesses should be banned by the Constitution of the United States unless they follow my 13 rules."

Among the many services Ungar offers at Electric Impulse are executive coaching, sales training, assistance with finding a competitive corporate edge, keynotes and seminars, speech writing, visibility training, and a whole host of speaking programs, including Speaking Boot Camp, Clarity College, 9 Ways to Catapult Sales, From Ordinary to Extraordinary: How to Develop into a 21st Century Leader, How Women Communicate, and Extreme Brand Makeover: Catapult from Commodity to Brand

Throughout Ungar's career, the most memorable experiences have been opportunities she has been given to serve as the catalyst for ordinary business leaders or workers to become truly extraordinary communicators. Turning the commonplace individual into a unique dynamo is what she's after, and she's had plenty of success to prove that her methods are effective in her work with Chicago Title, El Tech Systems, Harper Communications, Home Builders of America, Lowe's, and the Young Entrepreneur's Organization, among dozens of others.

Project-wise, one of the major highlights of her career thus far has been being able to write a "state of the firm" speech: "It will be

as close as I will come to writing a State of the Union speech!"

In terms of the lessons she has learned over the years, she divides them into two categories: "lessons learned on the job" and "lessons learned by those better than you in your field." One of the most valuable lessons she's acquired has been to approach each client on an individual basis, tailoring her expertise to his or her needs, even when the situation warrants a bit of on-the-spot ingenuity:

"One of the challenges of being a communication coach is that you can't prepare in advance for every client's challenges. One time I met with a CEO to prepare him for a speech to his board and shareholders. I had little time, a very stiff client, and a huge challenge. I saw a picture in his office of his young daughter, so I asked him to sit on the floor and read from the phone book as if he was reading a bedtime story. I could see the spark that I needed to know was there. Then I could figure out how to get it out at will."

When it comes to communication mentors, Ungar has just one: "My professional mentor is Alan Weiss. His approach is a take-no-prisoners style, the polar opposite of the kindly mentor you might imagine. It works for me; requiring and valuing clarity has great value."

Taking a cue from Custer's Comanche,

who survived in the midst of destruction, Ungar named her business after another horse, Electric Impulse. He was a large, white Arabian show horse she presented at competitions. During this time she had a horse show mentor whose winning strategy was to concentrate solely on the positive and to ignore the negative.

"That is what I attempt to do as a communication coach to identify the value within each person and help them communicate that value to their audience or market: define, develop, and discuss their strengths to go from ordinary to extraordinary. I saw the results and have always believed in this school of thought," Ungar says.

For the budding professional seeking that ticket to "electric" success, Ungar distills her knowledge down to three key points:

"Have a mentor, have a mentor, have a mentor. You are young and smart, *very* smart, but you will get where you want to go faster with a mentor outside of your profession or your company. Learn how to communicate effectively. The more visible you are, the more viable you are perceived to be."

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