

What's the Biggest Challenge in Being a Strategic Advisor?

As background, in survey after survey, CEOs and other leaders say **effective internal communication, including strategic communication counsel**, is critical to the performance of their organizations. In fact, in a Deloitte research study, **95%** of the surveyed CEOs rated effective internal communication as a key ingredient for success. Yet, just **22%** said that the delivery of internal communication was effective.

The purpose of the recent **Being a Strategic Communication Advisor** [survey](#) conducted by Connect Consulting was to gain intelligence on how strategic communication advisors view their role and their effectiveness in serving leaders.

These results also reveal a gap in expectations between senior leaders and their strategic communication advisors. In addition, the data points to clear differences in the behavior of effective advisors (what we call “*Absolute*”) and other advisors (what we call “*Accidental*”).

Strategic Advisors name 7 types of challenges

One of the survey write-in questions was: “What’s your biggest challenge in being a strategic communication advisor?”

The analysis of the comments shows that strategic advisors face seven types of challenges:

- 1. Leaders**—getting access, building trust and gaining commitment to action.
- 2. Resources**—primarily finding time to provide counsel.
- 3. Value**—ensuring that leaders receive value from the counsel.
- 4. Fulfilling commitments**—making sure that advisors follow through.
- 5. Personal skills**—having the skill set to serve as an effective strategic advisor.
- 6. Organizational structure**—navigating the organization
- 7. Business issues**—serving clients while managing a consulting business that offers strategic counseling.

About the Absolute Advisors

The survey data showed a divide between two types of advisors: Absolute Advisors and Accidental Advisors.

Absolute Advisors work at **being** strategic advisors. Compared to the Accidental Advisors, Absolute Advisors have adopted more disciplined and targeted practices in three areas: **relationship building, measurement** and **professional development**.

Furthermore, the Absolute Advisors spend 50% or more of their time advising leaders. They enjoy what they do and consider it a career choice.

How the challenges differ between the two groups of advisors

As is the case in all other aspects of the survey, major differences appear between Absolute Advisors and Accidental Advisors.

Absolute Advisors' key challenges

Absolute Advisors are most concerned about finding available resources, especially time, and ensuring that they are providing value. Their third biggest concern is access to leaders.

Some representative challenges of Absolute Advisors are included here. (Note that the comments have been edited to correct for spelling, grammar and clarity.)

- Always being effective and succeeding at helping my clients.
- Being heard and valued.
- Balance between coaching/counseling and tactical delivery.
- Helping clients understand the value of communications and the role as a business imperative.
- Helping folks understand that what they knew about communications isn't true anymore.
- Finding the resources to enact decisions—time, human resources and budgetary.
- Lack of time to implement all my plans. (Lack of resources.)
- Limited skills of staff and full plate despite the strategic consultation. This part of my job is becoming more and more important and time consuming.
- Prioritizing while drinking from a fire hose.
- The patients don't always know they're sick, and if they do, they take advice from quacks.
- Time and pace.
- Time pressures, competing priorities. Crisis situations preventing strategic thinking.

Accidental Advisors' key challenges

By contrast, Accidental Advisors are most challenged by leaders, lack of resources, undeveloped personal skills and their organization's structure. To a lesser extent, Accidental Advisors also worry about their ability to fulfill their commitments and provide value.

Some representative challenges of Accidental Advisors are included here. (Note that the comments have been edited to correct for spelling, grammar and clarity.)

- Leadership doesn't want communication to advise, but to implement. Often, what they want implemented works counter to the best interests of the organization. Simply put, they are ostriches hiding their heads in the sand.
- Managing daily priorities: doing the work, doing the advising and leading the team.
- Maintaining credibility during times of intense busywork, when senior leaders are "too busy" to follow a communications process.

- Setting appointments and keeping others' attention. We are in an ADHD world, so keeping people on tasks when so many other deadlines are due. So many other distractions are occurring.....too many plates are being juggled.
- Shifting smoothly and quickly between strategy and tactics portions of my role.
- Finding the time to strategize and offer effective communication opportunities.
- Not fully understanding my role, my boundaries, processes, etc.
- Time and commitment. I have too many other responsibilities and little commitment from my manager to prioritize strategic thinking and actions.
- Setting strategy using measurement, rather than backing in to strategy by way of tactical development and execution.
- Lack of confidence that I can add value to the leadership conversation on a strategic level. (I'm confident in my ability to deliver on tasks and tactics.)
- Putting aside small tasks, where I feel safe and comfortable, to address strategic issues.

What are the implications for Strategic Advisors?

These challenges are not going away. Rather than bury them or hide from them, highlight them. In other words, you need to figure out how to best work within these constraints.

Here's where Connect's [Strategic Action Group](#) comes into play. It's a 10-week mentoring and mastermind intensive that shows you step-by-step how to think and work like an effective strategic advisor. You'll also start to develop the consultative, measurement and networking capabilities that set Absolute Advisors apart. Plus, you'll gain more confidence to deal with the challenges all advisors face. If you are serious about moving to the next level in your career and delivering what leaders want, you need to sign up for the [Strategic Action Group](#). The next session starts September 16.



Connect is an independent coaching and consulting firm focused on clear and credible change. Founder Liz Guthridge serves as a strategic advisor to leaders who need to get employees on board with complex new initiatives. Liz also trains, coaches and mentors communication professionals to be effective strategic advisors.

For questions about the survey and the [Strategic Action Group](#), contact Liz Guthridge at liz.guthridge@connectconsultinggroup.com or 510-527-1213. For information about Connect, visit www.connectconsultinggroup.com