



Can You Deliver What Your Leaders Want?

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.

In these uncertain economic times, being able to deliver strategic advice that boosts your organization's bottom line is essential.

Survey results reveal 3 key success factors of effective strategic advisors

During July to August 2011, Connect Consulting conducted a survey that revealed three key success factors of effective strategic communication advisors: more disciplined and targeted relationship-building, measurement and professional development. The results have clear implications about what communication professionals need to do if they want to move away from tactics and adopt a more strategic, value-driven approach to communication.

Survey goals

The purpose of the survey was to gain intelligence on how strategic communication advisors view their role and their effectiveness. Results reveal a gap in expectations between senior leaders and their strategic communication advisors. In addition, the data points to clear differences in the behaviors of effective advisors (what we call "*Absolute*") and other advisors (what we call "*Accidental*"). (See the box on survey methodology.)

Survey respondent profile

Of the 113 respondents, 48% work for publicly-held companies, 15% work for privately-held companies and the rest work for non-profit, government, education, agencies, consulting firms and sole proprietorships.

Participants primarily work in corporate communications (35%) or employee communications (25%). Other areas include executive communications, IT, training, HR, marketing, strategy, planning, business units and M&A.

The respondents are a tenured group: 64% have been working 20 years or more and 24% have been working between 10 and 20 years. As for titles, 55% are *director* or above, including 13 *VPs*. Another 22% are managers. Many are specialists, such as *communication and public information officer*, *project manager* and *principal*.

A majority are experienced strategic advisors: 22% have worked as a strategic advisor for 20 years or more and 31% have worked as an advisor between 10 and 20 years.

What respondents said

Respondents said they believe that leaders and strategic communication advisors are **both** at fault for the significant gap between what senior leaders say they want versus what they get.

According to an analysis of write-in comments, advisors feel leaders' attitudes and actions contribute more to the expectations gap than advisors' actions or inactions—by a 3 to 1 margin.

According to strategic communication advisors, some sample comments		
About leaders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “They aren’t clear about what they want.” • “They don’t communicate their needs.” • “They don’t understand the value of strategic communications.” • “They think they can do it on their own.” • “They believe communication is magic.” 	About strategic advisors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have low business acumen. • They have poor consulting skills. • They have inadequate political skills. 	
Other problems that contribute to the gap: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 33%;">• Lack of resources <li style="width: 33%;">• Time pressures <li style="width: 33%;">• Organizational culture/structure 		

Yet another divide

While strategic advisors agree that leaders shoulder more of the responsibility for the gap, **how** advisors serve leaders varies. About a third spends 50% or more of their time advising leaders. Furthermore, these *Absolute Advisors* say they enjoy advising and consider it a career choice.

By contrast, the other two-thirds of respondents are *Accidental Advisors*. They tend to have fallen into their role, which they don't always enjoy. As for their commitment, 29% spend between 10–25% of their time advising, 21% spend 25–50% advising, and 14% spend up to 10% advising.

What Absolute Advisors do differently

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. (See charts on page 3.)

Absolute Advisors also take more initiative

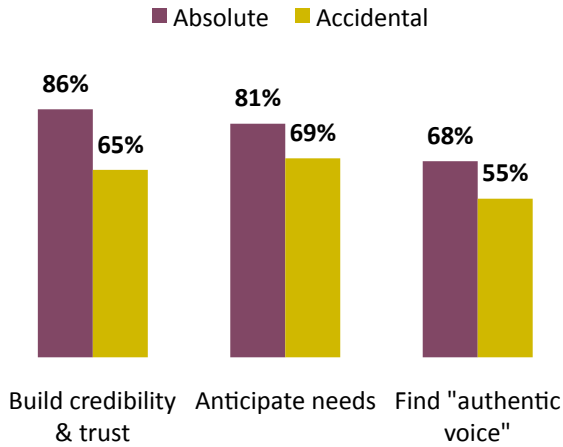
By their actions as described through their write-in comments, *Absolute Advisors* also take more initiative. They emphasize the value of:

- Learning the business.
- Building relationships with leaders, their assistants and others.
- Speaking up on critical and challenging issues.

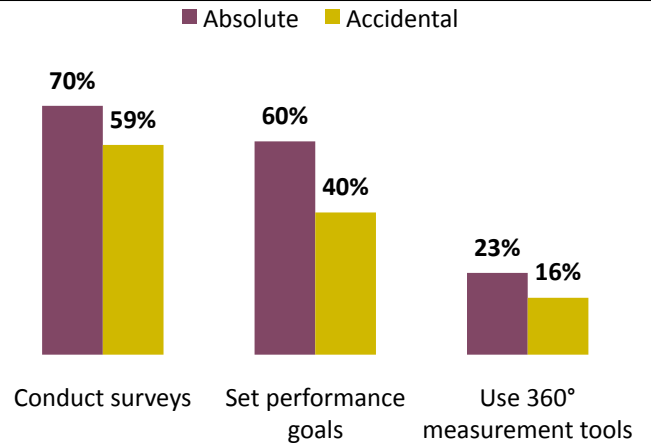
They also recognize the need to eliminate non-value-add work so they can focus on being

strategic and supportive. They do express frustration with limited time and access with leaders, yet they work within these constraints.

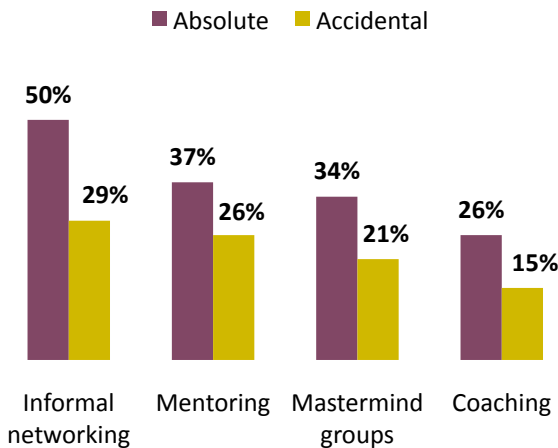
Targeted Practice #1. Relationship building to help leaders connect with



Targeted Practice #2: Measurement. 68% of Absolutes measure compared to 46% of Accidentals; furthermore, that measurement is more robust



Targeted Practice #3. Professional development around relationships that is "very effective"



Survey methodology

Connect administered the 22-question survey online, July 8 – August 4, 2011. We contacted strategic communication advisors through: Connect’s subscriber list; professional associations, such as CCM/The Leadership Exchange and IABC; and LinkedIn groups where advisors regularly interact. Respondents numbered 113.

Why you need to become an Absolute Advisor

Effective strategic advising requires being present with leaders to coach and serve as a sounding board. It also requires working behind-the-scenes to build relationships, measure results and develop skills. It’s more about demonstrating strong business acumen and emotional intelligence, and less about writing and editing. Strategic advisors do practice the technical aspects of the communication craft. However, they focus more on “being” than “doing.”

Communicators who become *Absolute Advisors*—those who serve as strategic advisors and love doing so as a career—quickly become indispensable because they are delivering what leaders actually want.

The Good News: You Can Learn to Be an Absolute Advisor

The good news for communications professionals is that the skills that separate *Absolute Advisors* from *Accidental Advisors* and the rest of the pack are not innate; you can learn them.

So why aren't more communicators taking steps to become more capable, confident and credible strategic advisors? According to many of the survey write-in comments, respondents say they don't have the time, the training or the support they want or need. Many commented that they haven't found skill training in a format that works for them. Some added that they're especially challenged to even think about learning how to be strategic when they're under extreme time pressures to deliver tactics.

The Strategic Action Group

The [Strategic Action Group](#) is a 10-week mentoring and mastermind intensive that shows you step by step how to develop the consultative, measurement and networking skills that set Absolute Advisors apart.

The groups are kept small – just 12 professionals from different organizations (so you can feel free to talk freely) to encourage interaction and individual attention.

Over the course of the five 75 minute virtual meetings and via interaction between classes in our online communication area, you'll develop a solid grasp of the skills needed to succeed. You'll also create a support group with sounding board that you can continue to tap when the official group is over. And you'll also receive a personal coaching session with Liz Guthridge to create a plan for applying what you've learned. That way you can improve your confidence, capabilities and credibility.

If you are serious about moving to the next level in your communications career and delivering what leaders want, you need to learn more about the [Strategic Action Group](#). The next session starts on September 16.



Connect is an independent coaching and consulting firm focused on clear and credible change.

Connect's founder Liz Guthridge serves as a strategic advisor to leaders who need to get employees on board with complex new initiatives. Liz also coaches, trains and mentors communication professionals to be effective strategic advisors. Connect's next [Strategic Action Group](#) starts Sept. 16.

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