

COMPETENCY 2A—EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Andrews University
School of Education

A Reflection Paper for Competency 2a—Effective Communication
Pursuant to the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership

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Introduction

Throughout my life, I have told stories to communicate my journey as a person and a leader. I have an extensive background in communications working as an award-winning photojournalist for newspapers in Texas from 1984 to 1995. As a photojournalist, I made photographs of the world around me. I covered news stories, sports, and local life. I have had many photographs published via the Associated Press and other news outlets and magazines, such as *Newsweek* and *Time*. Occasionally, I also wrote stories. In December 1988, I traveled for the first time behind the Iron Curtain to Poland and the Soviet Union, arriving roughly a month before the peaceful demise of Communism in Poland. I captured my experience photographically and wrote several articles for the Baptist Press.

Within a year of my visit to Poland, the Berlin wall fell, and my life took a different direction. Following my career in journalism, I entered seminary, where I studied the principles of biblical and cross-cultural preaching. I also served as a pastor in Poland for twelve years, where I learned to speak and function in the Polish language. In 1999, the Kosovo War broke out and I served the Refugees in Tirana, Albania and later, my family and I lived in Kosovo for a short time. As a result of these experiences, I lived and worked cross-culturally among three major religious groups maintaining starkly distinctive worldviews: Catholics, Muslims and Jews. I have a basic understanding of various media strategies and have used media as a means to communicate the story of what I do in leading the work of The Matzevah Foundation (TMF).

This paper will first examine several communication theories that have shaped my life and leadership. Second, the paper will explore how I applied these theories to my practice as a leader, and third, it will catalog key learnings and demonstrate how I use my education to serve the organization that I lead, as well as the people around me.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Definitions of Key Terms

Competency 2a: Effective Communication. The Andrews University Leadership Department advances a set of leadership competencies, which require students to have “theoretical knowledge and practical application” within a set of “core [leadership] competencies” of which the “leadership of others” is one group of competencies (*Leadership Handbook*, 2011, p. 36). This second group of leadership competencies addresses “the interpersonal aspects of leadership,” along with the “growth and development of others,” which is integral to the leadership function (*Leadership Handbook*, 2011, p. 36). Regarding the competency of effective communication, “*Leadership fosters effective communication in all internal and external interactions, to establish and maintain cooperative relationships*” (*Leadership Handbook*, 2011, p. 36).

Communication. Basic communication is comprised of sending and receiving a message; however, as simple as the concept of communication may seem, it is much more complicated. Communication is basically “sharing information and ideas” defined within the boundaries of relationships (Søgaard, 1993, p. 29). According to Dainton and Zelley (2011),

scholars Conrad and Poole, in 1998, defined communication as “the process by which people interactively create, sustain, and manage meaning” (p. 2). Søgaaard (1993) stipulates, “Any adequate definition of communication must also recognize both the transfer and impact” of any message that is communicated, along with the accompanying process of communication (p. 30).

Competent Communication (Effectiveness). Based on the work of Spitzberg and Cupach in 1989, Dainton and Zelley (2011) propose that “communication competence is most often understood as achieving a successful balance between effectiveness and appropriateness” (p. 2). Additionally, they suggest that “effectiveness is the extent to which you achieve your goals in an interaction” (p. 2), while appropriateness “refers to fulfilling social expectation for a particular situation” (p. 3).

Culture. According to the work of Kroeber and Kluckhohn in 1952, Mor Barak (2014) indicates that these researchers synthesized a definition of culture based on their analysis of “160 definitions of the concept of culture” (p. 176). Kroeber and Kluckhohn define culture as consisting of “patterns, explicit or implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts” (cited in, Mor Barak, 2014, p. 176). Furthermore, they assert that “the essential core of culture consists of traditional . . . ideas and especially their attached values” (cited in, Mor Barak, 2014, p. 176).

Moreover, Mor Barak (2014) cites the work of Javidan and House, who in 2001 defined culture as being a “set of beliefs and values about what is desirable and undesirable in a community of people, and a set of formal and informal practices to support the values” (cited in, Mor Barak, 2014, p. 176). Finally, Dainton and Zelley (2011) favor Collier’s 1989 concept of

“culture as one’s identification with and acceptance into a group what shares symbols, meanings, experiences, and behavior” (p. 182).

Matzevah. The term *matzevah* (מצבה) is Hebrew and means a memorial stone or monument; a matzevah is erected in memory of a significant event or placed at the head of the grave of a deceased person. In Jewish cemeteries, the headstone or matzevah signifies remembering and honoring the dead and ensures that the grave will not be desecrated. The Matzevah Foundation uses the iconography of the matzevah because its mission is to honor the memory of the Jewish community of Poland by caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland as a means to reconcile Jews and Christians.

Jewish Cemetery. A Jewish cemetery, in Hebrew, is known by several names. It is referred to as *Beit Chaim*—“the house of the living,” *Beit Kevarot*—“the house of graves or tombs,” or *Beit Olam*—“the house of the world or eternity.” Cemeteries are considered to be holy places by the Jewish community.

Shoah. Unless citing a source that uses the term Holocaust, I will use the Hebrew term, *Shoah* (catastrophe or destruction) to define the events of what many refer to as the Holocaust. I make this distinction for two reasons. Firstly, as Manosevitz (2010) emphasizes, the term Shoah is “used by modern scholars in reference to that event” and secondly, the word, Holocaust, is a Greek word that means “burnt offering,” which according to Manosevitz extends some type of “religious significance” to the event, adding that “there was nothing religious about Hitler’s ‘Final Solution’” (p. 55).

Worldview. The concept of worldview has been championed and advanced by theologians such as Sire and Naugle. Olthuis defines worldview as “a framework or a set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it” (cited in,

Sire, 2009, p. 18). Sire (2009) defines worldview as “a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart . . .” (p. 20). Naugle (2002) traces the use of the term through not only “Reformed history but also its path through European philosophy” and then deliberates its contemporary uses. Thomson (2012) discusses how “Christian worldview thinking has become an increasingly prominent framework for thinking about education” (p. 179).

Previous Knowledge Base

At East Texas State University (now Texas A&M at Commerce) in 1983, I began but did not complete a Masters in Journalism. My coursework included photography, photojournalism, film production, and journalism (**Artifact:** [01_Reece_TXAM_Commerce_Transcript](#)).

Unfortunately, financial needs forced me to seek employment as a photojournalist, and in April 1984, I began working for the Palestine Herald-Press (in Palestine, Texas) as the Chief Photographer. Later, in September 1988, I was hired by the Waco Tribune-Herald, where I worked for five years as a staff photographer (**Artifact:** [Reece Photojournalist](#)).

My initial visit to Poland in 1988 opened my eyes to the reality of the movement of the Holy Spirit, touching the lives of people on the other side of the world. Through this association, I have developed and used my communication skills to produce six stories and numerous photographs that were published in Missions Today and World Missions Journal, both were formerly magazines for the Brotherhood Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (**Artifacts:** [Missions Today_World Mission Journal](#)). The stories were about Christians and their lives and ministries in Eastern Europe before and after the fall of Communism. I learned from these experiences that I could communicate the Gospel in words and pictures, something that combined my talent as a photojournalist and a follower of Christ. My more than ten years of experience as a professional photojournalist lends itself to the discipline of communication.

While in seminary, I broaden my understanding of writing and cross-cultural communication by enrolling in the following coursework: Writing for Publications—CMMAR-320, Principles of Biblical Preaching—PRCHG-331, Principles and Procedures of Cross-Cultural Preaching—PRCHG-545, and Anthropology for Cross-Cultural Evangelism—MISSN-437 (**Artifacts:** [02 Reece SWBTS Transcript](#) and [Marías Story 320](#)). Although not particularly theoretical, I found the coursework to be practical preparation for my cross-cultural experience of being a pastor working within the Polish and European contexts.

Of my seminary coursework, probably the course from which I most often drew (and draw today) was Principles of Cross-cultural Preaching (PRCHG-545). The seminal thoughts that I employed in speaking and working in the Polish language were to learn their stories and to use the truth of their stories to communicate the truth of the gospel. Likewise, I conceptually used such cross-cultural communication principles in speaking Polish for twelve years and in my mission to lead, teach, and equip Poles for ministry. Finally, using biblical and cross-cultural principles, I developed and wrote a small group, church planting guidebook in Polish (**Artifacts:** [Zakładanie Zborow Poprzez Grupy Domowe](#)).

Foundational Communication Models

Bedford and Baladouni (1962) define the term model as “a tool for systematic thinking” (p. 652). Upon examination of a variety of communication models, these authors assert that models “are constructed for particular purposes and that they never include all possible elements of the communication process” (p. 651). Second, researchers select specific elements designed “to fit the particular situation being examined” (p. 651). Consequently, models or theories of communication contain components “that are most useful in describing” the communication process in a particular field or area of communication (p. 651). In the following sections, I will

discuss the basic communication process, an interpersonal communication model, and a few essential communication theories.

The Framework of the Basic Communication Process

Richard Nordquist (2019) determines that “any time two or more people get together to exchange messages, they are engaging in this basic process [of communication]” (para. 1). In **Figure 1**, we see that there are five basic elements of the communication process: (a) the sender, (b) the receiver, (c) the message, (d) the medium, and (e) feedback. First, Nordquist states that “The communication process begins with the *sender*, who is also called the *communicator* or *source*” (para. 2). The sender encodes or composes the message with particular “information,” which could be “a command, request, question, or idea—that he or she wants to present to

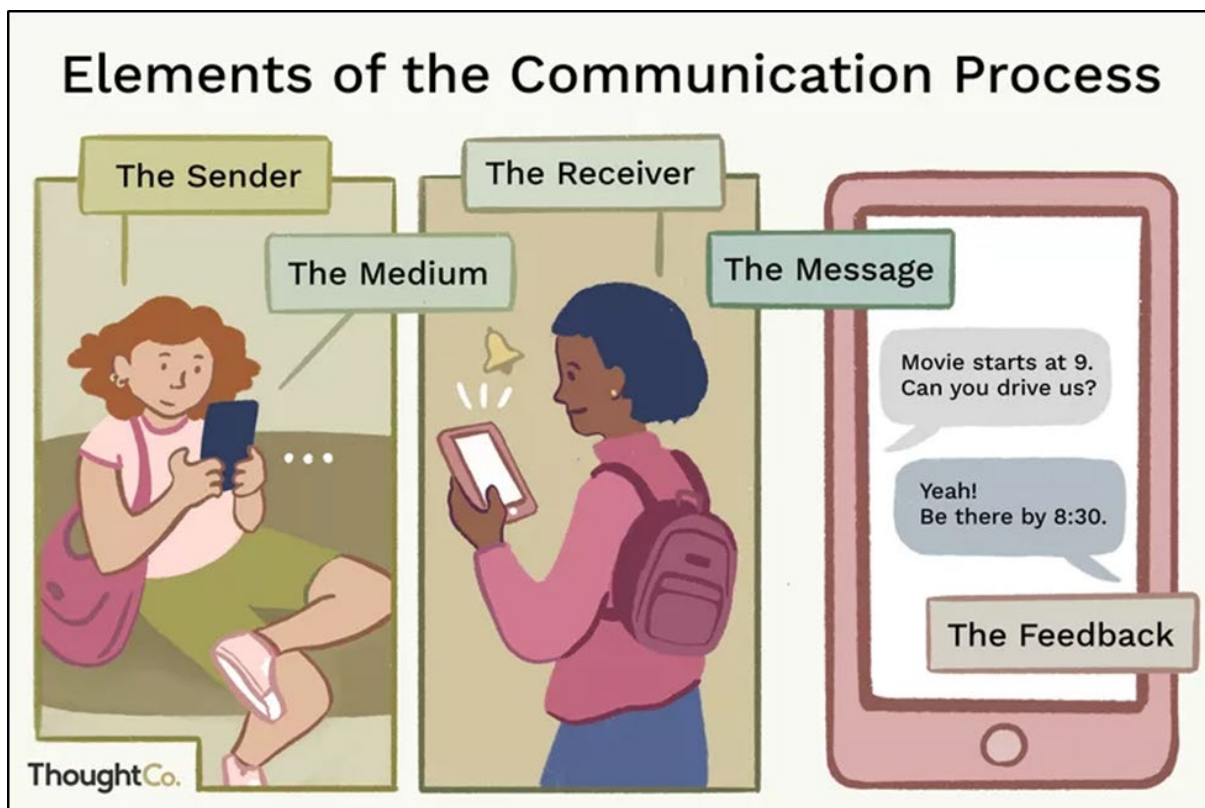


Figure 1: Illustration of Communication Process [Source: <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-communication-process-1689767/>]

others” (para. 2). Second, the receiver is the one who receives the information from the sender and is the one who must comprehend or grasp the meaning of the message conveyed.

Third, the message itself, or its content “is the information that the sender wants to relay to the receiver,” and messages are also transmitted via “body language and tone of voice” (para. 3). Therefore, the basic communication process is composed of these three components: the sender, receiver, and message. Fourth, the medium is the way the message is conducted or conveyed. Finally, the communication process includes what is known as feedback, meaning that once the sender sends the message and it is received, the person receiving the message responds to the message indicating that the message was understood. Feedback may be direct or indirect, or it could be written, verbal, or action.

Interpersonal Communication Model

Without giving any thought to the audience (the receiver), communication practice can become a one-way street, not being effective—or appropriate, and having a message delivery much like that of a hammer looking for a nail. Such a “message-orientated” approach, Søgaaard (1993) suggests, is based on “the design of the message rather than on the intended listener” (p. 41). Communication theories, consequently, must take into account the entire communication process within the framework of the given theory and consider the sender, the message, and the receiver along with other factors that will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Søgaaard (1993) suggests that a “variety of models have been suggested” by various researchers, which share standard components, but these theories “may differ in certain details” (p. 41). He suggests that Engel’s 1979 model of interpersonal communication is an adequate construct/model to evaluate “the elements of a communication process” (p. 41). In **Figure 2**, below, the communicator, Mr. X, wishes to send a message to the receiver, Ms. Y. To do so,

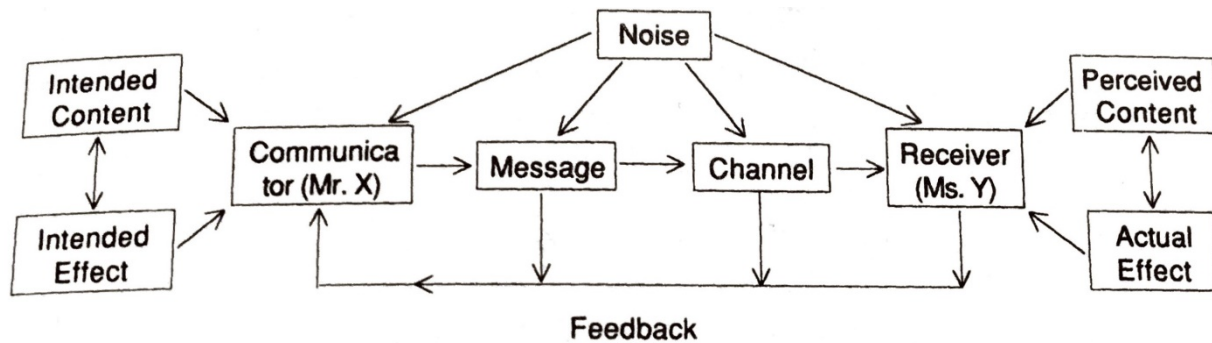


Figure 2: Engel's 1979 Interpersonal Communication Model (Søgaard, 1993, p. 41)

first, he encodes his message by selecting “certain words” that he wishes to use and arranges them “in a pattern or sequence to be communicated” (pp. 41-42). Second, once encoded, the message “has both an intended content and an intended effect;” the message is then “transmitted through a channel,” verbally or via other means (p. 42). Finally, Once Ms. Y receives the message, she must “attempt to decode it” and the actual outcome of the message “is determined by her perception of what is said, not by its intended content” (p. 42). Søgaard asserts that this model may be used as a model for mass communication, which has many different audiences.

According to Nordquist (2019), other factors influence the communication process. First, he identifies noise. He says,

[Noise] can be any sort of interference that affects the message being sent, received, or understood. It can be as literal as static over a phone line or radio or as esoteric as misinterpreting a local custom (para. 9).

Second, he reasons that context is also a factor.

[Context] is the setting and situation in which communication takes place. Like noise, context can have an impact on the successful exchange of information. It may have a physical, social, or cultural aspect to it. In a private conversation with a trusted friend, you would share more personal information or details about your weekend or vacation, for example, than in a conversation with a work colleague or in a meeting (para. 10).

Søgaard (1993) further expounds upon the concepts of encoding and decoding messages. He explains that encoding a message “refers to the process needed to change or shape a concept

into a message or program that can be transmitted” via a “selected media channel” (p. 43). Furthermore, he states that “the message must be coded or shaped a certain way to fit the ‘language’ of the chosen medium” (p. 43). Lastly, he suggests that decoding is “the process of receiving the message from the media and translating it into the receptor’s frame of reference” (p. 43). In essence, the person receiving the message must make sense of what the message is communicating.

Moreover, one other aspect that Søgaaard elaborates upon is the process of selectively filtering a message by the receiver of the message. Filtering can be demonstrated in the following four phases (p. 44):

1. **Exposure.** Exposure occurs when someone, a listener, viewer, etc., “is exposed to a message.”
2. **Attention.** Attention is when someone pays attention to the message.
3. **Comprehension.** Comprehension of the message is important so that the message “is understood correctly,” and the information can be processed.
4. **Retention.** Retention takes place when the message is remembered and action is taken.

Brief Overview of Select Communication Theories

Dainton and Zelay (2011) contend that communication theories “seem to converge on two general decision points” of importance for communicators to take into consideration (p. 208). The first decision relates to the directness or indirectness of the communication—or somewhere in the middle, and the second, concerns “whether the communication should be similar to or different from the previous communication” (p. 208).

Communicators, according to Dainton and Zelley, must first determine to what degree they wish to be direct in communicating their thoughts and needs. Directness can be effective; however, it may not be appropriate because “different cultures hold different values about clarity and openness” (pp. 208-209). Additionally, these authors suggest that “the appropriateness of directness” may be influenced by situational factors, such as the power to low power continuum. For example, the Politeness Theory (PT) maintains that “those in power are more likely to be direct, and those with less power tend to use indirect strategies” (p. 209). On the other hand, the authors assert that “there is also a time and place for directness,” and the Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) assumes that communication expectations are governed by context.

The second point of decision making in the communication process, as stated by Dainton and Zelley, “is whether a person should communicate in a similar fashion to previous messages or whether she or he ought to behave differently” (p. 209). They maintain that in systems theory communication patterns may “be symmetrical (the same) or complementary (different)” (p. 209); furthermore,

EVT projects whether a person will reciprocate or compensate based on the reward valence of the communicator and the valence of the violation (p. 209).

Finally, regarding effective communication, Dainton and Zelley reinforce the importance of self-understanding and understanding others, and they identify three theories that “explicitly address how qualities of the individual might affect the communication process” (p. 214):

1. EVT proposes that characteristics of the communicator, such as gender, age, and other traits affect the expectations of the communicator in the communication process.
2. Attribution theory advocates that “one of the ways you answer the question ‘why?’ is by looking for stable internal dispositions of the communicator.

3. Communication privacy management theory (CPM) puts forward the idea that “one’s own individual values and beliefs will determine the privacy rules that he or she creates.”

Dainton and Zelley conclude that communicators “cannot presume everyone will respond in the same way to the same message or situation;” instead, communicators must compose or design their communication “to match the qualities of the interactants” (p. 214).

Cross-Cultural Communication

In leading TMF, I interact and work with people of other cultures, who speak languages other than English and may be of a different religion, generational mindset, or social framework. It is critical for me, as a leader, to consider the communication process across language and cultural barriers.

Mor Barak (2014) defines cross-cultural communication as “the ability to convey a clear message” in another culture in which people (receivers) are able to understand the message of the sender (p. 185). Cross-cultural communication carries within itself various challenges because of barriers related to methods of non-verbal and verbal communication “to convey meanings that may or may not be the same in the cultures of origin of the participants” (p. 187).

Sanchez-Burks and Mor Barak (2014) point out that “people from different cultures often bring very different sets of assumptions about appropriate ways to coordinate and communicate in business relationships,” which are best seen in “demographic differences such as gender, ethnicity, or nationality” (p. 198). Furthermore, these differences are related to variation culturally “in cognitive, communicative, and relational styles,” which results in “challenges for intercultural business” that are more related to “deep-seated cultural variations between groups” (p. 198). The authors propose that it is a misnomer to assume that there are culturally neutral

interpersonal styles that are “universally correct,” which frequently lead to devaluing the “relational work style of others as ‘incorrect’ and ‘unprofessional’” (p. 199).

Likewise, Sanchez-Burks and Mor Barak indicate that “relational mental models influence our perceptions and the way we communicate and relate to others;” the authors explain that “mental models serve as a framework for encoding, understanding, and remembering information” (p. 199). Additionally, they characterize two types of mental models: relational mental models and cultural, mental models. Relational mental models refer “to cognitions about interpersonal relationships” and cultural, mental models “allow people to coordinate thought and action by creating shared expectations about how social interaction should unfold” (p. 199).

Moreover, Sanchez-Burks and Mor Barak reason that it is important to keep diversity issues in view concerning relational mental models because different cultures respond differently to non-verbal clues, such as gestures that communicate to them messages in subtle manners.

Consequently, cultural divides present challenges in intercultural relationships due to “two types of relational mental models: (a) task-focused mental models and (b) social-emotional mental models” (p. 202). The authors further address studies that considered cultural interdependence (“social structures that promote the good of the collective”) and cultural independence (“support individual autonomy and personal fulfillment”) both of which are important to consider when people work together because people have dispositions toward collective and individual mental relational models (p. 205).

Interestingly, Sanchez-Burks and Mor Barak highlight the fact that “all business transactions whether within the same culture or across different cultures, involve communication;” being able to “differentiate among cultural communication styles” involves using a “theoretical construct” known as “the continuum of low-context to high-context cultures”

(p. 207). High-context cultures such as Japan use more of an indirect communication style in which much is implied or inferred by the context, while low-context cultures use more of a direct method of communication in which everything is spelled out clearly.

Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced and discussed my experience as a photojournalist and that as a cross-cultural minister in Poland. I covered the basic process of communication and its elemental construct. Communication occurs “any time two or more people get together to exchange messages, and they are engaging in this basic process [of communication]” (Nordquist, 2019, para. 1). Likewise, Dainton and Zelley (2011) propose that “communication competence is most often understood as achieving a successful balance between effectiveness and appropriateness” (p. 2). These authors suggest that “effectiveness is the extent to which you achieve your goals in an interaction” (p. 2), while appropriateness “refers to fulfilling social expectation for a particular situation” (p. 3).

Communication theories take into account the entire communication process and consider how the sender, the message, and the receiver, along with other factors, impact the effectiveness or appropriateness of the communication. Søgaaard (1993) indicates that a “variety of models have been suggested” by various researchers, which share standard components but these theories “may differ in certain details” (p. 41). Cross-cultural communication carries within itself multiple challenges because of barriers related to methods of non-verbal and verbal communication “to convey meanings that may or may not be the same in the cultures of origin of the participants” (p. 187).

CHAPTER 2

APPLYING THEORY TO PRACTICE

Effective Communication Skills

Sharpening My Speaking and Presentation Competencies

By nature, I am an introvert. I have learned over the course of my life to become more extroverted when it comes to speaking or leading in public. Consequently, I began to grow as a public communicator; however, my communication preference is one-on-one rather than addressing small or large groups. While in seminary, as I mentioned previously, I enrolled in preaching courses and learned how to organize my thoughts, prepare a manuscript, and how to deliver a sermon. I am not a very dynamic preacher, but I became an effective communicator in time. The greatest challenge that I faced as a communicator was that of communicating in the Polish language. Learning to communicate in another language and culture is humbling. I eventually mastered the language fairly well. As a result of my cross-cultural experiences in the Polish language and culture, I learned to communicate straightforwardly, clearly, and passionately.

In early 2019, as a means to prepare for the increasing number of speaking opportunities that I was receiving, as a result, my work in leading TMF, I realized that I needed to improve my

public speaking abilities. For this reason, I decided to take two short but practical communication courses. Via [Udemy.com](https://www.udemy.com/) (an online learning source), first, I took the class: [*Pitch Yourself! Learn to Ignite Curiosity + Inspire Action*](#), and the second course I took was: [*Presentation Skills: Master Confident Presentations*](#).

Pitching your work—what you are passionate about in your work requires focus, clarity, and a call to action. Alexa Fischer (2014) defines an elevator pitch as “the short, concise, intriguing way you describe your work” (p. 1). She says,

[An elevator pitch] can open doors you didn’t even know existed. And when you love sharing yourself and your work with the world, big things happen (p. 1).

Furthermore, her teaching focuses on reconnecting “to the passion you feel for your work” and the organization that you lead enabling you to “discover the spark in your story that will ignite your listener’s curiosity” (p. 2). Aside from the substantial amount of Buddhist philosophy in Fischer’s presentation, I found the course to be what I needed.

According to the [course syllabus](#) (**Artifact**) for *Pitch Yourself! Learn to Ignite Curiosity + Inspire Action*, Fischer explains what she teaches participants to do in the course. She outlines six areas of course instruction:

1. How to connect to the passion you feel for your business or organization.
2. How to identify and remove negative thoughts that have been holding you back.
3. How to find the spark of your story so you can ignite the curiosity of the listener.
4. How to craft a dynamic elevator pitch.
5. How to seek opportunities to connect with new prospects.
6. How to capture the hearts and minds of your audience at any presentation.

I completed this course in a few days and earned a [course certificate](#) (**Verification**) in *Pitch Yourself! Learn to Ignite Curiosity + Inspire Action*. I recommended the course to our board

(**Artifact:** [Online Course Recommendation](#)); however, to my knowledge, none of the board members enrolled in the class.

In the second course, *Presentation Skills*, the [course syllabus](#) (**Artifact**) has five primary learning objectives describing what participants will learn: (a) be a memorable and confident speaker, (b) give a presentation without notes or cue cards, (c) master professional PowerPoint design and get your message across clearly, (d) overcome any possible problem from the common to the bizarre, and (e) learn from a world expert with 20 years of experience. The course came with a transcript of the video seminars, which I downloaded and used for a course journal and future reference and review. I spent about a week on this course and earned a [course certificate](#) (**Verification**) upon completing it. I found the seminars to be beneficial, and I learned several things that I have applied to my public speaking and PowerPoint Presentations. I will discuss how I used some of my learnings to speaking and presenting in Chapter 3.

Advancing the Communication Competency of TMF

Over the past nine years, I have read (and I am continuing to read) articles on developing non-profit communication and media strategies that embrace social media. I have also kept up with trends and research by reading articles concentrating on fundraising and developing strategies for grant writing and building a donor base. In an effort to help me and our board develop further in developing our work in media, as well as fundraising and grant writing, I share with them, from time to time, what I am reading and learning as it relates to developing our basic communications strategy, social media initiatives, and issues that affect non-profits, such as fundraising (**Artifact:** [Media Strategy Development Emails](#)).

One approach I use is to send the board and our primary volunteers a reading digest from time to time, which generally includes a summary, or reason to read the article. I include links to

the articles that I have been reading, which may be of importance to them. I keep track of what I read by bookmarking pages, printing articles, and then indexing these articles that I have read. For example, as a part of LEAD636, I kept a course journal and indexed the articles that I read and sent the board (**Artifact:** [LJ-Reece-LEAD638](#)). I continue a similar practice. I now bookmark and or print relevant articles and save them to my computer for future reference. Frequently, I will send these articles to the board for them to read so that they keep abreast of issues that relate to our work (**Artifacts:** [Light Reading Email](#) and [Light Reading Articles](#)). We now have a culture of reading and sharing relevant articles about issues that affect our work and our non-profit.

Applying Cross-Cultural Communication Theory to the Work of TMF

As an organization, we operate cross-culturally and interact with Jews, Christians, and secular individuals. Our volunteer base is mostly non-American and originates primarily in Poland; however, we engage volunteers from countries such as Canada, Argentina, Australia, South Africa, Russia, Ukraine, Israel, France, Germany, Austria, and Bulgaria. At the close of 2019 and in the course of eight years, TMF has engaged 1,310 volunteers, of whom 75 percent are local residents of the communities in which we have labored.

Due to the nature of working in Jewish cemeteries devastated during and after the Shoah, we realize that we are working as Christians in an arena, which at times, can be highly controversial and divisive, as there are tensions between Jews and Christians. Therefore, we have considered not only how to get our message out, but we have thought about the effectiveness and appropriateness of our communications with those with whom we cooperate and collaborate, whether they be Jewish, Christian, American, Polish, or otherwise.

Subsequently, the work we do in the Jewish cemeteries of Poland (and on one occasion in Ukraine) is straightforward and speaks for itself, as it is basic gardening—cutting grass, pruning trees, hauling branches, and picking up trash. Nonetheless, the purpose of the work of TMF is directed toward dialogue and reconciliation. Cemetery clean-up is a vehicle to that end. Therefore, we must be able to communicate our purpose effectively and appropriately to project participants—no matter who they are or from where they originate. To this end, we must develop the ability “to convey a clear message” (Mor Barak, 2014, p. 185) in another culture so that people are able to understand the message of TMF.

Every culture has within it a particular cultural context and to borrow a communication term, it also has “noise.” Speaking to the concept of noise, Nordquist (2019) articulates that noise “can be any sort of interference that affects the message being sent, received, or understood. It can be as literal as static over a phone line or radio or as esoteric as misinterpreting a local custom” (para. 9). Understanding and interpreting this cultural noise encountered in cross-cultural communication is a vital communication skill.

Likewise, each culture has a particular cultural context. Context, according to Nordquist (2019), “is the setting and situation in which communication takes place” (para. 10). Furthermore, context can influence or affect “the successful exchange of information,” and “[i]t may have a physical, social, or cultural aspect to it” (para. 10).

As an organization, TMF must learn how to communicate effectively and appropriately by not “misinterpreting a local custom,” and it must learn how to understand cultural or social frameworks beyond their experience and culture. In the following paragraphs, I will demonstrate using two examples of how I led TMF to address the cultural noise of their own Christian culture, and how cultural frameworks intersect with and affect our work.

Receiving Donations from a “Sinful” Source

The first example that I wish to share regarding cross-cultural communication—specifically cultural noise, is about an issue that confronted us as TMF in pursuing and potentially receiving grant funds from “Foundation X” that funds LGBT initiatives. From a Christian perspective, receiving funds from an organization that supports such initiatives might be considered as receiving donations from a “sinful” source.

The matter at hand is more so about deprogramming thinking patterns associated with Christian or a church cultural frameworks, as it relates to its interaction with non-Christian, or non-church cultures. I do not have time to pursue an explanation about how values and behaviors are linked, but they are; however, I will explore this matter briefly.

Cooper (2006) points out that “our values are constantly guiding our behavior” (p. 26). He advises us to make “healthy judgments” about situations and the people involved (p. 27). Such healthy judgments included evaluating “evidence carefully,” being “unafraid to decide,” recognizing “its own limitations,” being “willing to change its mind,” refusing “to distrust another’s motives unless” there is clear evidence otherwise, holding “its convictions with charity and tolerance for others,” separating “behavior and ideas from people, who hold them,” and having “concern for others” (pp. 27-28).

I communicated primarily about this matter with board members and volunteer staff via email; nevertheless, I did have at least one phone call discussing the issue with one of our officers on the board. I polled TMF seeking everyone’s opinions to gain insights and feedback regarding this issue so that we could decide how to proceed with the matter. For me, traversing this matter was vitally and critically important to who we are as an organization, our values and

behaviors, and sourcing our work. Ultimately, it affects how others, particularly non-Christians, perceive us outside the organization. All of these matters were on the line.

One of the most prevalent themes that stuck in my mind while reading Cooper (2006) was that of having compassion for others and not to be judgmental of them as a person. Being judgmental of others as a leader is the most difficult for all of us, who lead because we tend not to want to listen to another person's viewpoint but to advance our own. One aspect of differentiating my worldview from the worldview of others is to be objective and to think critically. This is an outgrowth of my rationalistic viewpoint; however, this does not mean that I am dismissive of other viewpoints.

If I learn to evaluate, i.e., to judge, what others are saying around me, I will learn critical thinking and be better able to make judgments about what is going on in a particular situation. One useful skill (among many noted by Cooper) was that of being able “to separate ideas and personalities” instead of “lumping ideas and personalities together” condemning both (Cooper, 2006, p. 38). Good ideas could be lost if we dismiss them at the source because we do not like a particular person or dismiss them altogether. Leaders should be able to make a judgment about an idea apart from their own personality or that of another person.

Based on the input that I received from surveying the views of everyone concerned, I shared with the board and others the rationale for my decision to move forward with the grant application from the “sinful” source (**Artifact: [Funding and Faith](#)**). In this email, I concluded that “the board generally has not clearly spoken to the issue.” I wrote,

At best [the board] is neutral on the issue in that I have heard from only 4 of 6 (I am not including myself) board members, who have expressed opinions about seeking funding from [“Foundation X”]. Of the four who have commented, 2 have been against, one cautious and one uncertain. From our advisory board, one member has advised against moving in this direction .

Second, in the same email, I stated,

The IRS has determined that we are a PUBLIC CHARITY and has classified us accordingly, which means that the PUBLIC can support us. By God's sovereignty, we are NOT a church or a Christian non-profit although we state that we are a Christian non-profit in our literature. Maybe we should say that we are a public charity founded by a group of Christians? Why? We are an organization that has been established by Christians and recognized by the IRS as a Public Charity. Even as a public charity, certainly we may operate from the perspective of a Judeo-Christian worldview, which allows us to determine how we function, by what values and ethics we function and by which principles we choose to function. All of this is up to us; nevertheless, we have other funding issues to consider regarding how Jews might perceive donations we receive from Christian groups or groups like Jews for Jesus. We also must consider how churches or individual Christian donors might view Jewish support.

Finally, I shared with the board,

I believe that we must be careful about the issue concerning from whom we accept funding. We must remember that giving is oftentimes an issue of the heart. We are looking for hearts that are inclined toward us or with whom we have favor. What we are expressing is God's love in a tangible way. People will resonate with what we are doing at the heart level. For me this is an indication that God is at work in their lives. I would ask you to read Luke 7:36-50 in which Jesus was anointed with oil by a prostitute. Jesus did not object to and received what the prostitute did to Him as an expression of her love and gratitude toward Him. Simon, the religious leader, condemned Jesus for his actions and looked down upon the sinner. Are we responding like Simon in this passage? Can we accept this type of gift from a sinner, who wishes to express tangibly their gratitude and love for what we are doing? If not, would we be prideful by not taking funds or a gift from a sinner?

As a public charity, I also wrote that TMF occupies "a middle ground, a neutral place between these two opposing groups", meaning us as sinners and potential donors who are not like us as Christians. Furthermore, I wrote,

Since we are a public charity, we have our answer. We can take funds from the public, both Jew and Gentile; however, we can reserve the right to accept or decline funding from the public based on whether or not there are any strings attached.

We live in a diverse world full of different people, ideas and ways to do things; therefore we should not be ethnocentric, but open to people and their ideas. We should not be judgmental and discount an idea or a resource because it is coming from a person, from some other culture or from a different cultural perspective.

One board member's response well summarizes the shift in perspective all of us experienced as we worked through the issue of taking gifts from sinners (**Verification:** [Re Funding and Faith_Robin](#)). The board member comments,

Let us examine our own hearts. When we think of accepting the money, what is the attitude of our hearts? I felt uncomfortable at first, and felt fear, as there is a soul tie. But as I wrestled it out with God, I realized that Jesus came for all. He accepted the washing of his feet from the prostitute. I want to reach out to all God brings in my path. I cannot find a Biblical precedent for refusing a contribution except in making a pact that interferes with my allegiance to God.

Friends, God has called us to a cutting edge ministry. We are out of the box, at least I am. I am in reckless abandon with regard for my love for my God. He has placed us a public charity. If our actions do not support this, then we will be found in the church box. The church is known in many circles for condemnation... Get clean, then come to Jesus. Is this fear motivated? When I think of myself, I have been afraid of getting dirty with sinners. I don't want this anymore.

Plaque for Oswiecim Jewish Cemetery

In the second example regarding how cultural frameworks intersect with and affect the work of TMF, it is important to consider how the public perceives TMF, especially in other cultures, whether they be American, Polish, Catholic, Christian, Jewish, etc. Such an understanding is critically important for the work of TMF.

From time to time, our organization must reconsider our identity as Baptist Christians *from* the Polish and Jewish perspectives. From the American Christian perspective, some of our board members drift toward identifying ourselves as merely “Christians.” When this occurs, I remind them of how our work began in the Polish-Catholic religious context, where Baptists are a minority and my working history with the Polish-Jewish community. I approached the Jewish community in Warsaw as a Baptist minister—not just as a Christian. Indeed, in Poland, nearly everyone considers themselves to be Christians; however, Poles are overwhelmingly and virtually all Roman Catholic Christians (approximately 95% of all Poles are baptized as infants into the Roman Catholic Church).

In April 2018, I revisited how our identity and message is perceived in other cultures. Once more the matter of our identity as Baptist Christians and its importance *from* a Jewish and Polish perspective emerged. The director of Auschwitz Jewish Center (AJC) in Oświęcim, Poland wanted to recognize and honor TMF's longstanding work in the Oświęcim Jewish cemetery by placing a plaque to the right of the gate on the outside Jewish cemetery wall, which runs parallel to a public sidewalk (**Artifact:** [Tomek RE the sign at the cemetery](#)). The plaque was in Polish and English. In the body of the text, one sentence stated,

The Matzevah Foundation is an American Baptist organization involved in Christian Jewish dialogue through caring for Jewish cemeteries in Poland and teaching about the Holocaust.

I forwarded the email to the board of directors for comment. In their responses, the consensus among them was to change the wording of “American Baptist organization” to something without “Baptist” (**Artifact:** [Board RE the sign at the cemetery](#)). One board member stated, “My initial reading of it was fine to me. But then I started to get hung up on ‘Baptist.’” Continuing, she asked, “Do we want to specifically call that out?” One other board member enquired, “What if we changed it to American Christian nonprofit organization?” Another board member agreed, “[I] do like American Christian better.”

I wrote an email response, but I did not send it (**Artifact:** [Steven RE the sign at the cemetery](#)). I felt it would be best to discuss this Baptist and cross-cultural identity issue face-to-face with the board. So in my response to their input, I told the board that we would consider this matter at our April 2018 board meeting (**Artifact:** [2018 April Agenda TMF Board Meeting](#)).

To prepare for our discussion, I asked the board members to consider: “How would you describe who you are and what you do in Poland in 30 seconds or less to an American, to a Pole, to a Jew in the US and Poland?” At our board meeting, we discussed the matter and determined to leave the wording as is with a few minor grammatical corrections (**Verification:** [Tomek RE](#)

[the sign at the cemetery](#)). The AJC mounted the sign, and we dedicated it in August 2018 (Verifications: [2018 TMF Year End Report](#) and [TMF Plaque](#)).

Identity—who we are—is fluid and it is not always fixed in terms that reflect our understanding. People perceive us differently even when we use “our words” to describe, who we are. We are, who we are by our character and integrity. In essence, this summary captures the meaning of cross-cultural communication as it is learning how to identify cultural noise and craft a message appropriately and effectively so that it will be understood in another cultural context.

The Intersection of Theory and Practice in the Mission of TMF

Hughes and Curphy (2012) define leadership to be “the process of influencing and organized group toward accomplishing its goals” (p. 5). Leading and developing a group of leaders takes time. When it comes to leading a non-profit, it was crucial for us involved with TMF to realize that we were launching an organization from zero in 2010 without anything—no resources, no plan, really no idea about what we were doing. As we developed the organization, we made mistakes and learned.

In early 2012, the Associated Press broke a story about the Susan G. Komen Foundation and their decision not to fund Planned Parenthood. Komen’s decision caused an uproar. I shared the unfolding story with our board. The Komen Foundation’s dilemma in this debacle concerned their mission and subsequent decisions that they reach regarding who they fund or support. Brown (2012a) observes, “Komen’s strategy was if they didn’t speak about it, it’s not a story (management misstep #1),” and concludes that the organization “was so tone-deaf to their own grantees, they were oblivious to the offensive Planned Parenthood was preparing to launch” (para. 4).

One of the mistakes that Komen made, was to remain silent, when the story went public and allow “others [to] take over the public dialogue” (Leroux-Miller, 2012, para. 4). As a result, Komen learned “what happens when a leading nonprofit jumps into a highly controversial area of public debate without a communications strategy” (Leroux-Miller, 2012, para. 4). Once again, Brown (2012a) reasons,

[W]hen [Planned Parenthood] did launch [its media offensive], a firestorm [rained] down on a very unprepared Komen (management misstep #2). For not only did Komen do a pitiful job in explaining their decision, they demonstrated they had no idea of how news spreads in the 21st century (management misstep #3); no understanding of the Internet; and by taking sides in a very public hot-button political issue, they were actually changing their mission by fiat (management misstep #4) (Brown, 2012a)

When I read this series of stories, I realized that TMF could face a similar danger in its mission. I asked the board of directors of TMF to keep before them this question: Who controls our message, or who shapes the message about our mission/purpose, or what we do in our mission/purpose? This question is essential. If we are not vigilant about our mission and how we communicate it and our story, someone or some organization could hijack it for their own purpose and advance their own agenda either knowingly or unknowingly.

Brown (2012b) argues that “every organization—regardless of size, regardless of mission—needs a PR/media strategy” (para. 1). Brown recommends that “[Such a media or PR strategy] is needed not only to convey the work of the organization to the broader audience, but, it is needed to effectively counter the unexpected crisis” (para. 1), as in the case of the Susan G. Komen Foundation in 2012.

How do we speak to a potential crisis without have the ability or the mechanisms to do so. Collectively, we recognized that beyond the officers of TMF who handled the day-to-day operation of TMF, we were operating it as an organization without specific roles and duties for board members. Therefore, we realized the need to develop tasks and assign board members who

were gifted and willing to lead these particular tasks. One of the most critical tasks that we identified was our media and communications and the development of a media strategy.

In April 2014, Rachel McRae was one of three new members elected to the board of directors of TMF. Over the next year an ad-hoc committee for governance considered roles and duties of the seven board members. In the spring of 2015, the board voted to accept the recommendation of the ad-hoc committee for governance and adopted the following roles and duties for the board of directors of TMF as seen in Table 2 below (**Verification:** [2015 March TMF Spring Board Meeting](#)).

Role	Area of Oversight
President	Organization
Treasurer	Finances
Secretary	Record Keeping
Director of Communications	Website and Social Media
Director of Community	Interactions with Public (inc education, events, etc)
Director of Development	Fundraising
Director of Operations	Logistics and Coordination of Team Leaders

Table 1: Board Structure and Duties of TMF

As the Director of Communications, Rachel oversees TMF’s website and social media platforms. She produces and provides the content to these media platforms via updates and blog posts. I provide content in the form of written stories, photographs, and occasional videos. Rachel has the lions’ share of responsibility for managing the TMF Facebook page, Twitter and Instagram accounts, and she produces a newsletter. Rachel writes the majority of our Facebook

posts, Twitter, and Instagram. I provide content in her absence and I rarely post to our FB page. In Chapter 3, I will discuss TMF's website development and social media policy.

Summary

I have led myself and the organization that I lead, TMF, to develop and improve the appropriateness and effectiveness of our communication efforts. I used two communication courses to bolster my personal effectiveness when I have opportunities to share with people the work of TMF using so-called "elevator pitches." And to improve when I speak publicly, I studied how to make better presentations.

As a means to address cultural assumptions that we may have as an organization, I led the board of directors to consider whether or not that we should receive donations as a public charity from a "sinful" source. Second, I wanted the board to consider how cultural frameworks intersect with and affect the work of TMF. It is important to consider how the public perceives TMF, especially in other cultures, whether they be American, Polish, Catholic, Christian, Jewish, etc. Such an understanding is critically important for the work of TMF. To this end, I led them through an exercise during one of our board meetings where they considered the question: : "How would you describe who you are and what you do in Poland in 30 seconds or less to an American, to a Pole, to a Jew in the US and Poland?"

I also led TMF to develop its communication strategy by asking the board of directors of TMF to keep before them this question: Who controls our message, or who shapes the message about our mission/purpose, or what we do in our mission/purpose? This question is essential. If we are not vigilant about our mission and how we communicate it and our story, someone or some organization could hijack it for their own purpose and advance their own agenda. Brown (2012b) argues that "every organization—regardless of size, regardless of mission—needs a

PR/media strategy” (para. 1). Brown recommends that “[Such a media or PR strategy] is needed not only to convey the work of the organization to the broader audience, but, it is needed to effectively counter the unexpected crisis” (para. 1),

Finally, I led our board to consider roles and duties of the seven board members. In the spring of 2015, the board voted to accept the recommendation of the ad-hoc committee for governance and adopted the following roles and duties for the board of directors of TMF. Our media work and communication strategy become anchored and led around the role and function of Rachel McRae, TMF’s Director of Communications.

CHAPTER 3

KEY LEARNINGS AND SERVING OTHERS

TMF Website

In 2014, before we established the position of Director of Communications and elected Rachel to that role, she led us in the development of our first website. The original TMF website, unfortunately, no longer exists and has been replaced in 2019; however, I have a few artifacts that demonstrate our process of designing, building, and launching TMF's first website. Beginning in September 2014, Rachel developed the navigation and page structure and along with her, me and one other board member, John Mark Folker, began to develop the page structure for the website using a template (**Artifact:** [TMF Website Content Nov 2014](#)). We did not have funds to hire a web designer, so we did all the work ourselves. We employed our own resources and abilities to design, structure, build, and populate TMF's first website with content. By the end of January 2015, we completed our work and launched TMF's first website (**Verifications:** [Fwd Re New TMF Website Has Launched](#) and [The Matzevah Foundation Newsletter, April 2015](#)).

Before and launching TMF's website, we requested feedback from various people who were associated with our work. I will discuss the importance of feedback in the next section.

However, within two years, Rachel sought additional feedback from a professional graphic designer (**Artifact:** [RE TMF Website Pro Feedback](#)) and determined that TMF needed to revise its original website with a new look and fresh content. Once more Rachel led us to revise and rebuild TMF's next website (**Artifacts:** [Nonprofit Websites](#), [Website Gathering Data](#), and [2017 Oct TMF Board Meeting Minutes](#)).

It took about 18 months for Rachel in cooperation with John Mark to complete the revision process for the next website. I had very little involvement with the process, other than producing some content, providing photographs, and editing text. In early June 2019, Rachel sought feedback from the board of directors (**Verification:** [Re New Website Launched](#)). After reviewing the feedback and making corrections, we launched [TMF's new website](#) on June 27, 2019 (**Verification:** [Announcing the new website for The Matzevah Foundation](#)).

TMF Brochure

Over the past nine years, TMF has produced three different version of its brochure. I designed and produced the first brochure in 2012. I chose a tri-fold design and used Microsoft Publisher to produce it. In retrospect and based on what I learned from the PowerPoint course I took, the brochure was too text heavy. Its look was crowded and busy with no clear message. Please note, all three TMF Brochures, discussed in this section, appear in one PDF file—

Artifact: [TMF Brochures Merged](#). The reader may scroll through the file and view each of the three brochures easily.

In the second brochure, we asked a volunteer, who was a graphic designer, to overhaul the brochure. She determined to make it more Jewish by making the tri-fold read from right to left, by placing the first page on the last panel of the brochure. So to read the brochure, the reader had to open the first panel to the right (and not to the left). In this version, we adopted the Jewish

tradition of not naming God, by spelling God and Lord, as G-d and L-rd respectively (**Artifact:** [TMF Brochures Merged](#)). Finally, in our most recent version of the TMF brochure, Rachel McRae worked with a graphic designer to produce a very clean and elegant tri-fold brochure (**Artifact:** [TMF Brochures Merged](#)).

The Importance of Feedback

Feedback is a vital part of the communication process. According to Søgaaard (1993), when communicators craft a message and send it, the receiver must “attempt to decode it” and the actual outcome or meaning of the message “is determined by [the receiver’s] perception of what is said, not by its intended content” (p. 42). The perception or response of the receiver is feedback.

In communicating the message of TMF via a website, we had to craft our message and determine if the message was effective and appropriate. The only way that we could make this determination was to seek the input of the so-called receivers. We sought feedback through the construction of both of TMF’s websites. I will share some of the feedback that we received in the next few paragraphs.

One board member stated, “I almost cried as I looked through the website today.” While another said, “Thank you all. I agree with Steven and think this will be an excellent way for us to tell our story. Excited about where we are and where He is taking us” (**Verification:** [Re New TMF Website Has Launched_3](#)). A third board member responded by stating,

What amazing beautiful work you have done! Overall, I think the Web site is vibrant and organized. The photographs are particularly beautiful and tell a story. In some of them I think emotion is even conveyed to the reader, which is a powerful thing. Thank you, thank you for the hard work on our Web site. I hope it will be visited often by many people (**Verification:** [Re New TMF Website Has Launched_2](#)).

Finally, we sought input from one of our partner organizations and we received specific feedback from Marla Raucher Osborn regarding the wording and content of TMF's website.

Marla wrote, "Steven, this looks just great! Thank you, thank you" (**Verification:** [The Matzevah Foundation webpage revisions](#)! Additionally, Marla provided specific input to improve the wording of content in one section:

I have only one comment, and it is really just a request: Is it possible to broaden the last sentence of the first paragraph - under the photo - so it is not just limited to the cemetery in Zambrow? For example, adding to the end, something along the lines that: TMF and FODZ expect to partner on additional projects in Jewish cemeteries in Poland, as both organizations recognize the importance of these sites, not just for Jewish heritage, but also for town heritage.

Once TMF's original website went live, Marla, announced it and commented about it on her personal Facebook page (**Verification:** [Marla FB Feedback](#)).

Social Media

TMF began using social media before we developed a website via Facebook. In January 2014, Rachel suggested using Twitter and to begin using a newsletter service, called [MailChimp](#), to craft and distribute TMF's Newsletters (**Artifact:** [A thought or two](#)).

As with many organizations we use a Facebook page to post news, articles, video clips, and photographs. We began our Facebook page in 2011 with about 45 followers, which is not much, so I requested the board to consider how we make use of Social Media, such as Facebook and Twitter, more effectively. Mort (2012) casts a new light on the use of Twitter as a social medium. She writes,

Over the last few years, the world of communications has simultaneously become both more accessible and less manageable. With the explosion of social media came the democratization of communications – one Tweet can reach more people than a press release, and a Facebook post can receive just as much attention as coverage in traditional media (para. 1).

This change in how news gets out can benefit smaller nonprofits that may not be budgeted for large communications outlays. But just because social media is accessible to all of us does not mean it should be approached without an airtight strategy (para. 2).

To Mort's point about approaching social media "without an airtight strategy" (Mort, 2012, para. 2), we began developing a social media policy. Generally, speaking only two people speak for TMF publicly regarding issues and that is Rachel and me. Beyond that, in 2016, Rachel developed and wrote TMF's social media guidelines (**Verification:** [TMF Social Media Guidelines](#)). In her opening paragraph, she writes,

Social media is key to the work of The Matzevah Foundation (TMF). We want to use it with strategy and focus. The information we share can be a powerful tool to create awareness, educate, and encourage people to join us in our work. Facebook and Instagram are our primary social media outlets and Twitter is our secondary outlet. The following guidelines are designed to help each TMF project to use social media in the most effective way possible.

The guidelines also include a Photo/Video Content Release Form allowing TMF to use a person's likeness in its media work. We also added a Polish language version of this release form (**Verification:** [TMF Release Form Wersja Polska](#)).

Under Rachel's leadership we began to grow our social media presence. She employed a strategy of buying paid advertising via Facebook to reach more people and increase the number of people interacting with us via our social media outlets. For example in 2016, Rachel wrote,

Tomorrow through early evening on Wednesday, we'll have an ad on Facebook running. This will be the first time trying this type of advertising. The goal for this ad is to draw attention to our Facebook page and hopefully increase our followers (we currently have 493... hoping to hit 500 soon!). I've set the parameters to target people who have interests in Christianity, Judaism, and Poland. The ad will be seen by people in the US, Poland, and Israel who fit the interest range. Facebook gave a wide estimate of 25,000-67,000 people could possibly see the ad. If you currently follow TMF on Facebook then you will not see the ad.

From this campaign, we netted an additional 89 TMF Facebook Page "Likes." Rachel and I use paid ads occasionally to grow our audience. As of today, we now have 2,027 page likes and 2,087, who follow our Facebook page on a regular basis. In her end of year quarterly report,

Rachel provided the following facts outlined in the next four sections regarding the growth of TMF's social media efforts (**Verification:** [Communications 2019 4th Qtr Report](#)).

Facebook

1. 1,994 followers (+181 this quarter)
2. Did a paid post to boost our Page before the Nashville event. It garnered several new "likes." \$35 spent.
3. Also did a paid post to promote the Nashville event. \$35 spent and it reached 2,832 people and garnered 41 responses to the event.
4. Biggest post this quarter: 10/11/19 Pic inside the Oswiecim Synagogue at the AJC that reached over 3,783 people (315 reactions, 17 shares, and 49 comments on the various shares)

Instagram

1. 326 followers (+9 this quarter)
2. Biggest post this quarter: 10/6/19 picture of Okopowa Cemetery (29 likes)
3. Used Insta Stories during Giving Tuesday that highlighted our work

Twitter

1. 79 followers (+4 this quarter)
2. Biggest tweet this quarter: 10/27/19 Pic from Zambrow Project (8 likes)

Newsletter

1. 135 people on our newsletter list (+17 this quarter). New additions came through the Nashville event and through the website (it works!)

2. Newsletters sent October 15, November 18, and December 20 (**Verification:** [The Matzevah Foundation 2019 Year End Report](#)).

Feedback: Participants' Testimonies

We capture testimonies of volunteers from time to time to determine how well those who work with us principally from other cultures perceive and understand what we are doing. Consequently, I would like to share two testimonies to illustrate what type of response we are receiving (**Verification:** [Matzevah Foundation Summer Newsletter 2015](#)). First from, Desi, volunteer from Bulgaria working at Oświęcim Jewish cemetery shared with us,

We started with a little workshop with the gravestones. We were given some sheets of paper with some words explaining what we could find on the gravestones. That was the moment when actually I understood how important our job was. We were cleaning a place where so many forgotten people were buried. And I personally find the idea of being forever forgotten really scary. I know we don't know the exact names or stories of all those people, but still I believe we made it possible for them to be remembered.

In the same newsletter, another volunteer shared their thoughts with us. He writes,

I enjoyed the work on the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim with the group of Matzevah Foundation a lot. I liked the group spirit and acceptance of everyone's different approach towards the Shoah and the work. I think that we showed mostly one important point with our work: they (the Nazis) tried total destruction of the Jewish people in Europe but it was not successful.

These are just two examples of the feedback that we receive from many people regarding our work. With this type of feedback, we can measure the appropriateness and effectiveness of our message, how people experience it, and how it impacts them as they work with us in the Jewish cemeteries of Poland.

Public Speaking

I am invited from time to time to speak about the work of TMF in various settings, such conferences, schools, and synagogues. Most of these venues are Jewish but not exclusively. It is

in these public spaces that I can speak about the work of TMF and I can challenge viewpoints regarding the Shoah or the status quo of Jewish and Christian interaction. I have been keeping a log of my speaking opportunities since 2013 (**Artifact:** [Public Speaking Log_SDR_2](#)).

In Chapter 2, I indicated that I took two short-term, online communication courses as a means to sharpen my public speaking effectiveness: [Pitch Yourself! Learn to Ignite Curiosity + Inspire Action](#), and [Presentation Skills: Master Confident Presentations](#). I will briefly share what I gained from these courses and how I applied my learnings to my public speaking.

First, in the Pitch Yourself course, my one take a way was the so-called elevator pitch which is “the short, concise, intriguing way you describe your work” (Fischer, 2014, p. 1). The elevator pitch is an effective personal communication strategy to be used when I might have 20 or 30 seconds to talk about the work of TMF. Generally, these opportunities transpire during first-time, brief encounters, usually when someone asks me, “Tell me. What do you do?”

I did not find the course to be too helpful in assisting me become more effective, or appropriate in giving an elevator pitch. I believe that I, as far as an elevator pitch goes, I fairly proficient in delivering such “pitches;” however, what the course did do was to help me on focusing on my passion and engaging the listener in action. Unfortunately, in my experience, 20 second exchanges do not lead to much, if any follow-up action on the part of the listener. Nonetheless, for me what is important is planting seeds in the minds of people with whom I interact. Who knows? Maybe one day, the seeds that I have sown, may bear fruit.

I found the second course, [Presentation Skills: Master Confident Presentations](#), most helpful in assisting me craft more appropriate and effective messages to share when I speak publicly. In the following paragraphs, and when applicable, I will highlight a few essential strategies that I learned from this course, and how I applied these strategies to my speaking

opportunities. The examples below, will document my journey in learning how to become a more effective leader and communicator.

2015 European Jewish Cemeteries (EJC)

Generally speaking, PowerPoint Presentations are not the best or most appropriate method to use when conducting a meeting or speaking publicly. PowerPoint presentations tend to be text heavy and have a large number of special features, such as animations, that presenters like to use when making presentations. I was aware of these issues; nonetheless, I was expected to make a presentation about my work at “A Cross-Disciplinary Seminar on European Jewish Cemeteries: Theory, Policy, Management and Dissemination” (**Verification:** [EJC 2015 Conf Brochure](#)). The conference was held in Vilnius, Lithuania between 25-28 October 2015. Consequently, I prepared a PowerPoint presentation (**Artifact:** [The Matzevah Foundation 25-Oct-2015](#)).

I was one of the panelists on the panel “Restoration vs Preservation vs Fencing vs Documentation.” The topic of my talk was “The Matzevah Foundation: Remembering, Restoring, and Reconciling.” I would have 12 minutes to introduce the work of TMF to a mostly Jewish audience. I used the lyrics from a Talking Head song “Once in a Lifetime,” from the album “Stop Making Sense.” I used a series of five questions from the song that ask a series of questions. I used these questions as section dividers as a means to break my talk into coherent segments. Likewise, I used these questions to guide my talk. In the lyrics, for example, David Byrne, states, “And you may ask yourself: ‘Well, how did I get here?’” Or he asks, “How do I work this?”

I spoke about 15 minutes using 23 slides of which eight were either section dividers or opening or ending slides. This meant that I had 15 content slides. I told my story about I became

involved in Jewish cemetery restoration work, what TMF does in its work, its philosophy, and with whom it partners in its work. In retrospect, I may have had too many words on the screen, which is a common mistake in PowerPoint Presentations.

Regardless, I only used the presentation as a guide for my talk referring to them only when I moved to the next topic or point of my presentation. Following my talk, the moderator of our panel said, “Wow! That Baptist preacher can preach!” Although, I really did not preach, I took his comment to mean that my talk was passionate and inspiring to at least him.

During the conference, I met some wonderful people and made a few contacts, one of whom was Dr. Caroline Sturdy Colls, a forensic archaeologist, who is a noted Holocaust archeologist. Immediately, after I spoke we had a break. Dr. Colls She invited me to collaborate in a three year International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) grant-funded research project (**Artifact:** [Cemeteries Conference](#)). We began the project in the summer of 2016 and completed it in June 2019. We plan to continue to collaborate in the future.

Later, I asked Caroline to evaluate my speaking and communications skills and she wrote an evaluation for me (**Evaluation:** [Ref Letter for Steven](#)). You may read her full evaluation by following the link above. Here, I will only share a paragraph from her reference letter. She writes,

Steven spoke passionately about his work with The Matzevah Foundation to restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland, how this work can foster Christian-Jewish relations and issues around justice and the Holocaust. I was immediately struck by Steven’s excellent communication skills and the way that he was able to convey a number of complex issues in layman’s terms to a diverse audience. Steven spoke emphatically about the Holocaust and about the ongoing challenges facing those who attempt to research it and engage with Jewish heritage in the present.

2017 Nashville Jewish Film Festival

As a part of the 2017 Nashville Jewish Film Festival (NJFF), I was invited to introduce the film, *Scandal In Ivansk* which was hosted by the Gordon JCC Senior Program (**Artifact:** [Nashville Jewish Film Festival Matinee Jewish Federation of Nashville and Middle Tennessee](#)). Rachel McRae promoted the screening of the film in the middle Tennessee region via a Facebook advertisement (**Artifact:** [Nash FB 10 17](#)). All of five of our board members and one volunteer attended the screening. Before the film screening we were allowed to set up a table in the foyer displaying information about TMF. One of the board members sat at the table and answered questions about our work.

Approximately, 100 people attended the film screening, most of whom were retired. Following the showing of the film, I was given about 20 minutes to moderate a Q&A and then 10 minutes to introduce the work of TMF. Sometime later, I asked Rachel to give me her evaluation and assessment of my speaking at the NJFF and she reviewed the video of my talk that she made for one of our Facebook posts regarding the film screening (**Verification:** [Facebook Live Screenshot](#)).

Below, I will share a quote from Rachel's evaluation of my public speaking ability (**Evaluation:** [Re Nashville Jewish Film Festival](#)). She wrote in an email to me,

You have a strong ability to tell a story. When you're going more off the cuff and not trying to stick to a script, the passion for the moment or experience you're conveying really comes through. That helps the listener to see your heart for what you're sharing with them but also about the call on your life to do the work. You also had good range in your inflection... in how you emphasized certain points. That helps to keep a listener engaged as well. In a more informal setting, like the Q&A period at the Nashville JFF, you are very engaging with the crowd and encouraging them as they ask questions or make comments.

Rachel recalls that from my introduction of the film, “when [I was] behind the podium, [I was] a bit more stiff and not as relaxed.” She concluded, “I understand that nerves will contribute to this.” Subsequently, regarding when I was behind the podium, she gave me some excellent

feedback and suggestions regarding how I might improve the effectiveness of my communication:

1. I would encourage you to gain practice and experience in bringing the same passion, clear voice, and confidence to your speaking when you might be using notes, or when you are in a more formal setting.

2. Become confident in what you want to present.

3. Practice as much as possible.

4. Watch the speed of which you talk.

5. When you need to clear your throat, try to remember to pull the microphone away, if possible.

6. Be sure to bring the same wide range of voice inflection when you're lecturing as you do in a more informal setting, like a Q&A period.

7. All of that will come with practice!

The Nashville screening was the first time that TMF was able to present publicly the work that we do to a Nashville *Jewish* audience. In late 2019, TMF had opportunities to host the screening of *The Presence of Their Absence* and to present their work to both Jewish and Christian audiences in Atlanta and Nashville.

The Presence of Their Absence

In 2017, I was approached by a film producer, Donna Kanter, who was working on the documentary about the trauma experienced by the children of Holocaust survivors. We discussed my work as a Christian—an ordained Baptist pastor, working with the Jewish diaspora of Jewish descent to care for and restore their ancestral cemeteries in Poland. Donna was fascinated with my Jewish ethical approach and knowledge of the Shoah. I explained how God led me to work

with the Jewish community of Poland, which ultimately led to the establishment of TMF. Donna asked me if I could help Fred and play a role in his journey of connecting his past with the present. I gladly agreed and we began working on the film immediately.

In June 2017, I worked with Fred in the Radomsko Jewish cemetery, and over a period of three days, we found the graves of his great grandparents and two of his great aunts. We also did some clearing and cleaning of the cemetery. The title of the documentary is [*The Presence of Their Absence*](#) and a trailer of the film is available on [YouTube](#); I appear in the trailer about minute 2:17.

In the fall of 2019, we “premiered” the film in Atlanta and screened the film at The Temple on Monday, November 11. *The Atlanta Jewish Times* did a story on the film screening: [*Temple Plays Role in Film About Restoring Polish Graves*](#). Our non-profit, TMF, took advantage of the film screening in Atlanta, where I live, and in Nashville, where many of our board members reside. In Atlanta, I was a part of a panel discussion following the film, and the next day, Donna, Fred, and I were invited to speak to high school students at the Lovett School. In Nashville, our board members organized and led a screening of the film at the Brentwood Public Library.

These three film screenings were monumental opportunities for us as an organization to engage both the Jewish and Christian communities. In Atlanta, I invited a few Christian friends to attend the screening of the film at The Temple. There were a hundred people in attendance. Following the film screening we had a Q&A.

In Nashville, we hosted the screening of the film at the Brentwood Public Library. We partnered with the Nashville Jewish Film Festival for the screening and used Eventbrite for the invitation process. Approximately, 100 Jews and Christians attended the screening. Our

Treasurer, Kevin Little, introduced the film. Rachel McRae, TMF's Director of Communications, moderated the Q&A following the film. Board members, JoAnn Siegienski, Elaine Brown, and volunteer Cindy Jones along with other volunteers supervised the donation, information, and snack tables. Following these two film screenings, Rachel produced content from these events for two of our newsletters (**Artifacts:** [A Monumentally Fun Week TMF Newsletter](#) and [Nashville screening TMF Newsletter](#)).

I am extremely proud of what our board members did in leading and organizing these two screenings. I had no leadership role to fulfill in the planning or implementation process. Collectively, we used these two opportunities to screen this film as vehicles to communicate to the public the mission of TMF. Once more, we do not yet know the outcome of our efforts; nonetheless, we did receive good verbal feedback following these two screenings. In time, we will see what fruit emerges when it comes to financial contributions or physical participations in our work.

2018 (IAJGS) Conference

I was invited to serve as a panelist for the topic of "Saving Jewish Cemeteries in Poland" at the 2018 International Association of Jewish Genealogical Society (IAJGS) Conference held in Warsaw, Poland. The panel had an hour and a half time slot for its presentation. The moderator of the panel, Dan Oren, Founder and CEO of Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland, was moderator of the panel. The panel itself was comprised of four people, with each person having 12 minutes to speak to the topic. Following the presentations, there would be a Q&A that Dan moderated.

I focused my talk on the topic of [Saving Jewish Cemeteries: Preserving Jewish Cultural Heritage](#) (**Artifact**). Dan set a ten slide limit for each presenter. Consequently, I loaded my

PowerPoint slides with text. I made the cardinal mistake of having too much text on the screen. I made a strategic choice to load the slides with text in the event that I had to skip something for the sake of time. At times, I read the bullet points. I felt constrained but I also had a sense that I wanted to communicate information more so than my passion for what I do. I did not really consider my mistake until I took course on mastering presentations (I will discuss what I learned and applied to my talks in the next section). Nonetheless, I spoke for about ten minutes as requested. I asked for feedback from two people present for my talk: Dan Oren and Dana Kurtz (Evaluations: [Reece evaluation Oren](#) and [Steven Reece Dana Kurtz 2019.01.27](#)).

First, I think that it is appropriate for me to share Dan's evaluation of my participation on this panel. He wrote,

With four panelists packed into short session, [Steven] was given the challenge of presenting his work in a dozen minutes. He rose to the challenge of a short talk exquisitely. His presentation was crisply organized: divided between summarizing the mission of his Foundation and the primary values that guide it, then framing the work in terms of the philosophies that guide it and the practical outcomes. Reece held the audience's rapt attention with his earnest voice, supplemented by powerful black and white photography and PowerPoint text.

For many Jews the question of "why should a Christian group take an interest in rehabilitating Jewish cemeteries" is a puzzling one. By carefully outlining his motivations and the practical aspects of the truly holy work that Reece does, he was able to engage the audience in thinking carefully about his propositions. Perhaps the best evidence in my mind of his success in engaging his audience ensued over the following twenty-four hours at the conference when I saw numerous attendees seeking Reece out to gain his counsel on cultural reconciliation projects they were pursuing or to seek his partnership in their own cemetery restoration efforts.

Second, I worked with Dana Kurtz in the Nasielsk Jewish cemetery restoration project for the first time that summer. I have been working with her brother, Glenn, since 2015 in this Jewish cemetery restoration project. During the week of our work, Dana asked me numerous questions as she sought to understand my approach and philosophy of the work of TMF. Both

she and Glenn remained for the IAJGS conference in Warsaw following our week of work in Nasielsk.

I asked Dana for some feedback and I will share a few paragraphs; however, before reading what I share below, I urge you to read her critical evaluation of me and who I am as a leader and communicator ([Steven Reece Dana Kurtz 2019.01.27](#)). For me, her words clearly convey who I am as a leader and how I interact and communicate with people in various capacities. In what I share below, Dana writes about my speaking at the IAJGS conference,

I know Steven was nervous about attending and presenting at a gathering of 700 Jews who were to varying degrees obsessive and extremely knowledgeable about their Jewish ancestors in Poland. He seemed eager to develop a mental picture of what he was getting into. In his presentation, Steven read verbatim the bulleted list of a plain text slide. This suppressed his passion and expertise. By highlighting one or two points and sharing a relevant experience or why it's so meaningful to him, his audience might better connect with him and The Matzevah Foundation's work. Unsurprisingly, this was not at all the case once off stage, even when talking with a group of new acquaintances.

I continue to be motivated by Steven's expressive Facebook postings and personal emails, learning more about The Matzevah Foundation's important mission and gaining insights into what's important to Steven. He writes in the same voice I met in Poland, genuine, warm, and compelling.

Both Dan's and Dana's evaluations and feedback regarding my communication and leadership skills are probably the best assessment that I have received as a Christian leader among Jews as I serve them and lead them and others to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

2019 7th Annual Genocide Awareness Week

In fall of 2018, John Liffiton of Scottsdale Community College (SCC) invited me to present at the 7th Annual Genocide Awareness Week, on April 19, 2019 at SCC (**Artifact:** [SCC Genocide Awareness Invitation](#), [SCC Genocide Conf Brochure](#), and [Genocide Awareness Week 2019 SCC Website](#)). Liffiton is founder-director of what he says, "has become the largest

genocide conference with about 2,800 attending just the lectures and 8-10k attending the educational exhibits.”

For my presentation, I prepared a PowerPoint Presentation, which I titled “[The Shoah and its Aftermath: Speaking for Those, Who Have No Voice Today](#)” (**Artifact**). I applied some of the pointers that I gleaned from the course I took earlier in 2019: [Presentation Skills: Master Confident Presentations](#). First, I began with a question, which engaged the audience in my talk. Not many people responded; however, asking a question allowed me to be more engaging in my talk.

Second, I introduced an agenda outlining the six sections of my talk with each section having a distinct style indicating the division of my talk. The sections are: Introduction (three slides), About TMF (seven slides), My Story (two slides), My Response (three slides), Reflection (eight slides), and Conclusion (three slides).

Third, for my presentation, I reduced the text presented on each slide. I used the brief sentences as markers or guides, to keep me on track through my talk. Fourth, even though the course work suggested that I use at most five slides, I used 29 total slides having eight that served as section dividers, beginning (title of my talk) and closing slides (contact information). What remained were 22 slides to use for my talk. I average about a minute speaking per slide, so generally, if I stay on topic, I speak about 22 to 25 minutes. Finally, I ended my talk with a question, which was the course recommended as a call to action. Essentially, what I wanted the audience to do as a result of what they heard.

About 60 people attended my presentation. I spoke for roughly 25 minutes. Following my presentation, I led a Q&A session with the participants that lasted about an hour and a half. Mr. Liffiton presented me with a certificate of appreciation and I received a follow-up email from

one of the participants thanking me for my work. (Verifications: [2019 SCC Genocide Awareness Conf Certificate](#) and [SCC Feedback](#)).

Conclusion

I have written a lengthy description of the communication efforts of TMF. I considered in Chapter 1, various communication theories and models. I think for the most part, TMF follows a basic communication model of crafting messages for specific audiences using a wide variety of media approaches (Facebook, Twitter, public speaking, newsletters, etc.). Cross-cultural communication carries within itself multiple challenges because of barriers related to methods of non-verbal and verbal communication “to convey meanings that may or may not be the same in the cultures of origin of the participants” (p. 187).

In Chapter 2, I discussed my own development as a personal communicator and the development of a basic communication strategy for TMF. The board of directors restructured the roles and duties of its seven officers in line with the gifting of its leaders. I considered the intersection of cross-cultural communication theory with the work of TMF by leading our board through two exercises that challenged their cultural frameworks as Christians leading a public charity and working across cultural barriers.

In Chapter 3, I considered how Rachel McRae led TMF to develop a social media strategy for Facebook and Twitter, along with guidelines for TMF’s use of social media. Additionally, under Rachel’s leadership TMF built and launched two websites within the span of five years. We garnered feedback from our audience regarding the content and message of our websites, so that we might be more effective in crafting our messages appropriately. Through the use of the feedback of participant’s testimonies, we have been better able to understand the

effectiveness and appropriateness our work is in the field as we work to care for and restore the Jewish cemeteries of Poland.

Finally, I share what I have learned through five speaking opportunities over the past five years. I sought input from several key people regarding what kind of communicator I am and how effective I am in my communication abilities. As a result, I think that I have grown and developed as an effective communicator over the nearly ten years that I have been leading TMF. With practice, I will continue to improve upon what I have learned and become an even more effective communicator.

Documentation of Competency

Artifacts

1. [01 Reece TXAM Commerce Transcript](#)
2. [Reece Photojournalist](#)
3. [Missions Today World Mission Journal](#)
4. [02 Reece SWBTS Transcript](#)
5. [Marias Story 320](#)
6. [Zakladanie Zborow Poprzez Grupy Domowe](#)
7. [Course Syllabus for *Pitch Yourself!*](#)
8. [Online Course Recommendation](#)
9. [Course Syllabus for *Presentation Skills*](#)
10. [Media Strategy Development Emails](#)
11. [LJ-Reece-LEAD638](#)
12. [Light Reading Email](#)
13. [Light Reading Articles](#)
14. [Funding and Faith](#)
15. [Tomek RE the sign at the cemetery](#)
16. [Board RE the sign at the cemetery](#)
17. [Steven RE the sign at the cemetery](#)
18. [2018 April Agenda TMF Board Meeting](#)
19. [TMF Website Content Nov 2014](#)
20. [RE TMF Website Pro Feedback](#)
21. [Nonprofit Websites](#)
22. [Website Gathering Data](#)
23. [2017 Oct TMF Board Meeting Minutes](#)
24. [TMF Brochures Merged](#)
25. [A thought or two](#)
26. [Public Speaking Log SDR 2](#)
27. [The Matzevah Foundation 25-Oct-2015](#)
28. [Cemeteries Conference](#)
29. [Nashville Jewish Film Festival Matinee Jewish Federation of Nashville and Middle Tennessee](#)
30. [Nash FB 10 17](#)
31. [Saving Jewish Cemeteries: Preserving Jewish Cultural Heritage](#)
32. [SCC Genocide Awareness Invitation](#)
33. [SCC Genocide Conf Brochure](#)
34. [Genocide Awareness Week 2019 SCC Website](#)
35. [The Shoah and its Aftermath: Speaking for Those, Who Have No Voice Today](#)

Verifications and Evaluations

1. [Course Certificate for *Pitch Yourself!*](#)
2. [Course Certificate for *Presentation Skills*](#)
3. [Re Funding and Faith Robin](#)
4. [Tomek RE the sign at the cemetery](#)
5. [2018 TMF Year End Report](#)
6. [TMF Plaque](#)
7. [2015 March TMF Spring Board Meeting](#)
8. [Fwd Re New TMF Website Has Launched](#)
9. [The Matzevah Foundation Newsletter, April 2015](#)
10. [Re New Website Launched](#)
11. [Announcing the new website for The Matzevah Foundation](#)
12. [Re New TMF Website Has Launched 3](#)
13. [Re New TMF Website Has Launched 2](#)
14. [The Matzevah Foundation webpage revisions](#)
15. [Marla FB Feedback](#)
16. [TMF Social Media Guidelines](#)
17. [TMF Release Form Wersja Polska](#)
18. [Communications 2019 4th Qtr Report](#)
19. [The Matzevah Foundation 2019 Year End Report](#)
20. [Matzevah Foundation Summer Newsletter 2015](#)
21. [EJC 2015 Conf Brochure](#)
22. [Ref Letter for Steven](#)
23. [Facebook Live Screenshot](#)
24. [Re Nashville Jewish Film Festival](#)
25. [A Monumentally Fun Week TMF Newsletter](#)
26. [Nashville screening TMF Newsletter](#)
27. [Reece evaluation Oren](#)
28. [Steven Reece Dana Kurtz 2019.01.27](#)
29. [2019 SCC Genocide Awareness Conf Certificate](#)
30. [SCC Feedback](#)

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