

## Seven Communication Lessons CEOs Can Learn from FDR's First Fireside Chat

Listen to the speech [here](#).

To say FDR was a communications genius is an understatement. His Fireside Chat about the banking crisis in 1933 can be used as a prototype for when CEOs communicate with their employees.

In 1933, the US was in pretty rough shape. Roosevelt needed to restore confidence in the American people to keep them from running on the banks. Most CEOs will never need to address a crisis as big as this, but everyone can learn from FDR's process to attain employee buy-in.

### **1. Use a warm, reassuring tone; acknowledge any pain the audience feels; thank them for their commitment**

He thanks everyone for their "fortitude and the good temper" and acknowledges the difficulty people are going through. He doesn't preach, but he reassures his audience that the government's plan will work.

### **2. Start by saying what the speech is about, and punctuate the beginning of each theme**

FDR started with, "My friends, I want to talk for a few minutes . . . about banking." It doesn't get much simpler than that. He begins the meat of the speech with "First of all, let me state the simple fact. . ." Other sections start with, "the second step," and "the third stage." Breaking complicated themes into bite-sized pieces makes them easier to digest.

### **3. Speak plainly and keep it real – but don't "dumb it down"**

Roosevelt acknowledges how complicated the subject matter is, but respects his listeners' intelligence. I love how FDR explains what banks do with the cash people deposit. It all makes perfect sense when he tells it. Keep your language plain.

### **4. Don't sugarcoat the facts**

Be as honest as you possibly can. FDR doesn't hesitate to acknowledge the cold, hard truth of the situation, and the work, sacrifice and trust he needs from the American people to resolve it. If you lie to your employees, or don't tell the whole truth, they will know.

### **5. Have a clear call to action**

People need to know what you want them to do. FDR wants people to put their money back into the banks – he tells them why it's in their best interest, and the country's. Employees want to help the organization. You just need to ask.

### **6. Keep it short**

FDR's whole speech is only about ten minutes. Don't drone on.

## **7. Be a leader**

Especially in difficult times, people like to see the boss. It gives them comfort and makes them feel like we're all in this together. FDR tells the listeners, "It is your problem . . . no less than it is mine. Together we cannot fail." Let your people know you're in it with them.

We may not all have FDR's charisma and charm, but we can emulate it. His speech kept the citizens from running on the banks. A CEO can follow his example not only to influence and inform employees, but to inspire them as well.