

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

A newsletter for the nation's coastal management and research reserve programs.

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A professional writer is an amateur who didn't quit.

—Richard Bach

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COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

THE POWER OF LISTENING

Most of us who choose a career in communications do so because we like words. We like crafting messages, shaping narratives, and explaining things clearly. In general, communicators are good at telling people things. But here's what's easy to overlook: The strongest communication doesn't start with talking, but with listening.

That may sound obvious, even a little cliché; yet, when deadlines loom and messages need to get out quickly, listening is often the first step skipped. We assume we already know what people need to hear. Sometimes we're right; oftentimes, we're not.

Effective communication is a two-way street. When we slow down long enough to first understand our audience, everything that follows becomes clearer, stronger, and more relevant.

Shift the Mindset

A logical communications instinct is to begin with the message. What information do we need to communicate? What do people need to know right now? Those are good questions, but they're incomplete.

Curiosity is a better place to start. What concerns our audience? What questions do they ask? What confuses, frustrates, or excites them? When we listen first, we stop guessing or assuming. Our messages then become far more useful to the people receiving them.

Read What People Are Already Telling You

One of the easiest ways to listen is also one of the most underused. Simply read the responses people are already giving you. Comments on social media. Replies to emails. Questions at the end of meetings. Feedback forms that you may have been too busy to devote time to. These are gold mines of insight.

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Instead of viewing comments as something to “deal with,” treat them as data. If multiple people ask the same question, that’s a signal. If a post sparks confusion or pushback, that’s information, not failure. Your audience is telling you where the disconnect is.

Listening doesn’t always require asking new questions. Sometimes listening just means paying attention to the answers that are already there.

Ask Before You Explain

Another simple—but powerful—shift is to ask questions *before* you present information. In meetings, this can be as straightforward as opening with, “What are you hoping to get out of this?” or “What questions are on your mind?” Asking questions not only provides valuable insight but also fosters feelings of respect and inclusion.

The same principle applies to written communications. If you’ve ever received feedback like “This isn’t what I needed” or “This doesn’t answer my question,” there’s a good chance the audience’s needs weren’t fully understood up front. A few questions asked early can save hours of rewriting later.

Keep It Simple

Listening doesn’t have to be complicated or time-consuming. A short survey with three thoughtful questions reveals more than a long, polished message built on assumptions. Informal polls, quick check-ins, or even a

single open-ended question—*What’s been most challenging lately?*—can provide direction.

The goal isn’t perfection; it’s awareness. Even a small sample of honest feedback can help you adjust tone, content, and timing in meaningful ways.

Listen First and Everything Else Will Follow

When you truly understand your audience, all the other communications “best practices” more naturally fall into place. Your messages are clearer because they answer real questions. Your tone is more effective because it reflects how people feel and what you genuinely want them to understand. Your outreach is more engaging because it feels relevant, not generic.

Listening enhances, not replaces, good writing, strong visuals, and clear strategy. Communication isn’t about simply broadcasting information—it’s about connection. And connection starts not with speaking but with listening.

The next time you sit down to draft a message, pause before you type the first sentence. Ask yourself not just what you want to say but what your audience is trying to tell you. Chances are, they’ve already given you the best starting point.



Pamela Jacobs

Senior Communications Specialist
Lynker for NOAA Office for Coastal Management
Pamela.Jacobs@noaa.gov

COMMUNICATION PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Featured product:

Calm's "Just One Step" Campaign

Source:

calm.com/blog/new-year-mental-health-reset;
@Calm on Instagram and Facebook

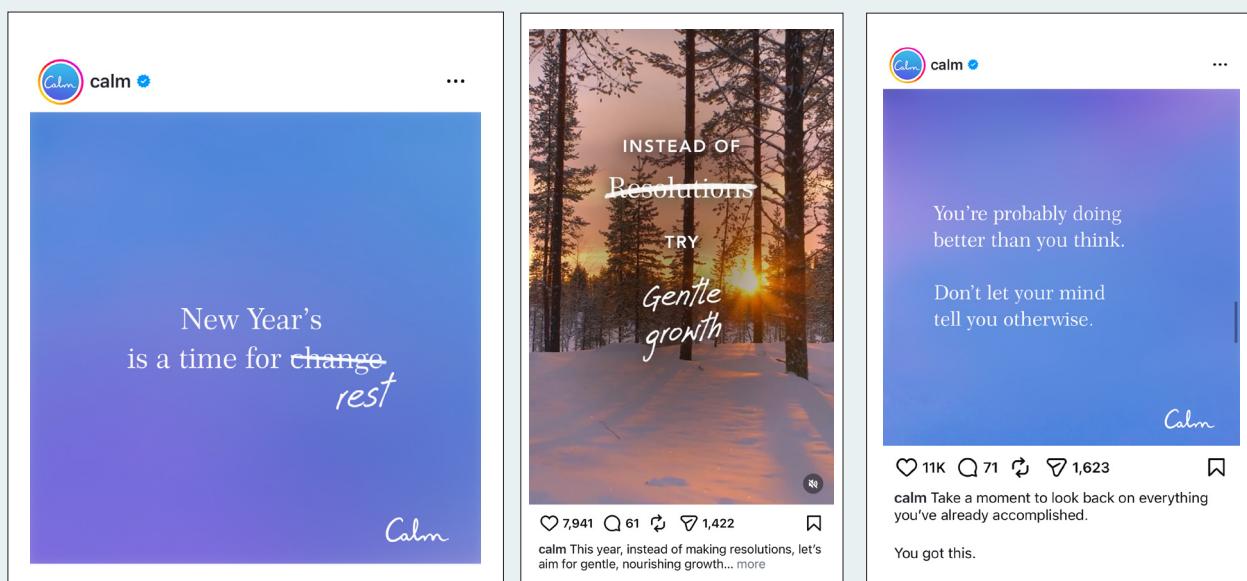
Submitted by: Pamela Jacobs, Lynker for NOAA's Office for Coastal Management

What it is: An annual, month-long mental health initiative by Calm, a self-care (meditation, sleep, and relaxation) app. Throughout January, Calm promotes a "mental health reset" for the new year via its app, social media, and blog, aiming to do away with the familiar "New Year, New You" theme and instead focusing on taking small steps toward well-being.

Why I like it: If you've ever quit your New Year's resolutions, you're not alone; studies show that up to 90 percent of people have abandoned their resolutions by February. So when you're looking at effective communication in the new year,

whether you view it through the lens of the consumer (*resolutions are recipes for failure!*) or the communicator ("New Year, New You" is *so overdone!*), the small-step theme is a major upgrade. For Calm's current and potential users, this campaign acknowledges how January can be at once overwhelming and underwhelming—a lot more work than play following the holidays—and that while mental health may suffer, the best way to hook people is through gentle guidance, not daunting demands. This approach also helps to build brand loyalty by being a stress-reducer rather than a stress-inducer, proving that the most powerful communication sometimes asks for the least amount of work from its audience.

Please note: This is not an endorsement of the designers, websites, or any proprietary tools but simply this writer's opinion on a good communication product.



FROM US TO YOU

OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT— SEA LEVEL RISE VIEWER VIDEO

The [Sea Level Rise Viewer](http://coast.noaa.gov/gallery/videos/slr/video.html) is one of Digital Coast's most popular resources for a reason. It's an easy yet innovative tool that benefits a wide range of users from around the country. That said, not everyone who could benefit from this tool knows what it is or how to use it. Enter this video. It demonstrates—in just over one minute—the what, why, and how of the Sea Level Rise Viewer, which means the next time you need to extol the virtues of the Sea Level Rise Viewer to your audience, you can let the video do the talking. Find it here: coast.noaa.gov/gallery/videos/slr/video.html.

FAST FACTS— HIGH TIDE FLOODING

This is one of the many graphics and facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab this one at coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/recurrent-tidal-flooding.html. If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and tag along with these themes:

- January 1 to 31: Mentoring Month
- January 5: National Bird Day

NOAA LIBRARY YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Fun fact: Hundreds of hours of NOAA knowledge are available at your fingertips and all in one place. The NOAA Library YouTube channel (@NOAALibrary) holds over 600 videos—seminars, workshops, and presentations—covering the full range of work performed by NOAA scientists and staff. It's a treasure trove of information for communicators and anyone else looking to dive deeper (bad pun intended) into NOAA's expertise. Find it here: youtube.com/@NOAALibrary/videos.



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Editor: Pamela Jacobs | Graphic Designer: Frank Ruopoli

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