

Announcer ([00:02](#)):

You are listening to the Safety Moment Podcast by Utility Safety Partners. Safety is always a good conversation, and it's a click away. Here's your host, Mike Sullivan.

Mike Sullivan ([00:18](#)):

Welcome everybody to the Safety Moment Podcast, part two of our discussion with Mr. Jon Lovink of Lovink Media, talking about the credible spokesperson program that he has been delivering for many years. And the absolute importance of being ready for communications in a crisis situation we're going to be talking about today as we move our conversation along is really the character of the person delivering the message. Delivering the words is one thing, but how you say it, how you present yourself, and really the empathy that needs to be embodied by the person delivering the message is so critical. And not just for the words, but whether you are on video or social media, that's absolutely imperative today as we move along. Does the communicator, does the person delivering the message, do they need to have an element of empathy?

Jon Lovink ([01:12](#)):

So it's kind of critical in crisis communications for sure, in ongoing communications have maybe people have differing understandings of empathy. Empathy. It can be sympathy for sure, but that's not what we're really talking about. It's like actually being able to make a connection with people at a way that they feel that you understand who they are. That kind of thing. I think in a social media driven world is more important than ever. And of course very well used by our political quote masters as they identify their target audience groups and they empathize with them and they build their base. You can talk about how politics is now being conducted in small little groups of empathetic in that space, in that space. So it is absolutely critical, I think, and sadly also highly manipulative in politics. At least

Mike Sullivan ([02:21](#)):

It's, and politics has changed so much in the last, oh God, five years, 10 years, it's changed so much.

Jon Lovink ([02:26](#)):

It really has. It's driving people into camps and then aligning with those camps in order to get the number of votes that you need. But let's stay out of the horrors that politics has become and just say, look, I do think one of the key things, I think if you're going to put somebody out there as a spokesperson, they've got to be able to connect, and they've got to be able to connect not just to their message, but also to the people affected by whatever it is that you're doing. And in your world, of course, safety is number one, right? That's right.

Mike Sullivan ([03:04](#)):

So really, that's what good communications looks like. You have the right person delivering the right message, and they've been coached. I mean, you coached a lot of people. You've gone through this for many, many years, Jon, when you have somebody who's coachable, it's got to be better than somebody who just like, let's face it, it's not for everybody.

Jon Lovink ([03:25](#)):

Well, yeah, I would say maybe, let me answer that this way. I think I've probably coached, let say 3,000 people. There's probably more.

Mike Sullivan ([03:36](#)):

I see. It's a lot more. That's my guess. But anyway,

Jon Lovink ([03:38](#)):

Maybe not. I don't recently haven't added the numbers up. But look, here's the deal. I don't think in those 3,000 sessions, I've come across more than 50 people who aren't coachable. Look, it is possible to get really good at this authenticity, empathic responsiveness, understanding how to answer a question in a way that reflects on your expertise, while knowing how to stay out of the weeds, knowing how to stay within your sandbox, so to speak. Being repetitive in a positive and engaging way, staying on, staying positive, staying positive, not letting your own negativity get in the way.

Mike Sullivan ([04:33](#)):

Do you have an example of that, Jon? Who out there that in a big story, has embodied all those things, been empathetic, been the right person, delivering the horrible message. Who out there has been able to do that?

Jon Lovink ([04:49](#)):

There's lots of examples, and I might say that, let me think.

Mike Sullivan ([04:56](#)):

Okay. The one that comes to mind for me is Maple Leaf.

Jon Lovink ([04:59](#)):

Yeah, I'll go to there, but I'm, I'm going to go, I can draw on that and I'll come back to that if you like. But in the current context, during Covid, especially during the beginning of Covid, all of a sudden we saw all these medical health officers take on the leadership role of communications around this absolutely devastating and frightening thing that was happening in the world. And none of us knew what was going to happen. It was terrifying for every single one of us. This was even before vaccines. And so you saw the media, I don't talk Canada specifically. You saw the media just glomming on to all of these expert medical health officers. And about four or five months in that first summer, maybe less, I think it was about August of that year, there was all of a sudden a spate of news coverage about who was doing the best as a communicator. And this is reporters and columnists saying this. And there was almost, I would say, close to a hundred percent agreement that Dr. Bonnie Henry out of BC was the one person who'd really gotten people on side really well.

Mike Sullivan ([06:15](#)):

Why do you think that is?

Jon Lovink ([06:18](#)):

I think, well, look, let's put aside the fact that all of the medical health officers have the expertise. So that's for sure, right? Sure. And all of them are committed to the same set of principals, which is protect people, protect the seniors in our seniors homes, figure out what best to do to make sure that the fewest number of people caught this illness that we didn't know was going to what it was going to do to us. So they all had that. But what most of them didn't have, except Bonnie Henry, is that connection to people. It's tone of voice, it's pausing, it's pacing, it's thoughtfulness. It's not only is she an expert, and

sometimes we see experts as distant from us because they put themselves on a pedestal and they talk from a pedestal and talk to

Mike Sullivan ([07:24](#)):

Us instead of with us.

Jon Lovink ([07:24](#)):

...and talk to us, right? And it's alienating. And plus we're in fear, and plus we don't know whether we trust them or not and all of that. And I feel like what the way Bonnie Henry did this, both in her language and the way in which she explained and the simplicity of her language, just go to her first news conference when they first had to announce that there had been deaths. And I think these were the first deaths in the senior citizen's home. And just her tone of voice and delivery to me as a reporter, former reporter. And I think to every reporter in that room, they got how serious this was. They got that. She really cared about this. They were prepared to listen to next steps that people were having to take. And there was much more of an openness to taking direction from Dr. Bonnie Henry than I think, at least from a reporter perspective. And I got to say, I'm a former news guy, so I look for people who actually look like the give a damn. Oh, she

Mike Sullivan ([08:32](#)):

Was genuine.

Jon Lovink ([08:34](#)):

It just seemed that way. And that's not to criticize Deena Hinshaw in Calgary or anything. She did her job, but there was an officiousness with her. I felt, right, no, good job. And I'd be the last to criticize any of these people a good

Mike Sullivan ([08:51](#)):

Job in a horrible situation, good job, horrible situation. It wasn't going away.

Jon Lovink ([08:55](#)):

But when you measure on the trust scale of being really good at this and getting more compliance, at least initially it was her. And later on mean people get tired of the message. And eventually, I think some people called her, started calling her Saint Bonnie, but people

Mike Sullivan ([09:13](#)):

Were tired. They were tired at

Jon Lovink ([09:14](#)):

All. It was, yeah, they were tired. Felt like

Mike Sullivan ([09:16](#)):

Everybody, their fatigue. Fatigue,

Jon Lovink ([09:17](#)):

You know, mentioned maple leaf, which I mean, that goes way back. I mean, this is a long time ago. But you know, have a company that's pushing out product that's got, I think Listeriosis, I think is what it was in the pork products. And they had so big company out of Toronto that produces basically a high percentage of the volume of pork products that were eating, that all that had to be shoved into the garbage bins, all that products sitting on shelves. And he knew his company. He knew his company was going down, or at least that's what he was concerned about. And this is way before really social media became a thing. He got ahead of this and put out a YouTube video. It's crazy to think about that. That happened. It was two minutes or less, maybe not even that long. He acknowledged they made a mistake.

[\(10:14\)](#):

He said it was never going to happen again. He said he focused on what actions people needed to take. He was contrite, and he made some statements of commitment that were really powerful. And he did what every, well, now every politician does. He got that out there before the news media even started covering the story. And all of a sudden, the news media are using that video to cover the story. So he was using the power of social media in its early stages to focus on the core principles of crisis communication. We're going to find out what went wrong. We're we're going to get everything off the shelves right away. We are a company that's committed to food safety. We are all devastated that this is happening.

Mike Sullivan [\(11:18\)](#):

And his appearance in that video, and I recall that, and this is why I brought it up, his appearance to me was, I remember that more than the message, more than what he said, because he looked absolutely exhausted. He looked disheveled to a degree, and here's a c e o of a massive corporation. He's delivering the message. And it looked to me to be 100% genuine. He really meant every word he said.

Jon Lovink [\(11:44\)](#):

It's funny you say that. First of all, the context, it was done at two in the morning. I mean, if you're in a crisis, just on that note, if you're from Calgary, everybody remembers the flood, right? Sure. And everybody remembers that, at least at that time, the mayor of Calgary and Naheed Nenshi seemed like he was like there all the time. And he built a lot of trust at that time, whatever people think of him now. But that idea of being there and just getting on top and getting ahead of that story is what they did with Maple Leaf. And he had a good advisor who said, get this video out and get it out before the news media wakes up. So, yeah, tired. Some people say it was a wooden presentation, and maybe that's true, but not a natural speaker. But he got some coaching, he got it across. His clothing was appropriate. And God, I'm thinking way back now, I haven't seen that video in quite a while. He had the right clothing on for the audience that he was talking to. It was not a big corporate setting. So you think about things like that, when you're doing media, you have to even think about situations. You have to think about the clothes you're wearing, for God's sake. Silly. Yeah, silly as that. You have to be

Mike Sullivan [\(13:09\)](#):

Relatable.

Jon Lovink [\(13:10\)](#):

You have to be relatable. So yeah, there's a good example of, you know, harken me back to that maple leaf crisis. And yeah, I mean, it is kind of ironic that that would have happened so many years ago and set an example of how to do it well, and how many companies still struggle with that idea.

Mike Sullivan ([13:35](#)):

You have a month, maybe a little bit more of those dog days of summer left. How many things are left on your honey do list. If you're going to be excavating, if you're going to be digging, please click before you dig. One click cost you nothing. Not clicking could cost you everything. I want to talk about social media a little bit, and we talked a little bit about social media at the very beginning and how it's changed everything. There's almost like, well, if you wait a couple of minutes, another story's going to overtake the last one. So we don't have to be too worried about what's going on right now. But at the same time, it's forever. It's out there and it's not going away. The social media, the impact story of social media today can be a burden. But as you also mentioned relative to the fires in bc, the emergency, ongoing emergency there, it's also a fantastic beneficial tool. When you're delivering coaching today, when you're delivering cred training today, are you going into that element as well? Are you talking about and showing the benefits, but also the drawbacks too, right?

Jon Lovink ([14:48](#)):

Yeah. Look, firstly, my coaching is primarily focused on helping people under scrutiny. So that's cameras, that's microphones, and that takes place on Facebook live. It takes place on Twitter, it takes place now on. And so now it takes place on Twitter, it takes place on Facebook, it takes place wherever people are in front of people. And that's stakeholder meetings too. So the detail of how to get into managing social media in a critical situation, if that's what you're asking. That's not my macha, but I teach people this. If you're not on social media in a crisis, you're going to lose the game mostly, you know, can avoid it. There's still lots of oil and gas companies, the smaller ones in Calgary, they don't go there. They choose not to go. They choose not to. And for some reason, for they're not downstream companies, their reputation is managed to a degree by the Alberta energy regulator and so on.

([15:49](#)):

I can sort of see it now. Others do use social media primarily those who are strongly connected into the communities, whether it's Grande Prairie, Red Deer, yeah. Where there's really community relationships at stake. But I don't think that you can avoid social media anymore and should not. And I think the key thing around, so what I think you asked, how do I deal with social media in a crisis? First of all, you have to be clear on what your messaging and what it is you need to get out there. And you got to distinguish between messaging and facts. People need facts. And social media can be a hugely powerful tool to deal with. What are the facts? What's in the river? What's in the air? How long will it be there? What should I do? Now, these are not messages. These are facts that people need.

([16:46](#)):

And the most important thing on that level is when there's a critical incident that affects people, they need information. They don't want somebody telling them a message. We're good people. We will do our best. They want, what's the data? When did it happen? Where did it happen? How did it happen? Whatcha doing about it? And what are you doing about it? Right? Yeah. Specificity. Specificity. Now emergency responders know about that, so they know all about that. Then there's all the inaccuracies out there all the time. All the time. There are people making stuff up, including, we should get out of Grande Prairie now. Yeah, nope. Or don't drink the water, be boil water. There's so many much information

Mike Sullivan ([17:39](#)):

Out there. Well, and that's one of the biggest challenges right now is separating fact from fiction. Because so often the fiction looks quite like fact, right? It

Jon Lovink ([17:46](#)):

Looks so real.

Mike Sullivan ([17:48](#)):

No, yeah, it does. It. So people

Jon Lovink ([17:51](#)):

Really have to, well, first of all, corporations, organizations, people, they have to take a responsibility for correcting misinformation. That is almost that, first of all, that's critical. And you have to have responsive tools to do that. So that becomes critical because you don't want people acting on information that's inaccurate. And there's so much inaccuracy out there, and really sad to say, but a lot of Canadians are not media literate. Not enough people. Well,

Mike Sullivan ([18:25](#)):

We've just been recipients, right? We've been recipients. Right. Whatever we're told.

Jon Lovink ([18:28](#)):

Right. We have, that's right. And one,

Mike Sullivan ([18:31](#)):

We've been conditioned,

Jon Lovink ([18:32](#)):

We've been conditioned to find out where it's a curated source of information and we should rely on it. And now that reliability is in question. I'm not saying that traditional news media, that reliability is necessary, but when

Mike Sullivan ([18:49](#)):

It all looks the same, it's when

Jon Lovink ([18:50](#)):

It all looks the same. That's, you even know. That's

Mike Sullivan ([18:53](#)):

Right. You don't

Jon Lovink ([18:54](#)):

Know. So this becomes the responsibility of corporations, organizations, regulators, and organizations like yourselves to make sure that the information that's out there act is accurate. And that then requires

an incredible, that just requires the need for speed. So in the cred principles, that's responsiveness, that's the R of responsiveness. So that deals with social media. You got to be in there, you got to manage it, and you got to manage the information, and you have to be able to assess what that information is and whether it's accurate or not. So it, that's really,

Mike Sullivan ([19:27](#)):

And that's part of the, so much of the importance of social media, whether or not you have an active presence on social media. I think as any organization, responsible organization that has an impact on the public or the public relies on you, you have to have it. At the very minimum, you have to be watching social media. You have to be paying attention because you could be brought into a story. And if you're not following it, then you don't even know you're part of it. And if, as you just said, responding to the facts, and we've had that situation exactly that. How about Alberta? One Call a number of years ago, and it was global news. They put out a tweet, tell us about your issues with Alberta. One calls, where did this come from? Oh, really? Yeah. And people were saying, oh, there's locate delays, this and that.

[\(20:16\)](#):

And it's like, okay, people think we actually are the ones locating. And we started inundating Global News in Edmonton with information on here's what we do, here's what our members do, and here's how you trigger the process, the public requests to locate. We process a locate and we provide it to our members who will then respond whether it's a locate or not. And we kept pushing that information to global news, and all of a sudden it just went away. And because they were reacting to a story that really wasn't a story, and we were able to provide feedback.

Jon Lovink ([20:52](#)):

That's a great example, Mike. And I just say, keep in mind, especially now in 2023, I suspect there are a whole bunch of reporters that have never heard of Alberto One CALL, probably not. Or the new organizational name.

Mike Sullivan ([21:05](#)):

Utility Safety Partners. Yeah.

Jon Lovink ([21:07](#)):

And ultimately, your job is not to be hostile about that, but to do your job, to correct. To correct even reporters out there. Not in a hostile way, not to say, oh, you guys screwed up. But to say at some point, maybe there's no story here.

Mike Sullivan ([21:24](#)):

That's right. That's exactly what it was. There's no

Jon Lovink ([21:26](#)):

Story here. There's no story here. And that's not to blind somebody with your brilliant pr. No, not at all. It's just to say at, it's just to inform reporters who are working on four stories a day. Right now,

Mike Sullivan ([21:41](#)):

It's my job to wave that flag saying, here's who we are and here's what we do. And feel free to contact us if you have more questions. Right?

Jon Lovink ([21:50](#)):

Absolutely.

Mike Sullivan ([21:51](#)):

So today, to not have a social media presence, that's a decision, but to not follow it, that could be detrimental.

Jon Lovink ([21:58](#)):

Well, and that's, of course, that's critical. You got to the, there's 10 key points of media management now in a crisis. One of them is monitor social media and be fast and responsive, because if you don't get ahead of the story on social media, it'll ate through traditional media who often don't have the time to check the accuracy of facts anymore. And so, as you know, there's going to be lots of inaccuracy in all traditional news media now, sadly, because they're pushing out stories and their responsibility to get on the digital platform so quickly. So they're relying, I would say, on you, for example, in your case, Mike, to correct their mistakes. And not in a hostile way.

Mike Sullivan ([22:42](#)):

No, no, not at all. No, not at

Jon Lovink ([22:44](#)):

All. They're doing their best. I think under the current circumstances where in Canada, people are being laid off, left and centre, all the promises that post media made and all the other organizations to our government regulators about what they were going to do, all of those have been broken. And

Mike Sullivan ([23:03](#)):

So goes the reliance on media, right? Well, you told me you're going to do something now you didn't do it, and the credibility that this diminishes further. But Jon, I always love talking to you. We could be going on and on and on. Got lots of talk afternoon here. We really could. Well, there is a lot of talk about, and maybe we pick it up again another time. But I really want to thank you for being on the Safety Moment podcast today. We're long overdue and long overdue to get together in person again too. But Jon, thanks for joining us and let's do this again sometime.

Jon Lovink ([23:35](#)):

It's a real pleasure, Mike. Thank you.

Mike Sullivan ([23:37](#)):

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