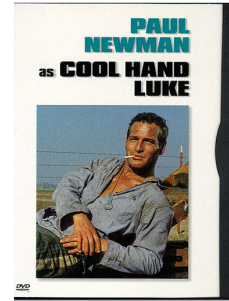


What Cool Hand Luke Can Teach Florida's ITS Industry About Better Transportation

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Every person involved in ITS in Florida has a right to be proud of the important work they do to keep Florida moving forward. Yet, there's a frustration that the general public has little appreciation for the importance of transportation and any understanding of how ITS can make their daily lives better. Well, to borrow a line from the classic 1967 motion picture "Cool Hand Luke" starring Paul Newman –

"What we've got here is a failure to communicate."

Effective Communication

In a nutshell, a lack of *real* communication is the greatest problem confronting the transportation industry. An astute individual once said that "Doing business without advertising is like winking at a stranger in the dark ... you know what you're doing, but no one else does." That's where we in the transportation industry are today: we know what we're doing, but no one else does! And then we wonder why TRANSPORTATION funding has decreased as a percentage of government spending, or "transportation" doesn't register on public opinion polls?

We can and must do a much better job of communicating with the "outside world" -- what I call the **3 Ps**: the **P**ublic, the **P**ress, and the **P**oliticians. But to do so, we'll need to:

- A.) Recognize that transportation is *NOT* about asphalt, concrete & steel. Ultimately, it's really about moving PEOPLE (and the stuff they deem valuable) safely & efficiently.
- B.) Understand that communication is a "contact sport" and that we'll need to *translate* what we're doing to tell the 3 Ps – without using jargon – why it matters.

Sell Truth & Offer Hope

Many years ago, it was decided in Europe to build a rail line from Vienna, Austria to Venice, Italy across the mountainous Alps. This rail line was successfully built ... even before a train actually existed that was capable of making the trip! This is a transportation metaphor of "hope."

Floridians are a hopeful people, and we should tell them the truth about today's transportation challenges – really "sell" them the truth – and then offer hope through the work we do to meet these transportation challenges.

Seven Simple Suggestions

With gratitude to Dr. Frank Luntz for his work on effective communication in the political/governmental world, I offer the following seven suggestions for better communication:

- 1.) **Time is a precious commodity** – What do people really want? More free time! More Floridians would rather get a free day off than a free day's pay. We've been good at counting

dollars and cents ... now it's time to start counting minutes as well. Talk about how your work will save PEOPLE time!

- 2.) **Solutions are what Floridians demand** – When developing plans, emphasize solutions. Every time you talk about challenges, follow with solutions that will make a difference in Floridian's daily lives.
- 3.) **Common Sense is what Floridians think is so lacking** in government – Rather than bleeding heart liberals, raging moderates, or compassionate conservatives ... what people really want from their government is “common sense.” All of your solutions should be framed using a “common sense approach.”
- 4.) **Don't talk about process** – Nothing turns off the public faster than talking about a government process. As long as the process is fair, ethical and legal, then Floridians don't really care about the process ... they care about the outcome. Talk about the purpose of your plan ... and don't use acronyms. Tell Floridians what you've done and what you are trying to do ... without getting mired in all the technical, bureaucratic ways of government.
- 5.) **Talk about consumers** – From cell phone service, to satellite TV providers, to the variety of shopping and restaurant choices available today... the public is more consumer-oriented than ever before. Floridians want more choices, more options, and more flexibility in transportation. Give it to them.
- 6.) **Floridians are looking for balanced approach** to virtually everything – The public wants their government's plans to strike a balance between competing interests. Make your plans and proposals transparently balanced.
- 7.) **Floridians want sincerity and simplicity** – The public will not trust any plan, proposal, or policy that seems too complicated. They are against complexity not because they don't think life is complex. They know its complex. The public just distrusts complexity because they think that government folks hide behind complexity. Be sincere in the development of your plans ... and simple in their presentation. And if you doubt the public's distrust of complexity, here's all you really need to know about government and bureaucracy:
 - Pythagorean Theorem: 24 words
 - Lord's Prayer: 66 words
 - Archimedes' Principle: 67 words
 - 10 Commandments: 179 words
 - Gettysburg Address: 286 words
 - Declaration of Independence: 1300 words
 - US Government regulations on the sale of cabbage: 26,911 words

Time's a wasting, and the job before us is much too important to wait. So remember to “translate” to effectively communicate, and let's all get busy “selling truth and offering hope” so we can Keep Florida Moving Forward!