

Building the Kingdom Through Today's Communications

By Bruce L. Olsen

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I have a great deal of affection for this group. Most of you will understand the bond that often forms between a mission president and his missionaries. When I see the students I was privileged to teach full-time for four years in the BYU Department of Communications, I value them equally. What a superb group of young women and young men study communications at BYU.

I found it to be so even back in the mid-60s when I studied for my bachelors and master's degree and worked on *The Daily Universe*. Of course, many of us who were students in those days probably would not be admitted to the University today nor qualified to be admitted to one of the undergraduate majors with today's standards.

On the other hand, I can point to some illustrious careers and significant contributions made by students of the 60s and 70s. I am honored to be associated with and numbered among you as a graduate of the Department of Communications.

As we begin, let me take you on a little journey that covers the administration of Gordon B. Hinckley, Church President and Prophet of God.

The Hinckley Years

I believe that when the communications history of the Church is written in some future date, those looking back on this period may well measure communications within the Church as the Pre-Hinckley period, the Hinckley years, and the Post-Hinckley era.

Perhaps the defining moment in President Hinckley's Presidency came at the luncheon when Mike Wallace and his producer for *60 Minutes* asked the President in front of a room full of news media notables if he would be willing to allow them to do a story on himself and the Church. I remember President Hinckley being quiet for what seemed like two or three minutes, but in reality was only a few seconds, and then saying "I believe I will take a chance."

Since he assumed his prophetic duties in 1995, we have been on a magnificent seven-year ride! When you compare Gordon Bitner Hinckley with any other modern prophet he is a stand out. Let's look at him for a few moments as compared with his own prophet-hero Brigham Young. To set the stage, let's look at a clip of the Tom Brokaw Olympic Interview. (Transcript follows.)



The Brokaw Interview for MSNBC

The Mormon Message

Tom Brokaw: One of the great epic stories in America is the great trek of Brigham Young and his followers into this valley. What do you think he would think of Salt Lake City and environs?

Gordon B. Hinckley: I think he'd be really quite amazed. I think he had a great prophetic vision of what would happen here, but to see what has actually happened here and to see the world coming here and becoming acquainted with what he had so much to do with, would be a very satisfying thing to him. I have a portrait of him right behind my desk and every once in a while, when I have a serious problem, I kind of turn around in my chair and look at him and say, "What would you do?" And I see him smile and say, "Carry on, boy!"

Landmark Hinckley Legacies:

(The parallels – President Hinckley and Brigham Young)

- Brigham Young presided over 115,065 Saints in 43 states or territories and 22 countries. Gordon Bitner Hinckley presides over nearly 12 million members in 162 countries and territories.
- Brigham Young built temples in the wilderness; Gordon B. Hinckley brought temples to the people.
- Brigham Young built the Tabernacle from whence the word of God went to the world for 132 years; Gordon Hinckley built the Conference Center, which seats 22,000 people.
- President Young inaugurated the Perpetual Immigration Fund, designed to bring the poor of Europe to Utah; President Hinckley created the Perpetual Education Fund, destined to bring the poor of the Church out of the bondage of poverty.
- Brigham Young was often interviewed by the press who visited Utah; President Hinckley has bearded the lion (media) in its own den: Mike Wallace, Tom Brokaw, Larry King, *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, the *New Yorker*, the National Press Club, the LA World Affairs Council, etc.—and 13 major interviews during the Olympics.
- After Brigham Young was sustained as President of the Church he never left the Mountain West. President Hinckley has visited over 60 countries during his administration.
- Brother Brigham was on the Westward trek when the Nauvoo Temple was dedicated. He did not live to dedicate any of the Utah temples. President Hinckley presided at the dedication of the Nauvoo Temple. Some 2,324,000 attended the 13 dedicatory sessions.

By any standard, I believe President Hinckley is a prophet's prophet. Not only is he a great communicator, he has moved forward on a bold, imaginative, caring agenda. For example, 47 temples were built in the first 118 years of Church history and 67 were completed in the next 6 years! Amazing!

Reaching Out

President Spencer W. Kimball in speaking to the Regional Representatives in 1974 said,

"...when we have used the satellite and related discoveries to their greatest potential and all of the media—the papers, magazines, television, radio—all in their greatest power....then, and not until then shall we approach the insistence of our Lord and Master to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

I believe that injunction still stands. As individuals and as a Church I do not believe we have fulfilled President Kimball's prophetic instruction.

The kingdom will be built by those who master the tools the Lord has given and will give us. The Lord said in the *Doctrine and Covenants*: *"Therefore, go ye into all the world; and unto whatsoever place ye cannot go ye shall send, that the testimony may go from you into all the world."* (D&C 84:62)

The kingdom will be built from within the formal organization of the Church and it will also be strengthened and shaped by Church members who serve the call of the Lord to help tell the Church's story through the so called "gentile" media available to them.

Many of you as students at BYU had at the heart of your communications studies the desire to build the Church. Not just to be serving citizens in the Church but to make a professional contribution that will draw the honest in heart, the elect of God, to the doctrines and life-style of the Saints and membership in the Church.

It will require men and women who know which way they face. There will be no question about their testimonies and there will be no uncertainty about their loyalty.

Communication is a hard and difficult profession if one wishes to remain both faithful and committed. It is not always easy to face toward the Church. But in the end if one has swung in all the directions of the compass it won't matter what the achievements in the profession may have been.

Out of the toil and inspiration of a generation of media savvy Latter-day Saints will come **the tales of the heart**. The stories that will bring to our Father's children experiences of the Spirit that will lead them to drink deeply of *the pure water* that they may never thirst again.

Let me share with you a couple of moments of a production called, "Myths and Realities." It was made to show to NBC's producers prior to the Olympics. It was very well

received by Dick Ebersol and 350 producer/writers from NBC affiliates across the country.
(Transcript follows.)



Myths & Reality

With

Steve Young and Sharlene Hawkes

Steve Young: (former NFL Quarterback): “Only fifty years ago half of all the world’s Mormons lived in this one, under-populated state. Fleeing here in the 1840’s from a nation intolerant or suspicious of their religious differences, they survived, then flourished. While some misunderstandings and confusion remain even today, the church gradually gained a measure of acceptance from mainstream America. In the 1960’s membership growth took off. Church missionaries could be found on the streets of most major cities of the world and church building dotted the globe. Today the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is seen as a world religion – 11 million strong – and growing fast. And to the media it is still as fascinating as it was when it was a small persecuted group.

Hi, I’m Steve Young. It was my third great grandfather, Brigham Young, who stood near this spot in 1847 (on Temple Square), stuck his cane into the dry ground and said, ‘Here we will build a temple to our God.’”

Sharlene Hawkes: (former Miss America): “My faith, like those of millions of other members of the Church, is the most important thing in my life. It brings meaning and purpose to life and gives practical answers to the challenges we all face daily. I hope this gives you a better understanding of who we are and who we are not.

Gordon B. Hinckley: “Towering above all mankind stands Jesus the Christ, the King of Glory, the unblemished Messiah, the Lord, Emmanuel. He is our King, our Lord, our Master. The living Christ, who stands on the right hand of his Father: He lives! He lives – resplendent and wonderful – the living Son of the living God.”

Now I’d like to share a piece done by the Church’s Audiovisual Department which was produced by Peter Johnson. This production features several scholars, among them Krister Stendahl, the former dean of the Harvard School of Divinity and currently head of the State Church in Sweden. (Transcript follows.)



Between Heaven & Earth

Professor Krister Stendahl: “In First Corinthians 15, where Paul speaks about those who baptize themselves for the dead and obviously takes for granted that: A.) there were people who did so and, B.) he has no complaint about it. Now, with the Mormons, we have it again as a practice.”

Truman G. Madsen: (Professor of Philosophy, Brigham Young University): “Professor Krister Stendahl of Harvard Divinity School became the bishop of Stockholm in Sweden. During a visit we made there, he called a press conference, invited various friends and the said the following:

‘I have three rules for interfaith discussion. To wit, *Number One:* If you’re going to ask the question, “What do others believe in their various faiths?” Ask *them* – not their critics, not their enemies. Because what one religious tradition says about another is usually a breach against the commandment, “Thou shalt not bear false witness.” *Number Two:* If you are going to compare, don’t compare your bests with tier worsts, but compare bests with bests.’”

Krister Stendahl: “Most people think of their own tradition as it is – at its best – and they use caricatures of the others.”

Truman Madsen: “And then, ‘*Number Three,*’ he said. ‘Leave room for holy envy.’ And then he said, ‘Let me give you an example of my holy envy for the Latter-Day Saints. We Lutherans, when we lose our loved ones, we have funerals and we have cemeteries, but that ends our concern with those who have gone before. But the Latter-Day Saints care about their forebears to the point that they want to bring the blessings of Christ’s atonement to them. So they build temples, and according to Paul’s instruction in First Corinthians, they perform baptisms for the dead.’

And then he smiled and said, ‘I have holy envy for that.’”

Krister Stendahl: “In a world where we have finally learned what I call the holy envy, it’s a beautiful thing. I could think of myself as taking part in such an act. Extending the blessings that have come to me in and through Jesus Christ – that’s generous. That’s beautiful.”



We are talking about women and men who have passports in the world but citizen ship in the kingdom of God. People who teach young women and young men classes on Sunday and their own families on Monday night. Who seek the Lord in the Temples because they know how to receive revelation in their personal lives and in their professions.

We also must not forget that we are talking about the production of commercials and advertisements that not only sell a product but lift the aspirations of mankind to a new and higher level.

The Challenge

As an illustration of what one committed Church member can do, let's look at Gordon Bowen. He joined the Church while attending University. Gordon is a highly talented, professional who began at Bonneville in the early days of the *Home Front* campaigns and then went on to work for several of the largest advertising agencies in New York. We'll look at two of his pieces. The first we might label "Prayer." The labor and talent was donated for this production. The second advertisement was produced for AT&T and was part of a Christmas campaign that saw over 60,000 runaway kids go home.



Verizon Television Commercial following September 11, 2001: Prayer

(Visualize scenes of innocence as young children play at the foot of the Statue of Liberty alternating with views of the statue itself.) A young man and woman sing the following message:

I pray you'll be our eyes
and watch us where we go,
and help us to be wise,
in times when we don't know.

Let this be our prayer:
When we lose our way – Light us through each day.
A world where pain and sorrow will be ended,
and every heart that's broken will be mended.
Let this be our prayer,
when we lose our way.
Lead us to a play, guide us with your grace.
Give us faith – so we'll be safe.



AT&T Public Service Campaign: Amazing Grace

(Picture a runaway teenaged boy, alone in a big city, and far from home. He is discouraged and on the streets. It's Christmas. Despair is written on his face and he gratefully accepts a free hot drink from a kind stranger. In the background you hear strains of *Amazing Grace*, sung by a woman on the street.)

*Amazing Grace!
How sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me,
That once was lost,
but now I'm found,
was blind, but now I see!*

(Next you see the boy pick up a telephone and speak.)

Boy: “Yeah. I need to call my mom in Cincinnati and I don’t think I have enough money. I *really* need to talk to my mom.”

Operator: “I can help you. Stay on the line.”

Woman: “Hello?”

Boy: “Mom?”

Woman: “David? David, is that you?”

Boy: “Mom? Can I come home?”

Narrator: “If you’re lost or stranded, please call 1-800-2BE-SAFE and AT&T will connect you to the help you need –free. Blessings of the Season from AT&T.



But, again, what I am trying to illustrate is the fact that the values of an individual communicator can be used to inspire humankind, and help make the world a righteous place.

In continuing the premise that Church members can and do make a difference by utilizing their values and their talents, consider this:

We need men and women who can help defend the Church against its enemies and use all of the modern techniques, methods and vehicles to explain our point of view to the honest in heart.

Those of you in the Communications field are trained to write with power, clarity and accuracy. You know how to take the emotion out and use the solid logic needed to convince. Step up and defend the Church without being asked. Don’t leave it to the crazies. When the Church is defamed, write to editors, get on the web, correct the misinformation, call the producer, get hold of the talk show host. President Faust has said, “No more uncontested slam dunks.”

You need to shoulder the responsibility to lift our fellow Saints no matter where they huddle in the midst of persecution and discouragement.

This needs to be done today. As I travel the world, I find too many who are afraid to acknowledge that they are members of the Church. Too many who feel the need to relinquish the truths that have briefly transfigured their lives and brought them to the light.

The feeble knees that need strengthening may not be the old and halt; it may be the new Saints. It may be the teenager who smiled in joy at his baptism but now faces the ridicule of teammates and the scorn of shallow friends.

Your book, television piece, movie, or documentary that demonstrates truths and illustrates the blessings of living the gospel may well be the instrument the Lord uses to reach the one.

Through the years I have loved the Church's *Home Front* productions. It is probably the most successful public service campaign of all time! As you know, Bonneville produces these. Here is one that illustrates my point:



Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

Public Service Announcement

“Families: It’s about Time.”

(A very young child, book in hand, approaches her father, who is working at home, and says:)

Little Girl: “Daddy? Can you read me a story?”

Father: “Daddy’s kind of busy right now...”

(Later in the day, the father is relaxing while reading the newspaper.)

Little Girl: “Can you read me a story?”

Father: “No, it’s your bed time, Sweetie.”

(At 4 a.m. mother and father are now asleep. Their bedroom door opens and in walks the little girl, who approaches her father’s side of the bed and asks:)

Little Girl: “Daddy? Can you read me a story?”

Father: “Honey, Daddy’s *so* tired. Go ask Mommy.”

(The little girl obediently walks over to her mother’s side and asks:)

Little Girl: “Mommy? Can *Daddy* read me a story?”

(Dad’s eyes pop open, the light goes on, story is read.)

Narrator: Families! Isn’t it about—*Time?* A Message from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.”



As professional communicators you know that he or show who communicates a message best, tells it with a story. The film produced for the Nauvoo Temple Open House in as excellent example.

This is the third film in recent history which was produced to be viewed prior to entering the House of the Lord. Russ Holt, a BYU graduate, was the writer and producer. This story at the end of the production drives the point home by telling a true story.



Nauvoo Temple Open House

Visitor’s Film

(Scenes of the temple)

Narrator: “It is in our Father’s Celestial kingdom that the righteous will live with their loved ones forever.”

(Pictures of a young couple on their wedding day. Voice of *Sister Howell*, a young widow whose husband, Brady Howell, died Sept. 11, 2001, when the Pentagon and World Trade Center were attacked.)

Sister Howell: “I know that this is the true gospel and even though horrible things may occur, it is still a great plan of happiness. We can be with our families forever and that is made possible through the ordinances that occur within the temple.

When Brady and I were married, it was a glimpse of the eternities. I will feel that way again and I will see Brady again. That has brought me so much comfort and hope, to know that I will be with him. He will be with me, and we will continue our progression—no only until death do us part, but for eternity.”



In Conclusion

The Church needs men and women who are top-flight communicators. They are needed both on the Church’s staff and as citizens of the kingdom. They need to be willing to consecrate

their talents to making a difference for the Church as well as being a light to an ever darkening world.

All who have desires to move the work forward are called to the work (see D&C 4)—much of which will be done in their own professions, as they stand for truth and righteousness and exert their influence before audiences, clients, and readers – thoughtful truths and stories which reflect values.

They will so live that they are spiritually fit to live as well as think (David O. McKay, Improvement Era, circa, 1960). These communicators will make a contribution as they teach righteous principles and lift humankind out of the mire of mediocrity and the ooze of pathetic filth which is so much part of our communications milieu.

Remember, oh remember, that the convictions and urgings of your heart during un0jaded salad days can still be fulfilled as you contribute to your field and lift and bless others. You do not need a call from the Brethren to serve humankind through your profession. You are expected to be a cut above, a solid citizen in the kingdom working to improve the world.

When I assumed the position of managing director of the Church Public Affairs Department, I was counseled to guard my testimony. Elder Russell M. Nelson warned, “We are just ordinary men with an extraordinary calling.” Thirteen years later, my testimony is far stronger than it was the day I started. I submit they are “extraordinary men with extra ordinary callings.” I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

About the Speaker

Bruce L. Olsen is the managing director of the Public Affairs Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. His assignment includes the direction of worldwide government affairs, community relations and media relations programs of the more than eleven million-member Church. His department also supervises public relations and open house programs for the Church’s current worldwide temple construction program.

Prior to his appointment, he served as director of corporate communications for Geneva Steel in Orem, Utah. Previous to that he enjoyed a successful twenty-year career at Brigham Young University where he held several positions, including assistant dean and registrar, associate professor of communications and assistant to the president for university relations.

A native of Orangeville, Utah, he holds both bachelors and masters degrees from Brigham Young University, where he served as editor of the school’s daily newspaper and as student body president.

He and his wife, Christine Payne Olsen are the parents of five children.

