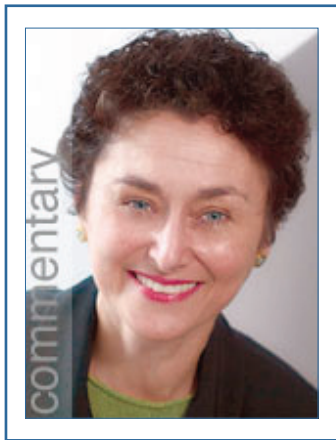


## Third Opinion

# Doing Business In The Cellophane Era

Saj-nicole Joni 01.07.08, 2:55 PM ET

This year, it's almost too easy to predict the big trend for the months ahead. And you're not going to like it much. Unless you got up this morning, looked in the mirror and said with confidence, "Bring it on!"



In an era when even the CIA has agreed to come clean about its latest snafu, and Wall Street's latest "packaging" frenzy has come completely undone, anyone who still doesn't get it will discover that this is the Time of Total Transparency. What you think is private may well not be, and the speed at which revelations travel is unrelenting. In short, your secrets are not safe anymore, unless by "safe" you mean "on a Web site somewhere on the Net."

In a Cellophane Era, what happens to the truth? It gets split into a thousand tiny pieces, and everyone gets a say. Truth becomes about multiple perspectives, intentions and needs. As such, if you're not actively engaging in contending with all those other perspectives, the truth about you and your company will be revealed, packaged and spun by someone else.

You need to be fully invested in the truth game in 2008. You need to get your perspective on the issues that affect your leadership out, onto the public airwaves. You need to make your claims for relevance, uniqueness and even greatness if you want to be heard at all. Most of all, perhaps, you need to become clear about your intentions, because when those are revealed later by someone else, they will be revealed unflatteringly.

The one cosmic rule of the Cellophane Era is that intentions matter. So you'd better be clear about yours.

### Trust Matters

Most people think of trust as something that either exists or not. Do you trust your teenage son to return the car by the time appointed? Do you trust your direct reports to bring that project in on time? Do you trust the markets to reward innovative products and excellent customer service?

But that meaning of trust is really just a way of saying that events should turn out the way you expect them to—or hope them to.

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Trust is in fact more complicated than that. In organizations and in human relations, there are levels of trust, and it is the job of leadership to get those levels right and to deal appropriately with people depending on the kind of trust that exists between you and them.

Some people you trust personally, some you trust for their expertise, and some you may trust (or not) because of their position in the organization. It is inappropriate and indeed foolish to mistake personal trust for that positional trust—what I call structural trust. For example, you may trust Joe down the hall because he's a great guy, works with Habitat for Humanity and is a pillar of the community, but it would be completely inappropriate (and indeed illegal) to reveal the early stage discussions about an impending sale of the company to Joe if his position did not allow for his inclusion.

Leaders need more than ever to understand the differences among the kinds of trust in a transparent era. It's not enough to have good intentions if you mistake personal trust for structural trust when the future is at stake.

And in 2008, it is near certain that your education will be played out in public.

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