

On Conducting Communications Research

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Recommended Citation

Fletcher, Alan M. (1980) "On Conducting Communications Research," *Journal of Applied Communications*: Vol. 63: Iss. 3. <https://doi.org/10.4148/1051-0834.1825>

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On Conducting Communications Research

Abstract

Dialogue: On Conducting Communications Research

education," we will be educating the public, the researcher, the extension specialist, the county agents, the experiment station administrators — and the farmer.

If we accomplish all of that, then we deserve the soubriquet, "Ace."

But, then again, this is only my opinion.

*Chester J. Teller
Rutgers University*

On Conducting Communications Research

I am not sure whether it makes me a maverick or a heretic, but I disagree with the notion that, for the sake of gaining professional parity in an academic setting, agriculture communicators should be conducting communications "research."

For better or for worse, I came to academic agriculture journalism rather late in life--after spending 20 years in various types of commercial publishing. Ever since I have been working for agriculture institutions (about ten years now), I have been hearing the communications people grumbling about being second-class citizens. The plain truth is that, in a way, we ARE second-class citizens at a university. We perform a support role for the people who do the real work of the institution. To put it in business terms: We don't make the company's products. The products of a university are graduates and new knowledge. In my opinion **working** journalists (not to be confused with **academic** journalists who teach) doing "research" is a feeble attempt to compensate for inferiority feelings that have grown out of our support position. Furthermore, doing research for professional enhancement may actually keep us from doing what we are being paid to do.

Those who are unable to accept their status as support personnel should get jobs with newspapers, magazines or book publishers. In those situations editors

have about as much status as it is possible to have. They produce the company's products.

At a university, as in virtually every other work setting, acceptance and a degree of parity with others are gained by being competent and professional. Conducting dubious research will not get us anything we cannot get by doing our work well. We should conduct research only for the purpose of acquiring information we need for doing our jobs more effectively and efficiently.

I have no inferiority feelings for being in a support role to the agriculture scientists who teach and do research. I receive my ego gratification from being good at what I do for a living and from knowing that ours is a noble profession that contributes to the welfare of humankind. This should be enough for anyone.

*Alan M. Fletcher
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