

## Send Us Grants

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### Abstract

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# *Send Us Grants*

DON NELSON

LINCOLN SENSED THE WAY to win the war. He realized that enemy armies, rather than places, were the proper objectives. But until he found Grant, no other Union general could grasp this concept. McClellan, Pope, Burnside, Meade, and the other Northern generals who had tried and failed to capture Richmond and smash the Confederacy's wily Robert E. Lee still arranged their battles in the style of the 18th Century.

The *Life* book series on the Civil War says Ulysses S. Grant was "the one soldier of the war who could think realistically about grand strategy, . . . for all theaters and all fronts . . . (in 1864 he launched) a series of simultaneous advances, a constant and relentless pressure against the entire strategic line of the Confederacy."

This strategy finally forced the artful Lee to surrender his Army of Northern Virginia to Grant's Army of the Potomac. In effect, it ended the war.

Now I don't want to get into any heated debates about the strategy of the Civil War. For one thing, Grant had more resources at his command than the South's greatest soldier. For another, I don't know that much about wars.

But I do want to take our profession to task a little. I say: Send us Grants!

We are by and large able tacticians. Tactics in the military sense is the science and art of disposing and maneuvering troops and ships in action. You can look it up. I define tactics in the communications sense as the science and art of disposing and maneuvering words, phrases, images and concepts into audience actions. Thus, we turn the adroit phrase, write the tight para-

graph, visualize the bright idea, explain the complex concept, with startling simplicity.

But we are by and large lousy strategists. In the military sense again, General D'Armeé Andre Beaupre says in his book, *An Introduction to Strategy*: "It will be agreed that the aim of strategy is to fulfill the objectives laid down by policy, making the best use of the resources available." So strategy is used to secure the aims of policy. Simple enough.

### *Communications Strategy Needed*

We have the policy — our broad educational objectives.<sup>1</sup> But we usually don't have that strategy that can carry out the policy effectively.

Two recent articles in *ACE Quarterly* (which, in large measure, inspired me to write this semi-rebuttal), give me an inkling of the uneasiness some of us feel with our imperfect — or non-existent — communications strategy.

Fehlhafer ("Plan Ahead for Efficiency: This Thing Called Plan of Work," *ACE*, Vol. 53, No. 4, 1970) asks us to pre-plan stories for various outlets, rather than doing it as an afterthought. He's on the right track—as far as he goes. (I'll return to this point.)

Belck ("Editor Jekyll and Editor Hyde," *ACE*, Vol. 54, No. 2, 1971) is disturbed about the specialist who feels he must publish "the unexpurgated facts about quackgrass nematodes," even though "only 15 people in the entire United States" give a quack.

Fehlhafer and Belck both are on to something. What I think they are trying to express, but don't quite articulate, is that we're still arranging our communications battles in the style of the 19th Century.

Fehlhafer suggests we go over the specialist's plan of work with him and arrange our communications strategy accordingly. Belck says about the same thing: ". . . find a weak link and hack away at it," he urges. But he, too, talks about a narrow strategy, "working with a dedicated but ignored sheep specialist, for example, trying to survive in a state where dairy is God."

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<sup>1</sup> We also have the resources. You may argue this point. I maintain we do.

Like the Meades and McClellans, these latter-day communications generals—and I suspect a good many of the rest of us communications field commanders—have not yet grasped the bolder, broader idea that we must attack simultaneously and relentlessly on all theaters and all fronts. Working with an economist here, a weed specialist there, and a nutritionist somewhere else won't yield any grand strategies. We may take Richmond but won't trap Lee and end the war.

### *Broad Program Thrusts*

We will have to begin thinking in terms of communicating about broad program thrusts rather than limited specialty parries.

To know how to communicate the rural development story, we need to talk to more than one economist. We must know the entire strategic thrust of our rural development program unit.

To do a good job with weed information in a specific medium is not the same thing as educating the public about the whole vast, new, bewildering field of environmental quality in many media.

Similarly, getting in good and communicating well for that one lonely hip nutritionist across campus makes very little impact on the entire expanded nutrition story.

So, while Fehlhafer and Belck speak (rather enlightenedly for editors) of knowing your specialist's program, they still are being outflanked by the trends of the times and the new broad thrusts of education.

What I am saying (and maybe repeating) is that the times of information about economic development studies, erosion control, and finer floor coverings are already gone. The broad theaters and fronts in educational information are now—or should be instead—total community development, pollution abatement, educating low-income people, and all the rest.

Lincoln had a saying: "He may criticize who is willing to help." I'm going to criticize a little more. But I'm also going to suggest some help.

I took a turn through the first 16 pages (through the "M" states) of the "Agricultural Information Staffs in State Land Grant Universities," issued out of our office. You should all have a copy.

I tried to see how we were staffed to do the program communication job I think we must do (strategic information) as compared to the media communication (tactical information) we have always done.

I wasn't too surprised to see how we apparently are still so much master tacticians, so little cunning strategists.

I counted 370 names through "Montana" and found this:

<i>Staff function</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Administrative.....	39	10
Media-related.....	239	65
Program-related.....	27	7
Research-oriented.....	19	5
Editorial-information jobs.....	25	7
Other types.....	21	6
TOTAL.....	370	100

Ladies and gentlemen of AAACE, do not misunderstand me! We need the good tactics. Once the battle is joined, the strategy be damned. We need the radio-TV specialist, the audio-visual expert, the publications editor. But do we need two out of every three on our staffs devoting their time and talents to media while less than one in 10 support programs?

Now, here I may lay my flanks open to vicious counterattack. What's in a name, anyway? I rather arbitrarily classified our staffing patterns. What the directory says we do may not always, in fact, reflect exactly what we do.

### *Unbalanced Staff Assignments*

But, in the absence of exhaustive research into this subject (and it would be revealing research, I'm sure), I still question the fact that we list 110 print media people out of the 370 and 41 electronic media types in this electronic age. I wonder more why we have 68 publications editors and a grand total of six marketing, 4-H, and rural development editors combined in these 28 state staffs.

Fehlhafer and Belck have both discovered that specialists are human. They'll talk, they'll reason, they'll eventually acknowledge that you—not they—know communications strategy best. But we've got to show them. After working as a program editor in Iowa for seven years and now here in Washington for several months, I can assure you that whole program units will embrace

your expertise in the same way. It may take some butting in—some crashing of program planning meetings—some “nonproductive” time of trying to see the big program picture. But it can be done.

This information support planning for an entire program thrust, by the way, is the perfect ploy, Jack Belck, for getting that publication request for 50,000 copies of the Ph.D. dissertation on palm tree frond virus cut back to less than 45,500 copies. If the PTF virus bit doesn't contribute heavily to program objectives, his colleagues will help you trim the numbers. If they don't, then their whole program planning strategy is awry, and not just the information input.

### *AAACE Guilty, Too*

While I'm hacking away at two of my colleagues (I hope lightly) and our information staffing patterns (I hope not so lightly), let me not miss an opportunity to demonstrate against our own organization.

I see we have Press, Publications, Radio/TV, and Visual Communications committees (media, tactics), but I see that we don't have even one home ec, 4-H, rural development, poverty, or environmental committee (program, strategy) in AAACE.

Media sessions we have in abundance. Educational program support sessions we rarely do.

I have attacked all along the agricultural college information and AAACE fronts. I will be disappointed if some Grants don't roll out their big guns. Fire at will.