



So Whatcha Sayin'?

Pandemic Lessons on Communication

Taison D. Bell, MD, MBA
Associate Professor of Medicine
Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine
Division of Infectious Disease and International Health



Kristen



Alain



Ruby

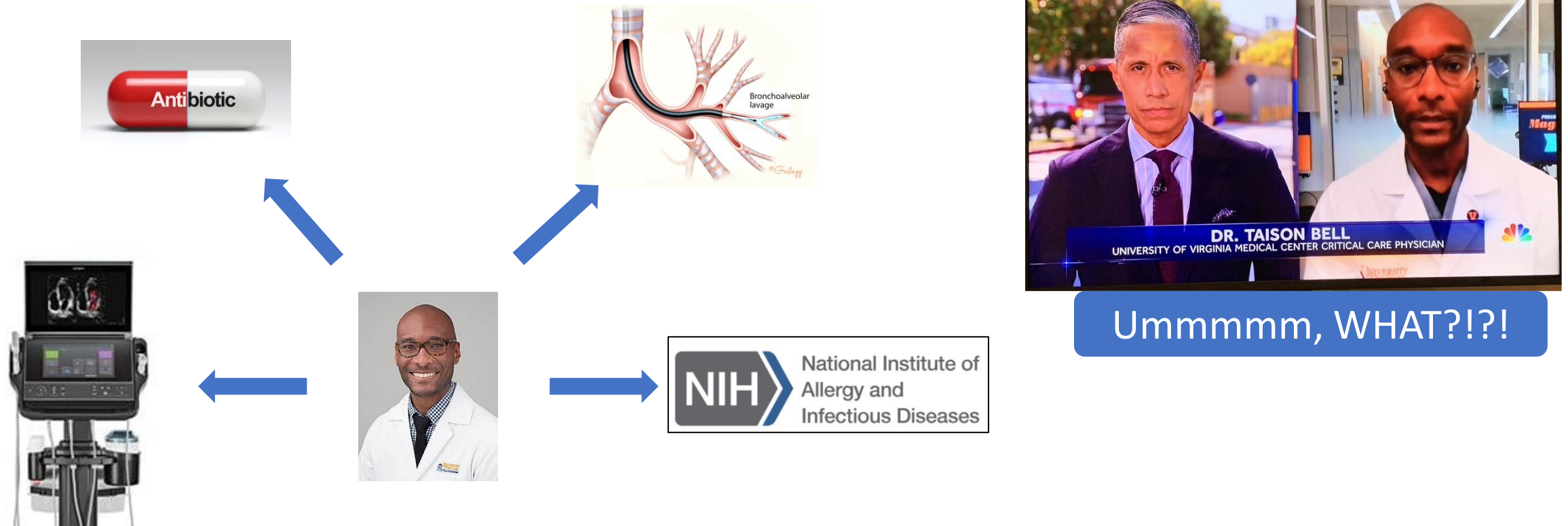
Outline

Outline the principles of mass communication for public health

Discuss combating misinformation and disinformation

Connect the above lessons with our task moving forward

You don't have to be "THE" expert to be a useful communicator (or anything else)



Who can sign up for a free COVID-19 vaccine?



- All Virginia residents and essential workers can sign up for a **free COVID-19 vaccine**.
- Register at Vaccinate.Virginia.gov or call **877-VAX-IN-VA** from 8am-8pm.
- Language services available. TTY users dial 7-1-1.



Dr. Denise Bonds - BRHD press conference



COVID-19 Cases and Number of PCR Testing Encounters by ZIP Code

Dashboard Updated: 3/19/2022. Data reported by ZIP for the past day.

Select Cases or Number of PCR Testing Encounters* from the Drop Down (Affects the Map)

Enter your ZIP code below to find it on the map. * Number of cases is suppressed if count is 0

Number of Cases

Number of PCR Testing Encounters**

	Number of Cases	Number of PCR Testing Encounters**
Total	12,065,210	1,450,295
2005	5170	39813
2006	780	3785
2009	7102	50863
2010	10341	64124
2011	8314	48072
2012	4654	36272
2013	990	5093
2014	216	2778
2015	86	1126
2016	495	4483
2017	6334	52629
2018	4733	36327
2019	1894	19094
2020	92	857
2021	42	170
2022	2284	18212
2023	364	2133
Not Reported	10,431	20,043

* Please see our blog post for more information on VDH calculates the number of people tested.
 ** Data is reported by public health from all reporting sites. All negative results may not be reported due to the large number of false negative results being reported for COVID-19.
 * Excludes Not Reported and Out of State in Total

Bristol, Virginia church serves community as a COVID-19 vaccination site



Virginia's COVID-19 Vaccine: You Ask. The Experts Answer.

Community and medical leaders answer your questions about the COVID-19 vaccine.



Wed., Dec. 16 at 7 PM
 Hosted by **JUAN CONDE**
 ABC 8 Anchor

Live broadcast and streaming at:

- WRIC8 / wric.com • WAVY10 / wavy.com • WDCW / dcw50.com
- FOX43 / wavy.com • WFXR / wfxtv.com • WDM / localdm.com
- News Channel 11 / wjhl.com

Meet Your Panelists:

- DR. NORM OLIVER**
Virginia State Health Commissioner, VDH
- DR. EBONY J. HILTON**
Anesthesiology / Critical Care, UVA Health
- DR. COSTI SIFRI**
Infectious Diseases and International Health, UVA Health
- DR. ETHLYN GIBSON**
Hampton University School of Nursing, Associate Professor
- DR. REBECCA VARGAS-JACKSON**
Physician Manager Support of the COVID-19 Health Equity Group, VDEM

#VaccinateVirginia



The Page Principles of Communication



Tell the truth



Prove it with
action



Listen to the
stakeholders



Manage for
Tomorrow



Remain calm,
patient, and
good-humored

A portrait of Paulo Coelho, an older man with a beard, resting his chin on his hand. The image is faded and serves as a background for the text.

Tell the
truth

Telling the truth and making
someone cry is better than telling
a lie and making someone smile.

- Paulo Coelho

How do you Communicate Truth along with Uncertainty?

- Science
 - Moves slowly
 - Filled with uncertainty
 - Iterative
- News Media
 - Moves quickly
 - Certainty = currency
 - Declarative



Communicating Scientific Uncertainty About the COVID-19 Pandemic: Online Experimental Study of an Uncertainty-Normalizing Strategy

- 1497 adults read 1 of 5 different versions of COVID-19 information
- Assessed for “ambiguity aversion”
 - Perceived likelihood of getting COVID, overall worry, intent for risk reduction behavior, etc.
- Study period: May-June 2020

Control

Uncertainty

Uncertainty + normalizing

Uncertainty + hope promoting

Uncertainty + pro-social

J Med Internet Res. 2021 Apr 22;23(4):e27832

No uncertainty (control)

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus, a type of virus that infects human beings. It is extremely contagious and spreads from person to person through contact with respiratory secretions from an infected person (e.g., through sneezing and coughing). Anybody can get COVID-19, and nobody is risk-free.

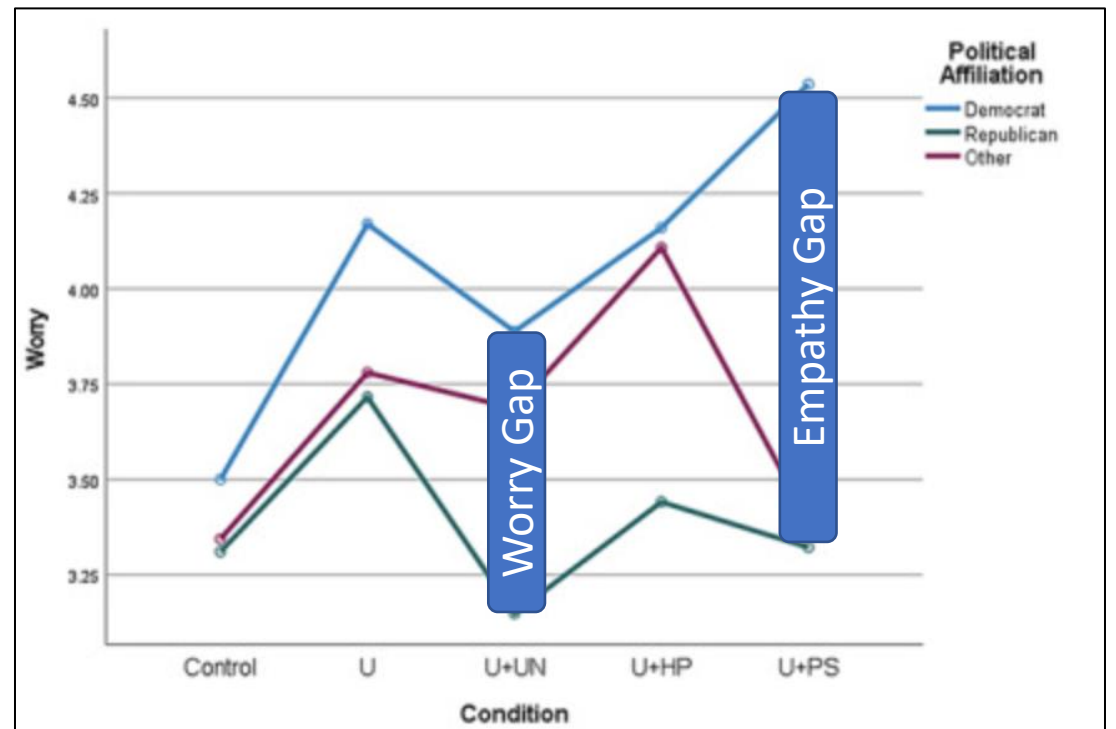
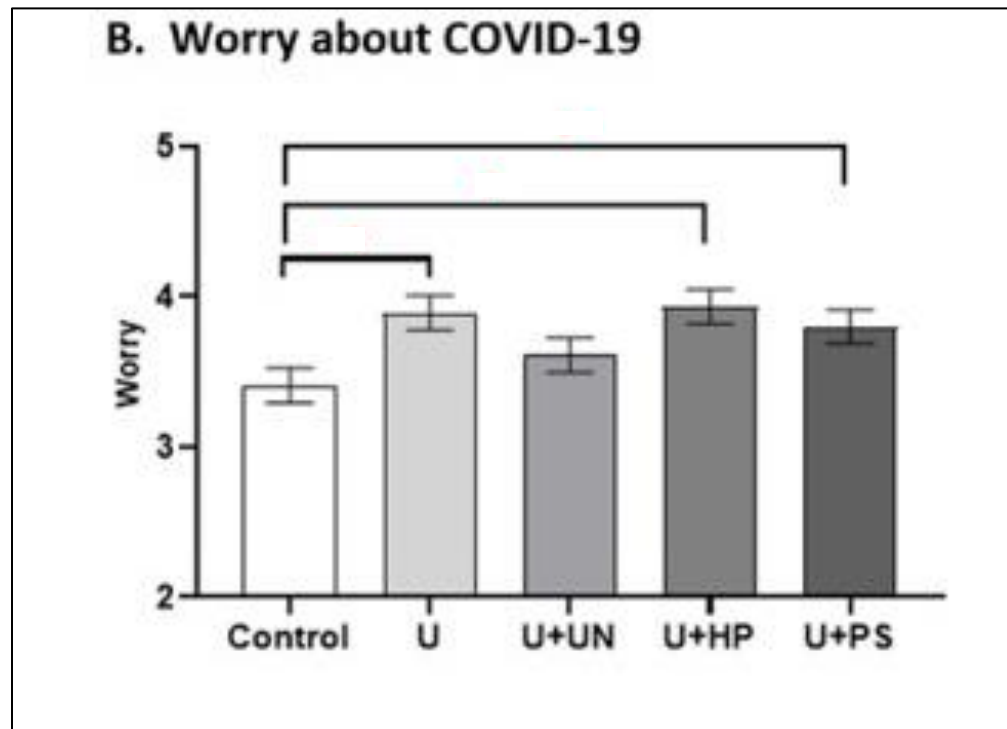
Uncertainty

There are many things we know about COVID-19, and many things we don't know. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus, a type of virus that infects human beings. It is extremely contagious and spreads from person to person through contact with respiratory secretions from an infected person (e.g., through sneezing and coughing). Anybody can get COVID-19, and nobody is risk-free. It's impossible to say exactly where it will spread and who will become infected or not.

Uncertainty + Normalizing

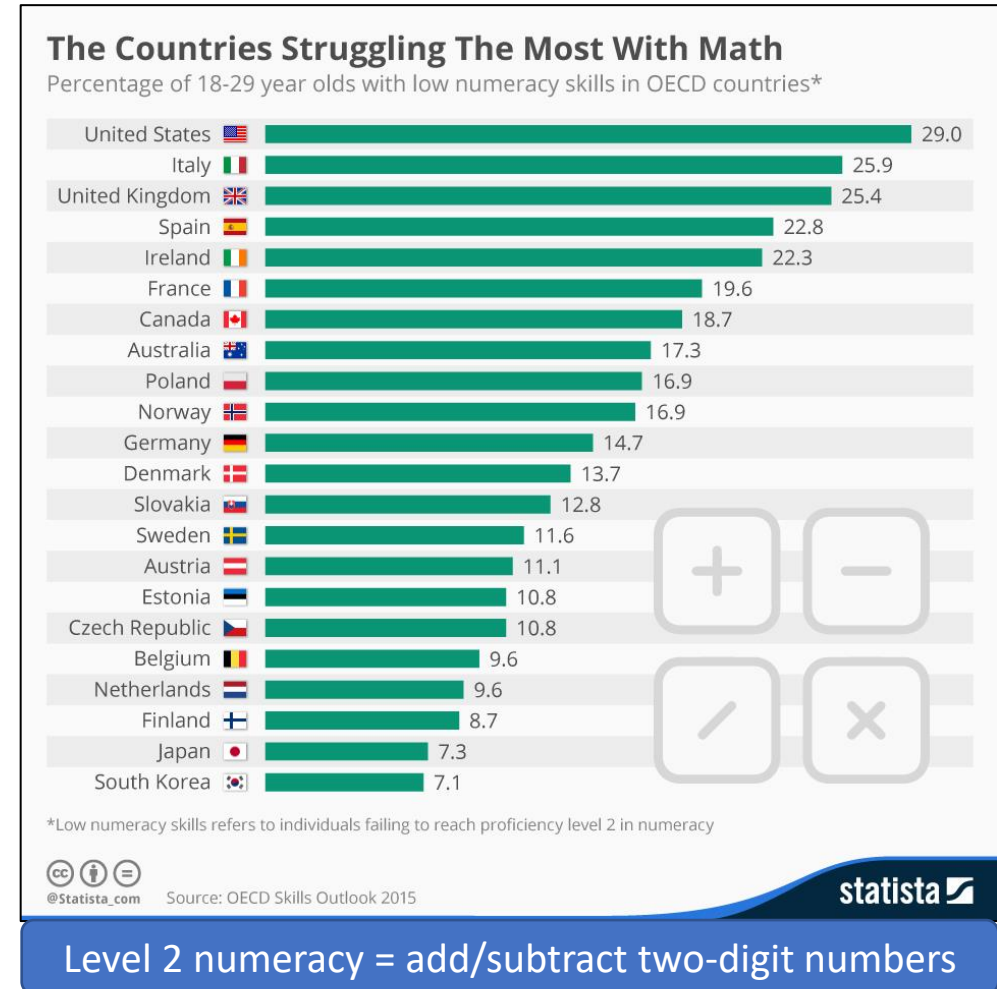
Right now, there are many things we know about COVID-19, and many things we don't know. COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus, a type of virus that infects human beings. It is extremely contagious and spreads from person to person through contact with respiratory secretions from an infected person (e.g., through sneezing and coughing). Anybody can get COVID-19, and nobody is risk-free. It's impossible to say exactly where it will spread and who will become infected or not. **But this is true of all diseases; there are always risks and the goal of medicine is to reduce these risks.**

Normalizing helps...for some

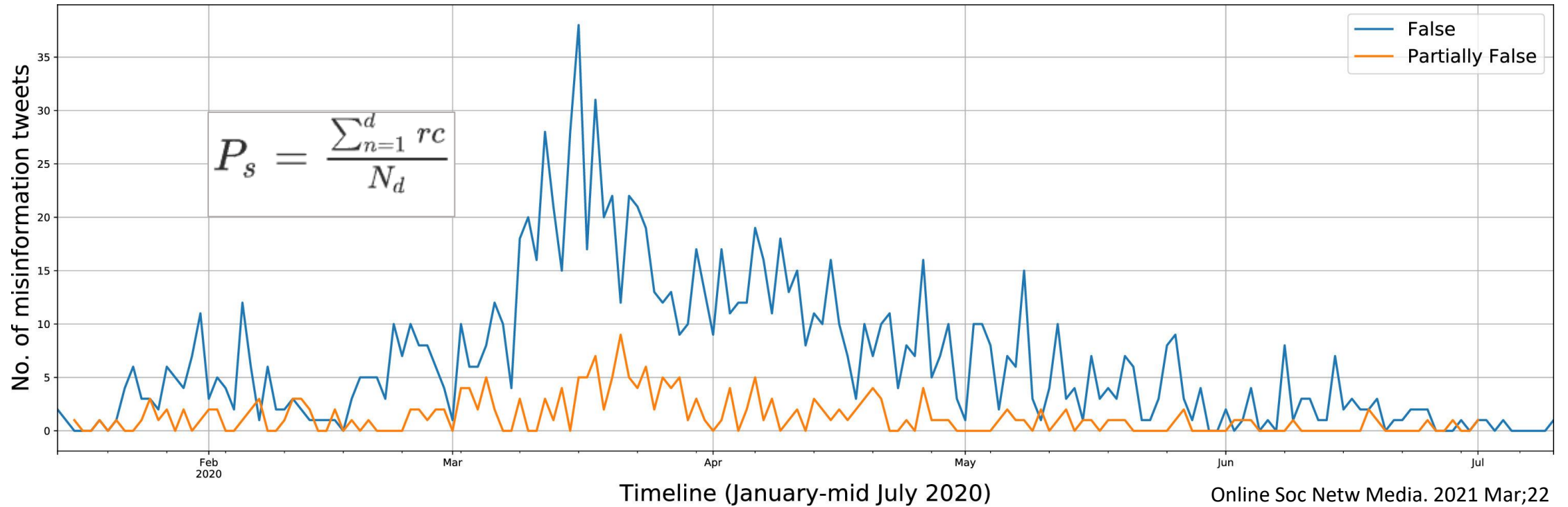


A Challenge: Numeracy in the US

- COVID-19 news often include a lot of data
- The general US public has difficulty with complex data
- How do you communicate data in a way that people can relate to?



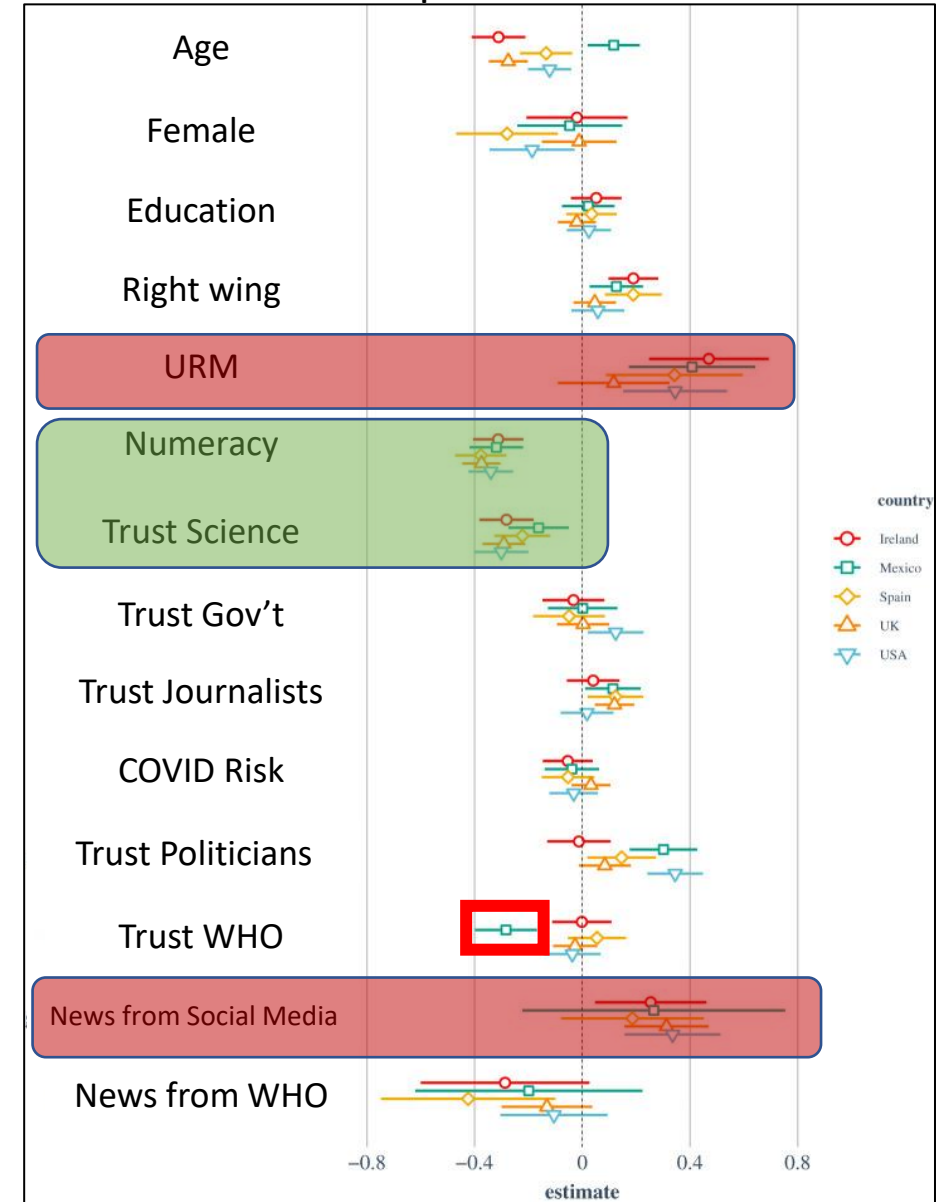
The Misinformation Fight



Who is Susceptible to mis/disinformation?

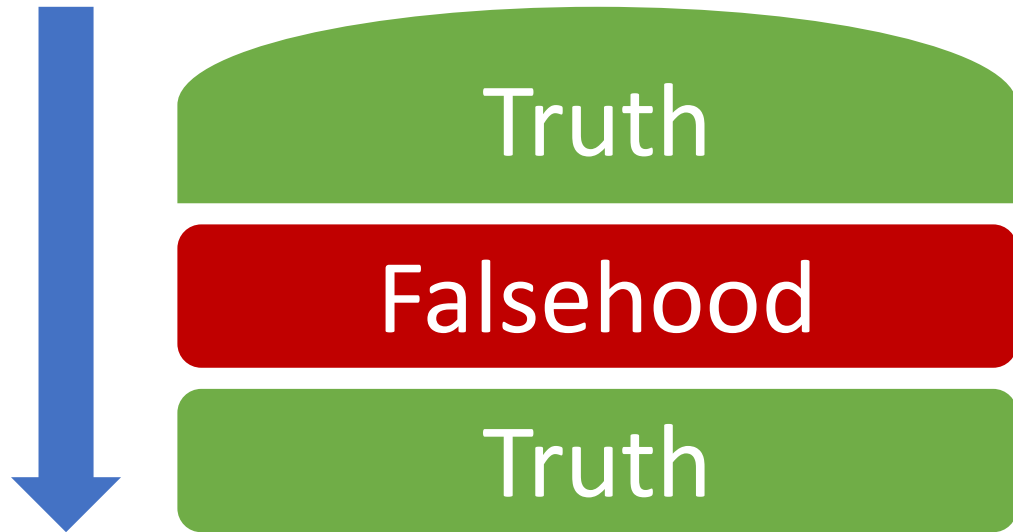
- Low susceptibility to misinformation with high numeracy and trust in science
- High susceptibility with self-identified URM status and those who obtain news primarily from social media

Left of 0 = less susceptible



R Soc Open Sci. 2020 Oct 14;7(10):201199

Combating mis/disinformation. The "Truth Sandwich" Method



G. Lakoff, FrameLab Podcast Episode 14

Jay Rosen @jayrosen_nyu · May 19, 2020
Here are the steps:

- 1.) State what is true.
- 2.) Report that a false or dubious claim has been made. (But only if it's newsworthy, meaning important for the public to know it happened. Otherwise use silence.)
- 3.) Repeat what the truth actually is.

Now for an example... 2/

17 542 1.4K

[Show this thread](#)

Jay Rosen @jayrosen_nyu · May 19, 2020
A "truth sandwich" lede:

There's no clear evidence that hydroxychloroquine, an antimalarial drug, protects against Coronavirus. Donald Trump said today he's taking it, but his doctor would not confirm that, and medical experts have said it could have dangerous side effects. 3/

19 309 1K



Prove it
with action

"I can't believe what you say...
because I see what you do."

- James Baldwin

"Doc, what would you do?"

Patients (and the public) are genuinely interested in the health decisions their providers make

We are better listeners when we humanize the person speaking to us

We are more likely to recall narratives

Parents Still Have a Thanksgiving Problem

By Katherine J. Wu



Getty; Adam Maida / The Atlantic

For many, many months now, 7-year-old Alain Bell has been keeping a very ambitious list of the things he wants to do after he gets his COVID-19 shots: travel (to Disneyworld or Australia, ideally); play more competitive basketball; go to “any restaurants that have french fries, which are my favorite food,” he told me over the phone.

Listen to the
stakeholders

“Change happens by listening and then starting a dialogue with the people who are doing something you don’t believe is right.”

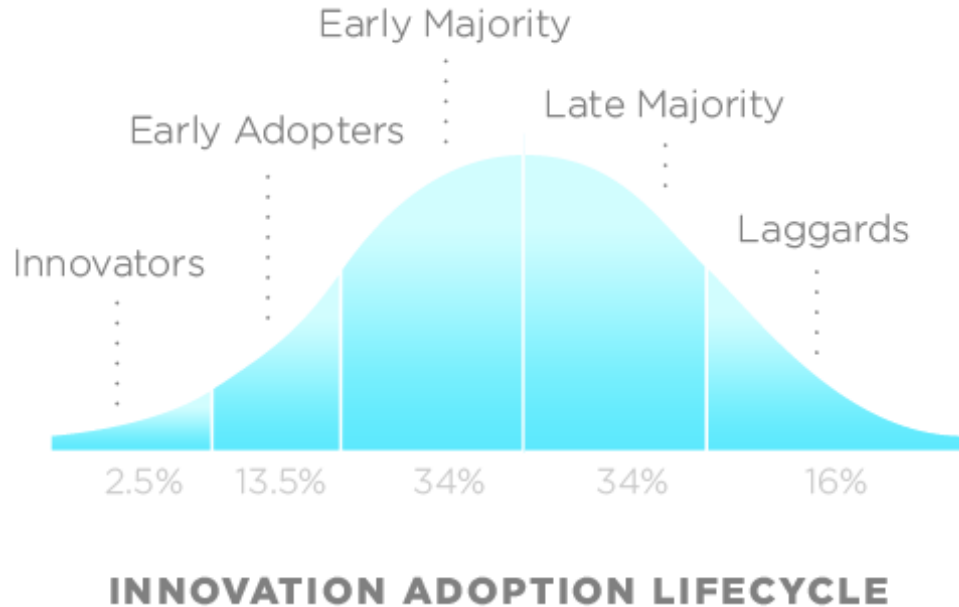
- Jane Goodall



"The most important thing is anticipation—not where the action is taking place, but where it's going to take place. Not where the subject is now, but where they're going to be."

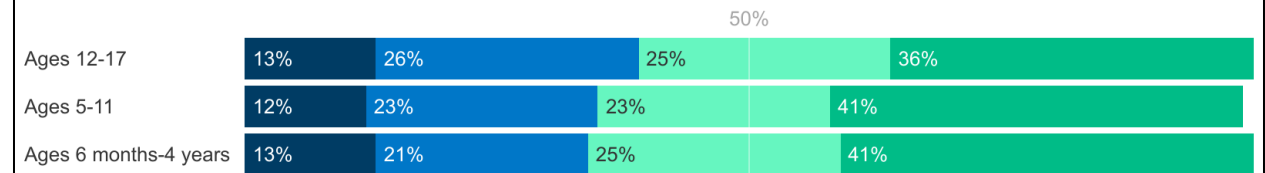
- Lawrence Schiller

Adoption Lifecycle: Rogers' Bell Curve



Thinking about your child between..., do you think you will definitely get, probably get, probably not get, or definitely not get them the new vaccine once it is available for their age group?

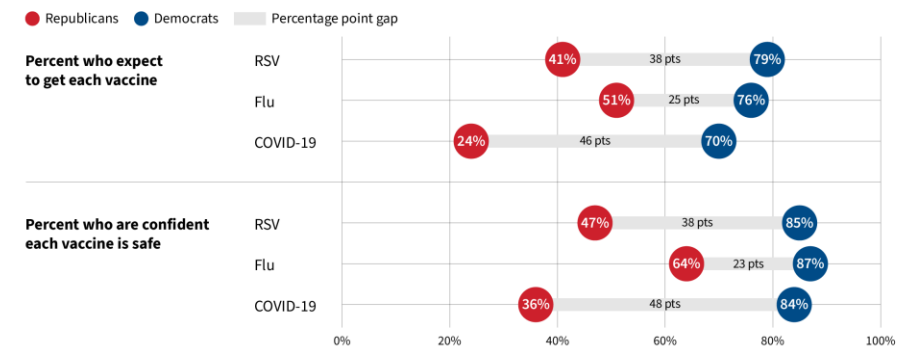
■ Definitely get ■ Probably get ■ Probably not get ■ Definitely not get



NOTE: Among parents or guardians of children under the age of 18.
SOURCE: KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor (Sept. 6-13, 2023)

KFF COVID-19
VACCINE MONITOR

Republicans Much Less Likely to View Vaccines as Safe, Intend to Get Them; Biggest Differences in Partisan Views of COVID-19 Vaccine



NOTE: RSV vaccine questions are only among adults ages 60 and older. See topline for full question wording

Remain calm,
patient, and
good-humored

My goal is to make people laugh
with integrity...with something
that I still find funny

- Ali Wong



“Quill” (X-Men)

Humor has the power to:

- Diffuse anxiety and anger
- (Re)enforce bonds
- Build a narrative
- Clearly delineate your position



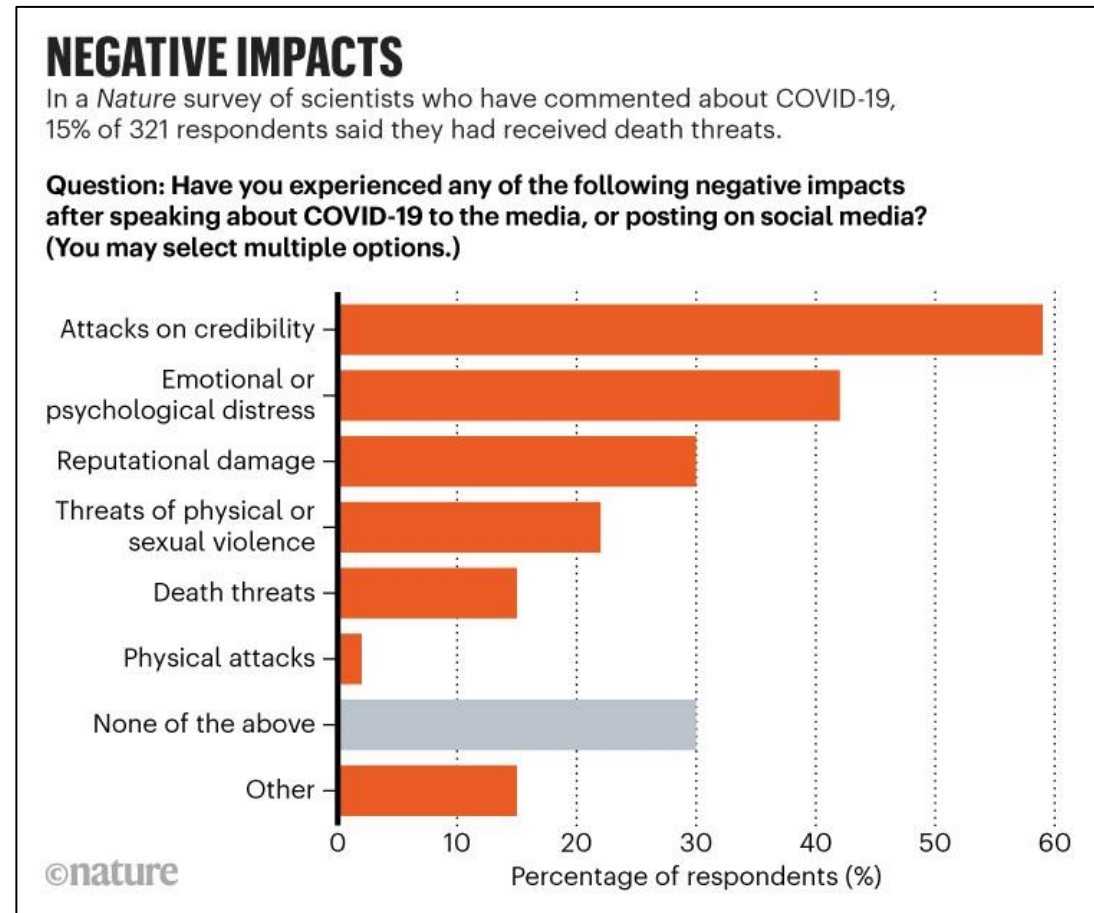
“He who dares not offend cannot be honest.”

-Thomas Paine



COVID Sci-Comm and Backlash

- More than two-thirds of scientists and public health experts have reported negative experiences as a result of their media appearances or social media comments
- 22% received death threats or threats of physical harm



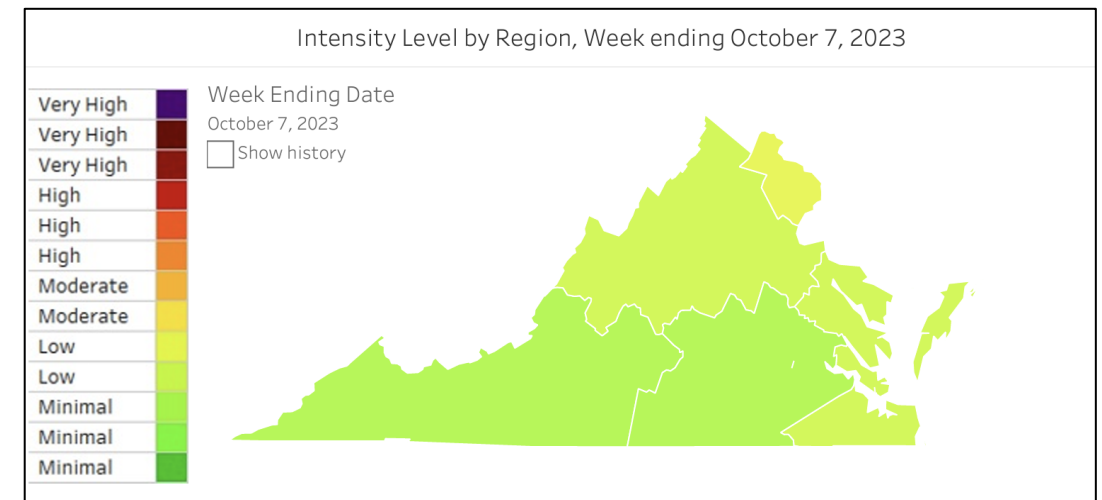
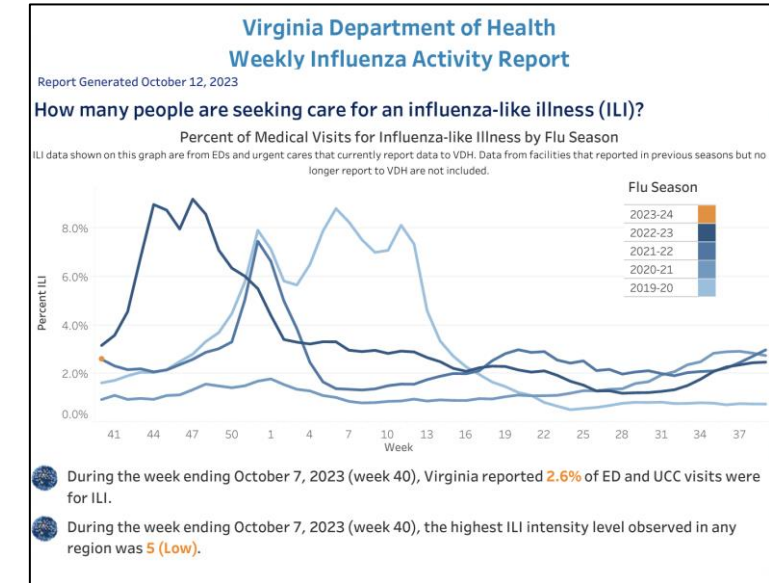


Lesson 1: Keep it simple

Language of health communication needs to be simple

Analogies tend to work better than statistics

We remember visual information 6x better than reading or hearing

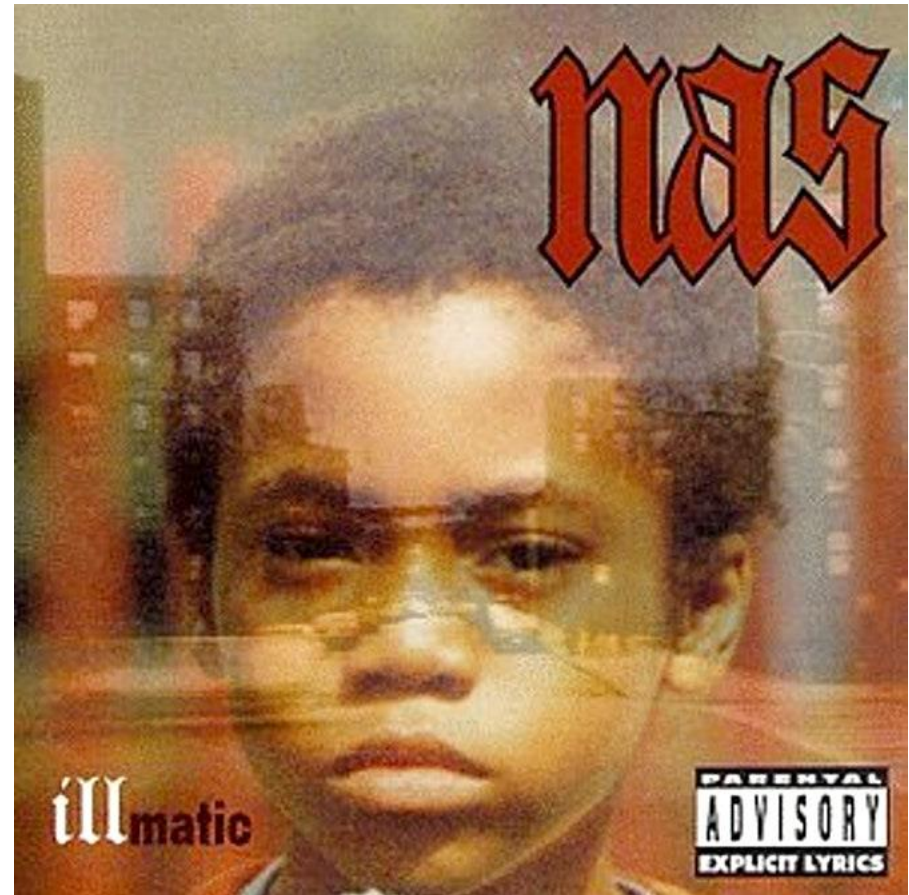


Lesson 2: We need to use more stories

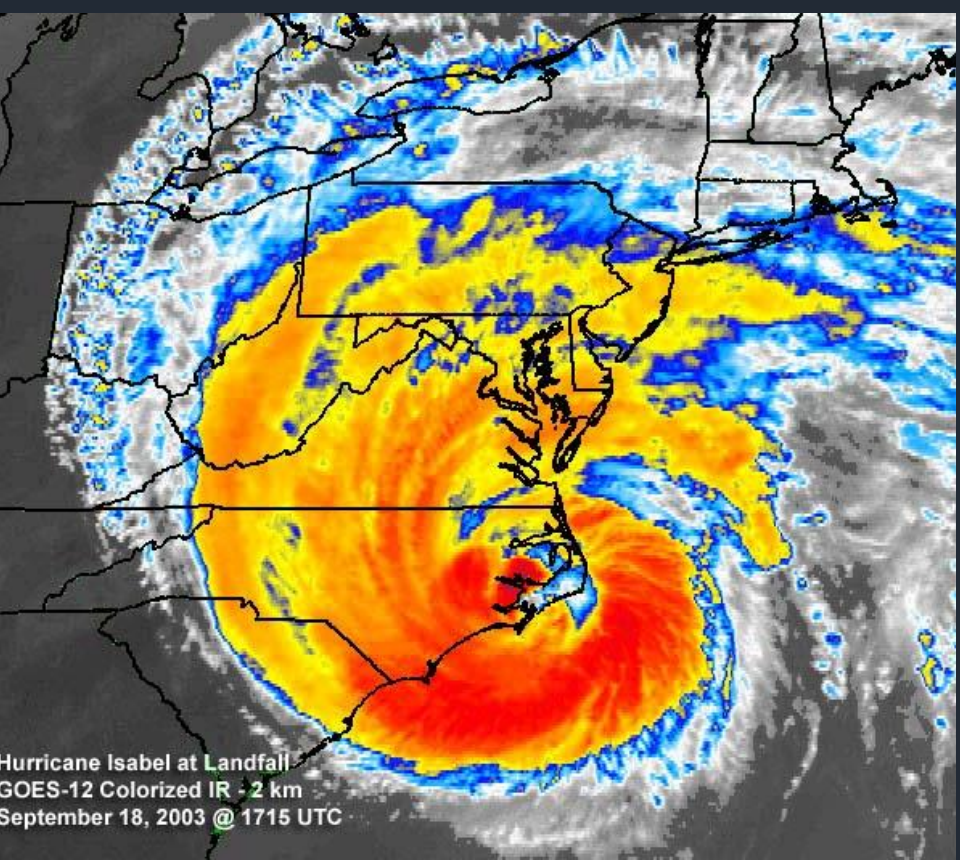
We tend to overemphasize the influence of data

We tend to underemphasize the influence of narratives

I believe the most effective PH communication uses both



Jeff Aiken, Hurricane Isabel Survivor



- “We underestimated the storm...(we) quickly realized the decision to stay was the wrong one. I probably wouldn't have been here had I been expecting this”
- “Mother Nature is going to win eventually, and that's what happened with my store, with my job, with my business and with my life”



Commonwealth of Virginia
Office of the Governor

Executive Order

NUMBER 26 (2023)

**CRUSHING THE FENTANYL EPIDEMIC: STRENGTHENING VIRGINIA'S
INTERDICTION AND ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE TO FENTANYL CRISIS**

Gov. Youngkin highlights new plan to combat fentanyl crisis in Virginia

by Caitlyn Frolo | Tue, May 9th 2023, 6:11 PM EDT



Lesson 3: We need to understand the power dynamics we navigate

To be human is to want to influence the world

Healthcare is a very disempowering experience

We run the risk of exacerbating this sense of powerlessness

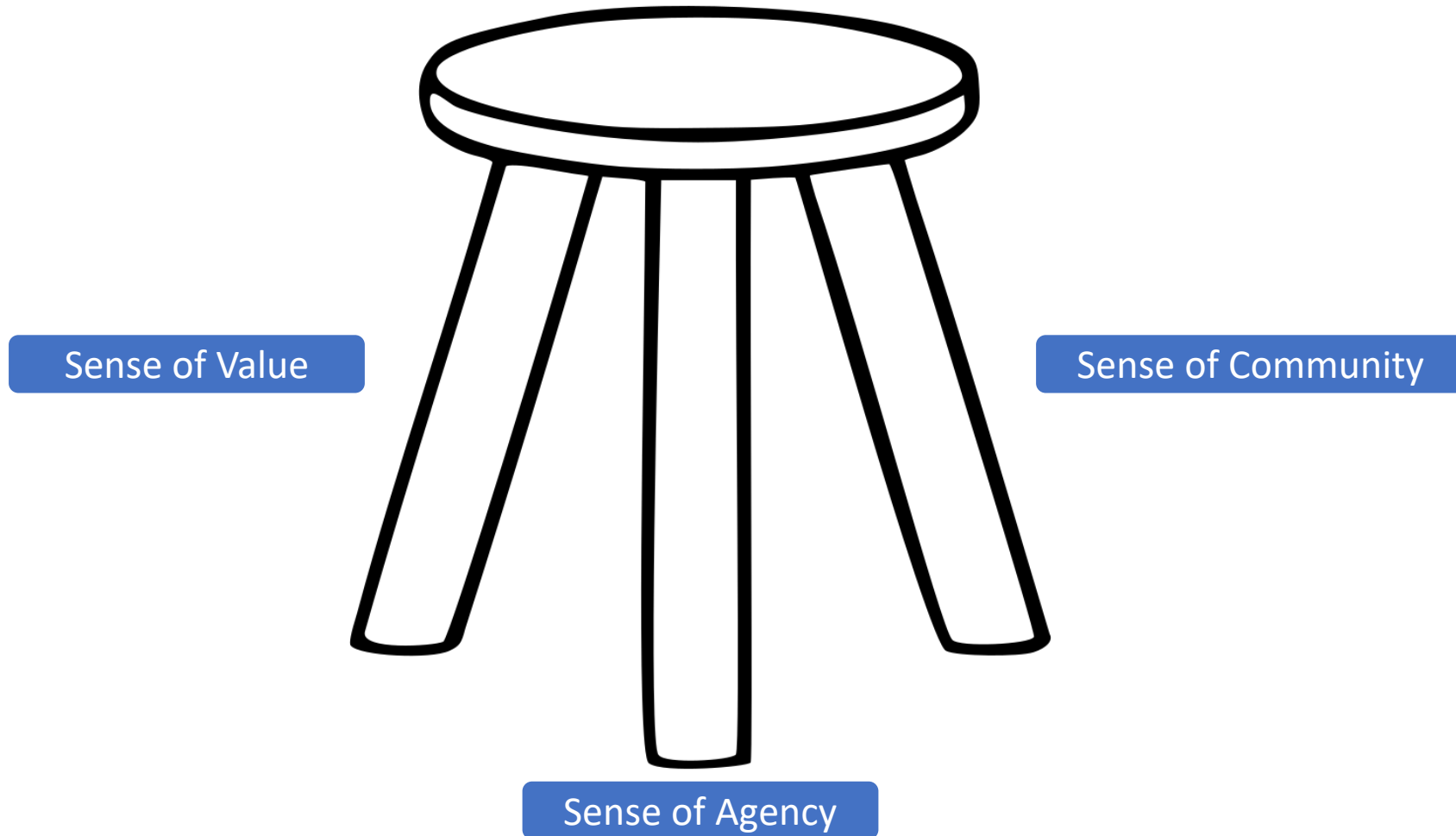


What “difficult” folks are often saying

I don't feel heard =

- Nobody is really listening to my concerns
- I have no influence over my situation
- I'm not valued

The Wellness Stool



Emotional Intelligence

**Harvard
Business
Review**

How Emotional Intelligence Became a Key Leadership Skill

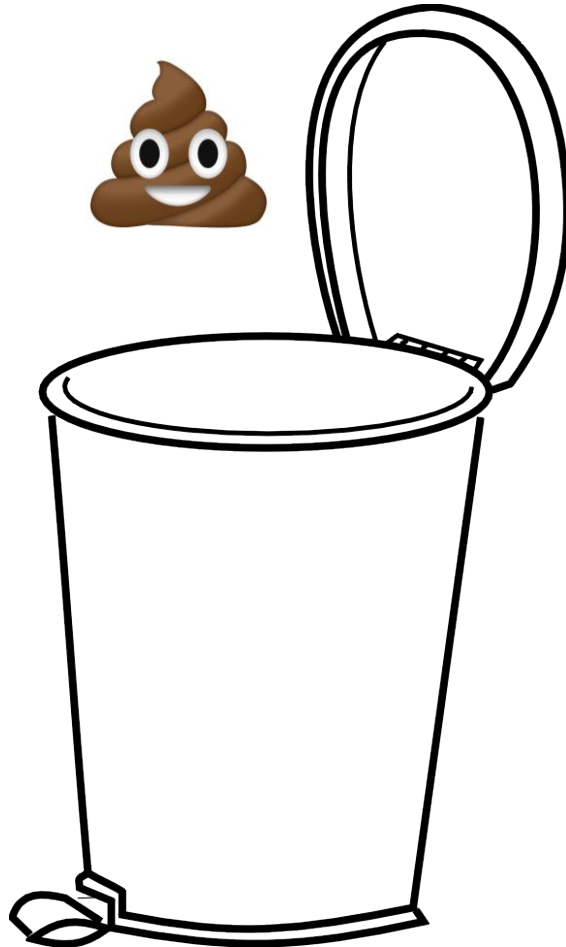
by Andrea Ovans

April 28, 2015

Emotional intelligence is the ability to:

- Accurately perceive your own and others' emotions
- Understand the emotional signals that govern your relationships
- Manage your own and others' emotions

Emotional intelligence is hard! Ruby and the poopy trashcan



Summary

Transparency and Trust Building:

- Prioritize transparency
- Share accurate and up-to-date information
- Consistent messaging from trusted experts and authorities to reduce misinformation

Tailored Messaging:

- Tailor messaging to specific populations, including their language, cultural background, and concerns
- Understand the audience's needs and preferences
- Engage with community leaders and grassroots organizations

Health Literacy:

- Use plain language and simple visuals to convey complex information.

Social Media and Digital Engagement:

- Digital platforms are powerful tools for reaching a broad audience.
- Actively engage with the public, addressing questions and concerns in real-time.

Understand Behavioral Science:

- Understanding human behavior and psychology is crucial.
- Nudging techniques and behavioral incentives can encourage healthier choices.

Plan Your Drama:

- Implement crisis communications plans and practice them before you need them
- You can implement a plan for everything, but you can implement a plan for most things



Discussion

