

# How Corporate Communicators & Leaders Should Pivot Their Messaging as the Pandemic Shifts

*Authenticity Expert Vern Oakley, a leading director of corporate videos, offers tips as content transitions to more targeted messages.*

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-- With the two-year anniversary of the Covid pandemic just months away, and the long-awaited arrival of herd immunity still something of a dream, leaders from major corporations, academic institutions and organizations are continually re-examining the tone of voice they use when addressing key issues with customers, staff or the public at large.



CEO and Chief Storyteller Vern Oakley is a public authority on on-camera authenticity.

Vern Oakley, authenticity expert, author and founder of Tribe Pictures, a leading corporate video production agency, says that the importance of speaking with sincerity, purpose and conviction is more important now than ever before. Tribe has been busy during the pandemic, producing highly-targeted videos for a major global pharmaceutical manufacturer, a leading worldwide consumer products company, an international clinical and diagnostic laboratory, a privately-held real estate investment advisor and a global natural resources provider.

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*Vern Oakley*

Acknowledging that many companies created videos early in the pandemic to talk with their most important audiences, Oakley says the landscape has changed significantly. For example, for a video that Tribe Pictures produced early in the pandemic, the message was ‘we’re all in this

together.'

"We were all called to a higher purpose, to work together to overcome this terrible tragedy," Oakley remarks. "And you could see that message from many TV commercials and many corporate communications. There was a widely-shared attitude that 'we can only overcome this if we work together.' Things are different now."

Pivoting to a more focused view has become the norm, Oakley says. "Our feelings have been modulating both up and down during this time. What we've seen is companies starting to focus more on what's important for them, rather than what's important for society at large."

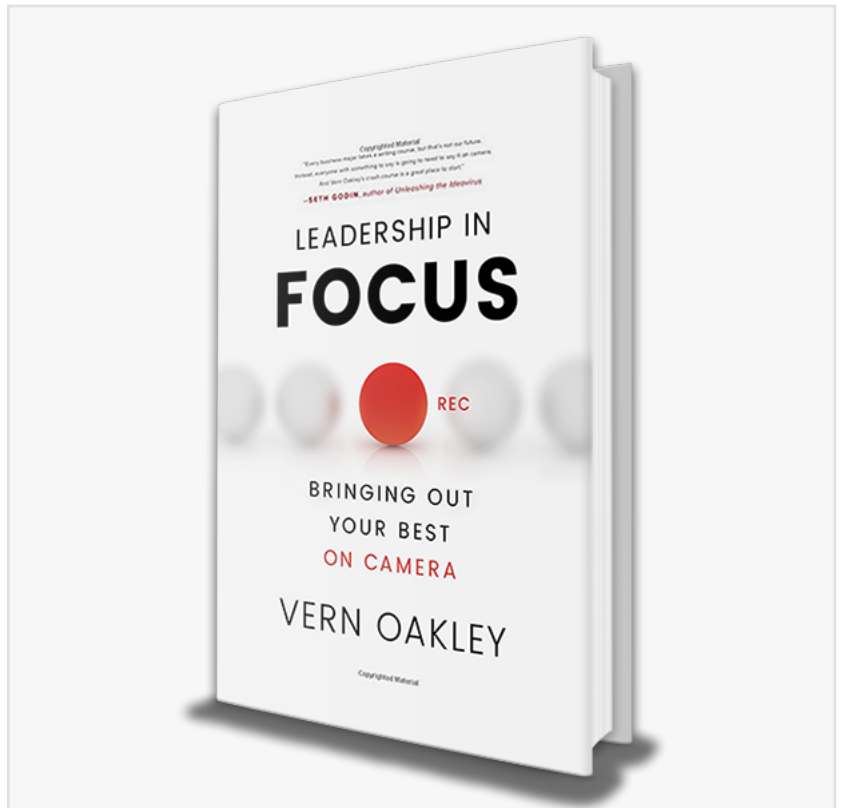
Other trends have been impacting corporate communications as the pandemic has continued on, adds Oakley, further impacting the move to pivot messaging.

#### Caution Prevails

Oakley points out that the Delta variant caused many to become more cautious. "We've seen people pivot from moving forward positively to holding back, as they did early on," Oakley explains. "It's reflected in how lots of big employers have to move their deadlines for reopening offices to 2022."

One result has been a willingness for video communicators to celebrate the efforts of those who are still working hard, staying on task. "And they're doing that in a way that's specific to their industry and their particular issues, as opposed to on a broader, societal scale."

#### Tap Remote Work's Unforeseen Benefits



Vern Oakley's best-selling book "Leadership in Focus: Bringing Out Your Best On Camera"



As an expert in business communications and directing CEOs, Vern coaches others that trust and authenticity are leadership essentials.

As people have become accustomed to remote communications, communicators have shifted to new ways to engage their audiences and keep their remote workforces tuned in.

One thing that's come out of this, notes Oakley, is the human element has begun to shine. "We're seeing what people's homes are like and getting a glimpse at their living situations. In terms of video and messaging, it has to become more humanized, real and emotional, and less formal. So it's creating an opportunity for much greater authenticity for everyone, from the CEO on down."

### Avoid Making Bold Claims

For leaders who need to communicate with video, what are their biggest concerns? Oakley says it's saying something that comes back to haunt them later: "Everyone's trying to avoid the misstep of coming out with a statement or a policy that's going to be rescinded," he remarks. "We're seeing a more cautionary tone, expressed in a 'we're feeling our way through this' kind of direction."

While Oakley notes that some Tribe clients seem determined to simply forge ahead, taking the pandemic in stride, "more communicators and leaders are taking a circumspect approach. The theme for the best communicators is tying messaging back to their purpose, mission and values. Those are core foundations and won't change, regardless of what happens with the economy or how long the pandemic drags on."

### The Need to be Authentic Has Never Been Greater

As the Delta variant left people whipsawed, Oakley advised clients to keep their audiences in mind and focus on being authentic. "People have become more skeptical. You don't want to over-sell or over-promise anything, and being authentic continues to be the most important aspect when it comes to persuasion, whether you're talking to employees, investors, candidates or consumers. We're telling leaders to come out from behind the desk. Leaders can lead by being more real."

Oakley is inspired by author Brené Brown, renowned for her writing on empathy. "As Brené points out, we can identify with somebody who's able to express their vulnerability," he notes. "Remember, leaders are struggling, too—with the way Covid changed their businesses and affected their workforce. While you can't lead from fear and insecurity, you can lead from an honest expression of working your way through it."

### Empathy Matters

Helping leaders convey authenticity is Oakley's specialty; indeed, it's the subject of his award-winning business best-seller, "Leadership in Focus: Bringing Out Your Best On Camera." For Oakley, this has interesting ramifications:

"It's more than just body language and intonation. The other aspect is the authentic nature of the words you're saying. We're seeing people just not responding to corporate speak. They accepted it in the past, but now, as leaders pivot into the current shape of the pandemic, they're

looking for a real message that's empathetic, forward-looking, with a strong POV that's driven by values."

To learn more about Oakley's approach to helping CEOs become stronger communicators and leaders, or to order copies of "Leadership in Focus," visit [www.vernoakley.com](http://www.vernoakley.com).

#### About Tribe Pictures

Tribe Pictures ([www.tribepictures.com](http://www.tribepictures.com)) is an award-winning video production agency in Chatham, NJ. It specializes in strategic video solutions for the Global 1000, private equity firms, leading universities, and nonprofits, addressing such areas as culture change, human resources and investor relations. For 35 years, Tribe has produced purposeful films through a blend of strategic messaging, storytelling and fine-craft filmmaking. With a mission of "humanizing the most successful companies in the world," Tribe has created compelling content for American Express, Colgate-Palmolive, KPMG, Merck, Quest Diagnostics, Stanley Black & Decker, NYU, Princeton University, Swarthmore College and others. Led by Founder/Creative Director Vern Oakley, Tribe's work has received over 500 global awards.

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