

Credo for Ethical Communication

2017 Review Committee: Mary Stuckey (Chair), Mike Sproule, and Kathie Turner

Current Credo (*Approved by the NCA Legislative Council in 1999; Reaffirmed by the Legislative Assembly passing the report and recommendations of the Taskforce on the Public Policy Platform in 2011*)

Questions of right and wrong arise whenever people communicate. Ethical communication is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision making, and the development of relationships and communities within and across contexts, cultures, channels, and media. Moreover, ethical communication enhances human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others. We believe that unethical communication threatens the quality of all communication and consequently the well-being of individuals and the society in which we live. Therefore we, the members of the National Communication Association, endorse and are committed to practicing the following principles of ethical communication:

We advocate truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication.

We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision making fundamental to a civil society.

We strive to understand and respect other communicators before evaluating and responding to their messages.

We promote access to communication resources and opportunities as necessary to fulfill human potential and contribute to the well-being of families, communities, and society.

We promote communication climates of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of individual communicators.

We condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through distortion, intimidation, coercion, and violence, and through the expression of intolerance and hatred.

We are committed to the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.

We advocate sharing information, opinions, and feelings when facing significant choices while also respecting privacy and confidentiality.

We accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences for our own communication and expect the same of others.

Proposed Revised Credo (May 2017, edits in red)

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communication enhances human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others. We believe that unethical communication threatens the quality of all communication and consequently the well-being of individuals and the society in which we live. Therefore we, the members of the National Communication Association, endorse and are committed to practicing the following principles of ethical communication:

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We strive to understand and respect other communicators before evaluating and responding to their messages.

We promote access to communication resources and opportunities as necessary to fulfill human potential and contribute to the well-being of **individuals**, families, communities, and society.

We promote communication climates of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of individual communicators.

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Rationale and Supporting Materials

1. Rationale for why this statement merits Legislative Assembly consideration and how it is reflective of beliefs of those in the communication discipline:

As a group of scholars dedicated to the study of human communication, we must recognize and consider in an official capacity the role ethics play in how we interact with one another. Ethical communication is integral to the creation and maintenance of healthy communities.

2. Relevant background information regarding the Credo for Ethical Communication:

The original “Credo on Ethical Communication” was drafted in 1999. It was reaffirmed by the Legislative Assembly following the recommendation of the Task Force on Public Policy in 2011.

Ethics remain central to the theory and practice of communication. The credo recognizes the integral role of ethical communication in healthy communities, and affirms the responsibilities of communication scholars in cultivating an atmosphere of ethical communication.

3. We recommend adding the word "individuals" to the fourth paragraph, so it would read as follows: "We promote access to communication resources and opportunities as necessary to fulfill human potential and contribute to the well-being of **individuals**, families, communities, and society."
4. Supporting materials:

Questions of right and wrong arise whenever people communicate. Ethical communication is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision making, and the development of relationships and communities within and across contexts, cultures, channels, and media. Moreover, ethical communication enhances human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and others. We believe that unethical communication threatens the quality of all communication and consequently the well-being of individuals and the societies in which we live. Therefore we, the members of the National Communication Association, endorse and are committed to practicing the following principles of ethical communication:

WE ADVOCATE TRUTHFULNESS, ACCURACY, HONESTY, AND REASON AS ESSENTIAL TO THE INTEGRITY OF COMMUNICATION

"The content of lies as well as their detection and the implications of their perpetration is a common concern. Be it a meeting between heads of state, a manager's suspicions about an employee, a jury deliberating a trial, a customs agent stopping a potential smuggler from entering the country, a home owner's concern over the trustworthiness of an aluminum siding company, the validity of a solicitation for charity, a police officer determining if an arrest should be made, a doctor listening to a patient complain, or someone feeling betrayed by a friend or spouse, decisions regarding truth and deceit are frequent occurrences in today's society." -- Pamela J. Kalbfleisch, "Deceit, distrust and the social milieu: Application of deception research in a troubled world," *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 20:3 (1992), p. 308.

"Two ideas are central to the free speech rights of corporations. First, they are grounded in the need for society to have accurate and complete information about important issues. Typically, this allows an organization to promote its own perspective and interests. . . . Organizations, therefore, defend themselves against public accusations and correct or modify those accusations. Second, although principals of free speech do not mandate that corporate speech be responsible, speech that is truthful, accurate, and complete contributes more effectively to the open market place of ideas (Nilsen, 1974; Renz, 1996; Schuetz, 1990; Sellnow, 1993; Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997). Schuetz synthesizes these standards by explaining that effective advocates "present reasoned messages grounded in relevant and sufficient evidence ... in a form that is complete and clear" (p. 276)." --Robert R. Ulmer, "Responsible Speech in Crisis Communication: The Case of General Motors v. Dateline NBC," *Free Speech Yearbook*, 37:1 (1999), pp. 155-56.

WE ENDORSE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, DIVERSITY OF PERSPECTIVE, AND TOLERANCE OF DISSENT TO ACHIEVE THE INFORMED AND RESPONSIBLE DECISION MAKING FUNDAMENTAL TO A CIVIL SOCIETY

“Democratic Communication Ethics are based on a public ‘process’ ethic, an open airing of diverse opinions and control by majority vote.” Moreover, “the democratic ethic in communication studies is a ‘public’ process for forging mass collaboration on ideas, customs, and rights.” –Ronald C. Arnett, “The Status of Communication Ethics Scholarship in Speech Communication Journals from 1915–1985,” *Central States Journal*, 38 (1987), pp. 46, 48.

“It is these four ‘moralities’—the duty of search and inquiry; allegiance to accuracy, fairness, and justice in the selection and treatment of ideas and arguments; the willingness to submit private motivations to public scrutiny; and the toleration of dissent—which provide the ethic of communication in a free society.” –Karl R. Wallace, “An Ethical Basis of Communication,” *Speech Teacher*, 4 (1955), p. 9.

“To enter upon argument with a full understanding of the commitments which as a method it entails is to experience that alchemic moment of transformation in which . . . , in the language of Buber, the *Ich-Es* is replaced by the *Ich-Du*; when the ‘other,’ no longer regarded as an ‘object’ to be manipulated, is endowed with those qualities of “freedom” and “responsibility” that change the ‘individual’ as ‘thing’ into the ‘person’ as ‘not-thing.’” –Douglas Ehninger, “Argument as Method: Its Nature, Its Limitations and Its Uses,” *Speech Monographs*, XXXVII (June 1970), 109-11.

“Potential rewards of valuing difference include increased creativity, productivity, and profitability; enhanced public relations; improved product and service quality; and higher job satisfaction. If organizations deal effectively with difference and embrace it as a positive force, . . . they can optimize accomplishing their goals. . . . Equally as important (if not more so), when we value differences we can help to fulfill the United States credo of liberty and justice for all. And we can enhance our lives. . . . If we take time and care to think and talk about difference, we might have productive and enjoyable interactions with each other across difference.” -- Brenda J. Allen, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2011), p. 6.

“Constitutive power and agency remains with [diversity] consultants who must make context-dependent choices that decrease the dominance of the business case. One strategy consultants used is ‘sequencing’: using the business case to establish access, interest, buy-in, or comfort, and then incorporating more humanistic approaches as they gain trust, interest, and commitment from the individuals and organizations they work with. Alternatively, they incorporated and balanced the business case with other discourses, such as emotion, social justice, even ‘feeling good,’ from the very start.” -- Jennifer J. Mease, “Reconsidering Consultants’ Strategic Use of the Business Case for Diversity,” *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 40:4 (2012), p. 400.

WE STRIVE TO UNDERSTAND AND RESPECT OTHER COMMUNICATORS BEFORE EVALUATING AND RESPONDING TO THEIR MESSAGES

“Firm moral commitment to a value system ... along with a sense of moral identity, is founded upon unreflexive assessments of multiple perspectives ... We must progressively learn to recognize how often the concepts of others are discredited by the concepts we use to justify ourselves to ourselves.” –Star A. Muir, “A Defense of the Ethics of Contemporary Debate,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 26 (1993), p. 291.

A prescriptive approach to dialogue “requires participants to make choices between and among multi-vocal, tensional perspectives and assertions. As praxis, dialogue involves the processes of making and evaluating moral judgments about and through communication. From this perspective ... he or she not only becomes an active agent shaping the quality of the relationship, but also assumes responsibility for the ways in which communicative practice facilitates relating.” – John Stewart and Karen E. Zediker, “Dialogue as Tensional, Ethical Practice,” *Southern Communication Journal*, 65 (2000), 240.

“With co-active persuasion, your approach should be not to challenge listeners but to help them see the situation in a new light. Keep your goals modest. Ask only for a fair hearing. A co-active approach not only affirms your position but signals to listeners that you yourself are also open to persuasion and further discussion. We are not suggesting that persuading reluctant listeners is easy; it isn’t. But a dispassionate first hearing can plant the seeds of future persuasion. Follow Cicero’s ancient maxim to “hear the other side.” It can make you a stronger persuader and a better, more informed person.” –Kathleen J. Turner, Randall Osborn, Michael Osborn, and Suzanne Osborn, *Public Speaking: Finding Your Voice*, 11th ed (Boston: Pearson, 2018).

WE PROMOTE ACCESS TO COMMUNICATION RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES AS NECESSARY TO FULFILL HUMAN POTENTIAL AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE WELL-BEING OF INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, AND SOCIETY.

“Skills considered as vital to the development of the whole person include listening skills, presentation skills, and social skills in general. A critical component identified as part of communication competency is an individual’s ability to become a better person.” -- Sherwyn P. Morreale, Joseph M. Valenzano and Janessa A. Bauer, (2016): “Why Communication Education is Important: A Third Study on the Centrality of the Discipline,” *Communication Education*, 66:1 (2017), p. 10.

“Communication can help couples connect on a deeper level and feel more satisfied with their relationships. Additionally, competent communication strengthens bonds among family members and helps them cope with conflict and stressful situations. Communication gives family members the tools they need to express their feelings and address their concerns in a constructive way, which ultimately helps when conflicts and stressful situations arise. . . . Better interpersonal communication can improve the social health of a community by strengthening relationships among various community members.” -- Sherwyn P. Morreale, Joseph M.

Valenzano and Janessa A. Bauer, (2016): "Why Communication Education is Important: A Third Study on the Centrality of the Discipline," *Communication Education*, 66:1 (2017), p. 9.

"Effective communication is necessary to the process of creating societies that embrace all individuals and provide citizens with the rights and liberties they deserve. Thus, communication plays an integral role in developing social policies that benefit everyone." -- Sherwyn P. Morreale, Joseph M. Valenzano and Janessa A. Bauer, (2016): "Why Communication Education is Important: A Third Study on the Centrality of the Discipline," *Communication Education*, 66:1 (2017), p. 11.

"The underlying assumption is that technological change will bring more benefits than losses for individuals and societies, albeit in the long term. The evidence suggests at the same time, however, that deep social and economic inequalities are persistent and unlikely to be reduced by tinkering with the rate of technological change or with up-skilling in relatively narrowly defined advanced technology fields. Yet persistent inequality undermines commitments to democracy and the capacity of individuals to generate an income to live a decent life; one that is safe, and one that offers them a possibility for improving their well-being and regard for their self-worth and that of others." --Robin Mansell, "Inequality and Digitally Mediated Communication: Divides, Contradictions and Consequences," *Javnost: The Public*, 24:2 (20), p. 152.

WE PROMOTE COMMUNICATION CLIMATES OF CARING AND MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING THAT RESPECT THE UNIQUE NEEDS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATORS

"With this evocation, this acknowledging call to others, rhetoric demonstrates its 'physicianship' as it helps to promote reasoned judgment and civic virtue and thereby lends itself to the task of enriching the moral character of a people's communal existence." —Michael J. Hyde, *The Call of Conscience: Heidegger and Lévinas, Rhetoric and the Euthanasia Debate* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), p. 13.

"The humanist commitment demands a dedication to nurturing and treasuring those characteristics in ourselves and each other that underlie our capacity for bringing quality into our lives. There is, I suggest, general agreement on what these characteristics are, at least on how they can be labeled. What is lacking is knowledge of and attachment to them on a personal level. This humane knowledge, moreover, is always a potentiality inherent in the relating of one human being to another. When we attempt to 'reason together' in order that we might live together productively and happily, we lead each other and ourselves to the edge of the human soul."-- Christopher Lyle Johnstone, "Ethics, Wisdom, and the Mission of Contemporary Rhetoric: The Realization of Human Being," *Central States Speech Journal*, 32 (1981), 177–188.

WE CONDEMN COMMUNICATION THAT DEGRADES INDIVIDUALS AND HUMANITY THROUGH DISTORTION, INTIMIDATION, COERCION, AND VIOLENCE, AND THROUGH THE EXPRESSION OF INTOLERANCE AND HATRED

The Columbia incident forces the critic to face squarely the distinction between coercion and persuasion. Leland M. Griffin makes a clear distinction between these two concepts. He sees a rhetorical action as being "coercive rather than persuasive" when it is "essentially non-rational," when it is "dependent on 'seat of the pants' rather than 'seat of the intellect.'"-- James R. Andrews, "Confrontation at Columbia: A Case Study in Coercive Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 55:1 (1969), p. 9.

"The discovery of deception within a relationship tends to be an intense and predominantly negative emotional experience, one which may lead to the eventual termination of the relationship. Degree of relational involvement, importance attributed to the act of lying, importance of the information that was lied about, and suspicion all played significant roles in influencing the emotional intensity of responses that were reported by subjects in our sample. Subjects were most likely to report experiencing negative emotions when the intensity of the reaction was strong, they were highly involved in the relationship, and both the information that was lied about and the act of lying were viewed as significant. Our results suggest that the discovery of deception may also influence subsequent relational termination. More than two-thirds of the subjects who reported that their relationship had terminated since the time that the lie was discovered reported that the discovery of the lie played a direct role in their decision to end the relationship. Nearly all of these breakups were reported as being unilateral, initiated by the recipient of the lie." -- Steven A. McCornack & Timothy R. Levine, "When Lies are Uncovered: Emotional and Relational Outcomes of Discovered Deception," *Communication Monographs*, 57:2 (1990), p. 131.

WE ARE COMMITTED TO THE COURAGEOUS EXPRESSION OF PERSONAL CONVICTIONS IN PURSUIT OF FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE

"In a letter following his expulsion from the Soviet Writers' Union, Solzhenitzyn warned his literary censors that he and other writers have an inherent human right to free expression. He emphasized: 'It is time to remember that the first thing we belong to is humanity, and humanity is separated from the animal world by thought and speech and they should naturally be free. If they are fettered, we go back to being animals.'" --Janice Schuetz, "Alexander Solzhenitzyn's Approach to the Philosophy and Function of Free Expression," *Free Speech Yearbook*, 20:1 (1981), p. 69.

"Singling out 'lonely courage' authorized a turn to 'civic courage,' which was available to everyone at the end of the 19th century. Unlike military courage, which required a regiment and a battlefield, civic courage was the individual heroism possible in modern society. 'The nation blest above all nations,' James explained, 'is she in whom the civic genius of the people does the saving day by day, by acts without external picturesqueness; by speaking, writing, voting reasonably; by smiting corruption swiftly; by good temper between parties; by the people knowing true men when they see them, and preferring them as leaders to rabid partisans or empty quacks.'" --Paul Stob, "Lonely Courage, Commemorative Confrontation, and Communal Therapy: William James Remembers the Massachusetts 54th," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 98:3 (2012), p. 260.

WE ADVOCATE SHARING INFORMATION, OPINIONS, AND FEELING WHEN FACING SIGNIFICANT CHOICES WHILE ALSO RESPECTING PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

“Freedom of speech is speech in fact freely exercised. It is people talking and writing and creating fresh ideas and discussing old ones. It is a climate of inquiry and experiment and invention. It is especially a listening to what the other [hu]man says. It is people talking, not merely people who are not prevented from doing so. In this sense freedom of speech is both a means to good ends and an end in itself. People need it to reach just decisions in which many participate, and they need it because the creation and exchange of ideas is a good in itself, like music, or human sympathy.” -- Robert Redfield, “The Difficult Duty of Speech,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 39:1 (1953), p. 6.

“We must find ways to raise the level of political debate about what we see as threats to the basic moral and political principals of democracy. We must strive at every opportunity to make the connection between actions and consequences, benefits and hidden costs. We must begin to articulate what the right of privacy means in concrete social and political terms. We must even be willing to question the implications of social science research which, more often than not, involves the powerful gathering information about the powerless, so as to bring their behavior more in line with the demands of the larger social order. Additionally, we must be willing to align ourselves with broad social movements which struggle against all forms of discrimination. When we support legislation which bars discrimination against people because they are black, handicapped, female or aged, we do so in full recognition that we incur an ‘efficiency loss’ to society because we fail to use available information about such people; but we do so because we believe such discrimination is incompatible with our traditional commitments to social equality.” -- Oscar H. Gandy Jr. & Charles E. Simmons, “Technology, Privacy, and the Democratic Process,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 3:2 (1986), p. 166.

“Private life makes sense only in relation with our perception of public life. What is public and what is private has become increasingly difficult to define, particularly as we have become dependent upon media technology to facilitate interpersonal communication. The ability to transcend place alters the importance we attributed to the nature of privacy and publicness. Evidence of the decline of public social life is revealed in "time budget" studies which indicate that since 1965 time spent on informal socializing and visiting has gone down by as much as 25% and time devoted to organizations and clubs has dropped by 50%. Surveys show sharp declines in collective participation and sites of civic engagement from political parties to bowling leagues. Laws protecting rights and creating liability reflect changing societal values and privacy is certainly no exception. Through the law, values become the final, authoritative, and enforceable disposition of conflict.” -- Susan Drucker and Gary Gumpert, “The Ambiguity of Privacy Rights: Lost In Electronic Space,” *Free Speech Yearbook*, 35:1 (1997), p. 13.

WE ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SHORT-AND LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES OF OUR OWN COMMUNICATION AND EXPECT THE SAME OF OTHERS

“In the ambiguity that arises with the charge of unethical conduct—in word or behavior—the function of argumentation is two-fold. Argumentation permits the formulation of a specific and substantive ethical charge, and, conversely, permits the agent questioned a specific and substantive defense. If some of the agents discussed had defended their behavior more ably, their fates might have been different. The pivotal factor, however, would not have been the code, but rather the conduct of argumentation in relation to the code.” –Richard E. Crable, “Ethical Codes, Accountability, and Argumentation,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 64:1 (1978), p. 31.

“The rhetorically sensitive person (a) tries to accept role-taking as part of the human condition, (b) attempts to avoid stylized verbal behavior, (c) is characteristically willing to undergo the strain of adaptation, (d) seeks to distinguish between all information and that information acceptable for communication, and (e) tries to understand that an idea can be rendered in multi-form ways.” –Roderick P. Hart and Don M. Burks, “Rhetorical Sensitivity and Social Interaction,” *Speech Monographs*, 39:2 (1972), p. 75.