



PROVE IT! PODCAST

HOSTED BY DEBBIE ALBERT

Episode 126: Making Messages Resonate

Guest: Karen Friedman, CEO, Karen Friedman Enterprises

This is Prove It. A podcast for impatient business owners, overwhelmed marketers, and PR practitioners with no time for podcasts. In just 10 minutes they answer 3 questions and offer proof of what's working in marketing communications today. Here's Debbie Albert, President of Albert Communications.

Debbie Albert: This episode of “Prove It” focuses on making your messages resonate. My guest is Karen Friedman, who's the CEO of Karen Friedman Enterprises, and her mission is simple; she wants to help you be the best communicator you can be, and that can take a lot of forms, which we're about to hear.

Karen is a former colleague of mine from our days at Channel 6 Action News here in Philadelphia. She's now a business communications expert, a syndicated columnist and the author of three books, including one called *Shut Up and Say Something*, and based on that title, you know you're in for a treat during these 10 minutes. So, Karen, welcome to “Prove It.”

Karen Friedman: Hey Deb. Thank you.

Debbie Albert: Are you ready to get started? As you know, we have a format of three questions, give or take and then a Prove it point at the end. So, I'm ready to jump in when you are.

Karen Friedman: I'm ready to prove it.

Debbie Albert: Okay. So, you have a new series of videos, and before I even go into this first question, let me just tell the listeners that you do a series of videos that I think are out of this world. They're one or two minutes of a real piece of information you can take away as a communicator, or really as anyone in business. I watch them all the time. I think I told you once that I delete so many emails that come in, but that's one that I know is not going to take up a lot of my day and I'm going to learn something from it. So, **there's a new series coming out now called “Try It Differently.” As that relates to messaging, what do you mean?**

Karen Friedman: So, the key to improvement, any improvement, is to think differently, and when we think differently then we're open to trying things differently because we move out of our comfort zone. So as a “Prove it” if you will, I recently worked with the CEO of a biotech company. He was trying to raise millions and millions of dollars. They were doing okay but they weren't doing great. And I got into a room with him and quickly noticed that there was no sense of urgency. There was no reason for people to



PROVE IT! PODCAST

HOSTED BY DEBBIE ALBERT

say, “Oh my goodness, I have to be in on this early, early before anything great happens”, and every suggestion I would make to him, he’d say, “Well, we don't do it that way in my country.”

Well, this is a different audience. It's investors and on and on and on. And when I finally got him to think differently by recording him and playing it back and he saw the difference, it was like this giant light bulb went off in his head, because all of a sudden he was sitting in the seats of the people he was talking to, and quite frankly, he realized that he was a little boring. Let's call it what it is.

Debbie Albert: I'm with you, girl, I'm with you. So, all right, so you jumped right ahead to the prove it part, so you're going to have to prove it again at the end of the episode. You're going to have to think of another one and I bet you have a million. **But, for a second question, how do you take a complex topic? I mean, I know you've worked with people, computer software, engineering, you mentioned biotech, how do you work with them to make their messages resonate? You know, you talked about potential investors and stakeholders, what is it that you do, Karen? What's the secret sauce?**

Karen Friedman: So, you hit the nail on the head, Deb, when you said make it resonate. The secret sauce is just like back in our days of television, who's the reader? Who's the listener? Who is the viewer? Who's the audience? All audiences aren't created equal, but when people communicate, they tend to communicate the same way, whether it's an internal audience and external audience, regardless of who the stakeholder is. So, what that means is they tend to deliver, for example, the same presentation with the same words on the same slides. So, what happens is we lose people. And so, I always say to the people that we work with, ask three questions: What does this mean? Not to you, to them. Why should somebody care about it? And what's the 'so what'?

If you're saying a bunch of words, really, I would sit there and say, so what? So what? So what? And that helps us get to how does what you're saying affect, benefit, impact, make a difference to the listener or back to the beginning - Why should they care about this?

Debbie Albert: **So how do you break that down? How especially, look, I know you. You're not an expert in engineering or biotech. Do you have to get over the hurdle of the person you're working with understanding that not everybody understands what they're talking about?**

Karen Friedman: Yeah, well that's the biggest hurdle, and you know what the really cool thing is, it's good that that people who do what I do are not experts in all of these fields because I'm listening to it with a very different ear. You know, like think of it, I'll say to people think about talking to a smart neighbor. Okay. So maybe you are a brain surgeon and maybe your neighbor is a professor of literacy at an Ivy League school. So your neighbor's incredibly smart, but he or she is not smart in what you're smart at. How do you, now if you're standing there talking to your neighbor at a barbecue, how do you now explain it to them in a way where you're not dumbing it down, which is a terrible expression any way.



PROVE IT! PODCAST

HOSTED BY DEBBIE ALBERT

Debbie Albert: Right. Exactly

Karen Friedman: It's like you're not oversimplifying, but you're explaining it to them in a way that they can understand because they didn't go to medical school.

Debbie Albert: Right.

Karen Friedman: You know? But if you were talking to a group of brain surgeons, then obviously you don't have to oversimplify it that way. So, who's the audience and how do we make it relevant to that audience? That's really, in your words, Debbie, the secret sauce.

Debbie Albert: Right. I think that's a good point. I mean everything we talk about in the work that you do, the work that I do is know your audience. It's the first rule for everything we do. Yup. So, the third official question is **what are common mistakes we make when delivering messages, whether it's a meeting, a presentation, or even a one-on-one interaction with someone inside or outside the company?**

Karen Friedman: Number one, aside from what we just talked about, providing way too much detail, way too much minutia, thinking that our listeners know what we know, and not differentiating between what they really want to know versus everything we think we need to tell them. So if you really think about any listener, any audience, no matter how sophisticated, regardless of what they do for a living, they're human beings first. They are mothers, they are fathers, they are sisters, they are spouses, they are partners, and they are children. You know, we're all people, and if we can look for ways to humanize or personalize information, then we're going to have a better chance of getting through to people.

Prove it!

Debbie Albert: That's excellent. That's great. Okay, we're up to the **Prove It** part, my friend, and you already gave us one at the beginning, but **tell us another one about a client or someone you worked with who wasn't communicating his or her messages in a way that resonated, and how you diagnosed and fix the problem.**

Karen Friedman: I have a great one for you because often people are resistant until they come to that 'aha' moment themselves. So many years ago, I was working with a technical company and they were rolling out a new product that they were very, very excited about, but they were having a hard time coming up with the words and explaining exactly what this product did. It was back in the days when computers were still a little bit newer and not as tiny as they are today. So finally, after several hours in a room with the CEO and the CFO and the CMO and all the C people, the CEO says, "I got it", and



PROVE IT! PODCAST

HOSTED BY DEBBIE ALBERT

everybody in the room through quietly out. “Yeah, yeah, yeah. What is it?” and he says, “*what we do has heterogeneous multiple versatility capacity*”, and everybody in the room looks at him, you know, and they're all kind of doing a little kissy, kissy, kissy.

And they go, “yeah, yeah, yeah, that's great,” and he looks at me and he said, “What do you think?” and I said, “I have no idea what you're talking about.”

Debbie Albert: [Laughs] That is insane.

Karen Friedman: He says, “Well Karen, not to insult you”, so of course I know that I'm about to get insulted, right? He says, “But the people that I'm talking to understand what we do.” I said, “No, they don't. He says, “Yes they do.” We do that for about three minutes. And I said - let's call him John. I said, “John, of course I understand what you do, but you have to explain to them what these words mean to them. Is it going to save time? Is it going to save money? Are they going to be able to do more with less? Are you going to be able to move people who are stuck in task A over to task B? What do they care about?”

And he just kind of stared at me with a blank face, and then he said, “Well, how can we do that?” And just like going back to our days back in the news business, I started asking a lot of questions. They started answering them, not in these complicated words, but in real, real words, real conversation. And when you can move people there, as I said in the beginning, when you get them to try it differently, then they think differently, and that's the whole game.

Debbie Albert: You know, that's a great point. I mean, you have to boil it down to the pearl of what it is, and then from there you can build out if you need to, and for the right audiences.

Karen Friedman: Yeah. You know, and also, and I know this is, you know, the idea of this, just to be short, but think about it this way. A lot of times, let's say somebody has a really technical presentation, whether they're using slides or they're not using slides, they like to start with all of this detail, or they like to start with their solutions, and I always advise when you can, let's start with an example, a story. Restate the challenge so when you get to the solution, it's more powerful because you've reminded them of what the challenge or the problem is and now your solution helps them understand how things can be different.

Debbie Albert: That's perfect. That's perfect. Karen, perfect timing because only someone in the news business could keep to 10 minutes without even trying. [Laughs] I want to thank you and thanks also to our listeners and I hope that they'll stay tuned for new episodes to help gain clarity in what's happening in marketing communications today. Thanks for listening.

You just listened to Prove It, a production of Albert Communications. Find a transcript of this episode and more about this feisty creative team on the web@albertcommunications.com.



PROVE IT! PODCAST

HOSTED BY DEBBIE ALBERT

-

END OF PODCAST -