Culture, Communication, and a Conference - by Nathan Taylor

Big deal. Messiah College is having a faith and pop-culture conference and Jeff Tweedy is coming to campus, as the featured artist. Seriously, he has only won two Grammies while making some of the most critically acclaimed music of the new millennium. Nothing to get too excited about, especially for the communication majors and faculty.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. Not only is pop-culture important to faith and Christianity, but it is also important to the study of communication.

A very rudimentary definition of communication is the transference of ideas. And pop-culture is probably the most influential purveyor of both subliminal and blatant ideas anywhere. Indeed, communication has as much to do with pop-culture as gasoline has to do with an engine. Communication serves as the driving force behind pop-culture, and is the reason why it exists. Nothing could be popular without good communication.

Another aspect of pop-culture which should be addressed by communication scholars is influence. Nowhere else in society do we find such widespread persuasion, pressure, and novelty. These factors coupled with the mass media, prove to make pop-culture a massive vehicle for influence. As effective communicators, we are also concerned with producing influential messages. Studying pop-culture will help us produce the best messages which will influence the receiver.

The conference is designed to give Christians the tools to actively engage in pop-culture. As Christian communicators, it is vital that we have these same skills. The keynote speaker, Steve Turner (author of Imagine: a Vision for Christians in the Arts), is a leading Christian voice, calling for engagement with culture. Additionally, Messiah’s own beloved Dr. Ed Arke will be conducting a workshop on Christianity and the radio industry.

Yeah, Jeff Tweedy will be there as well. But he is only an added bonus. Go because the study of pop-culture is vital to communication scholarship.

To register for the conference go to: www.messiah.edu/popular_culture.

The Complexity of Cross-Cultural Communication by Jennifer Shaver

To succeed in today’s global environment, managers must become proficient cross-cultural communicators. Cultural differences in communication objectives, language, and nonverbal behaviors can lead to misunderstanding and offense.

Suppose you are trying to communicate in an Islamic culture. What an American might see as religious, because Muslims believe that human efforts are determined by the will of Allah, not by a schedule (Munter). Therefore, non-Muslims may have to adjust their expectations.

Language causes one of the most difficult barriers to cross-cultural communication. For example, Russians may encounter difficulty with English, because several key words and phrases such as “efficiency,” “free market,” and “regulation” cannot be directly translated into Russian. In Japanese, the word “hai” translates as “yes,” but its connotation may be “yes, I’m listening,” rather than “yes, I agree” (Munter).

Nonverbal communication such as body language, greeting behaviors, and vocal qualities can also cause major barriers to communication. The head is considered sacred in Buddhist cultures, so you must never touch anyone’s head. In Indonesia, Thailand, and Syria, crossing your ankle over your knee is considered rude (Munter).

Mary Munter says, “Culture permeates every aspect of management communication, from basic decisions about setting a realistic communication objective to specific behaviors when greeting people.” Corporate communicators are beginning to take advantage of cross-cultural training programs to learn about various cultural barriers and how to adjust accordingly.

For more information, check out the work of Mary Munter.
On campus opportunities:

**Student Essay Contest**

Messiah College students are invited to submit essays based on the theme of the Faith and Popular Culture conference November 11-12, 2005 “Reconciling the Church and the Popular Arts.” The popular arts will be understood to include film, television, advertising, and popular music. The winning essay writer will receive an award of $250, will be recognized at the conference, and the essay will be published in the Minnemingo Review. The suggested length is 6-8 pages, using a size 12 font. Essays should be submitted by October 28, 2005. Send 3 hard copies of the essay (with no name appearing on any page) and one title page which includes your name, phone, and title of the essay to Jeff Rioux, Box 3050. We also urge faculty members to promote the essay contest and encourage students to participate.

**Job Opportunities**

“Best Places to Work” Program Coordinator

Best Companies Group (a division of Journal Publications) seeks highly motivated individual to manage several “Best Places to Work” programs in different states across the country. The individual must be highly motivated, creative and solution oriented. Marketing experience is preferable but not required. Full benefits, fun work environment and competitive compensation. Send resume to: Megan Burns, Best Companies Group, meganb@bestcompaniesgroup.com, Fax (717) 236-6803.

Cancer Recovery Foundation

The Cancer Recovery Foundation is looking for a Public Relations Assistant to make media calls and help the Foundation receive help for victims of hurricane Katrina. Cancer Recovery is helping families whom have a child with cancer that was involved in the hurricane. This is a part-time position, 12-15 hours a week, and pays $7.50 an hour. Contact Sherry Shirk, Administrative Manager. Phone: (717) 545-7600 Fax: (717) 545-7602 E-mail: sshirk@cancerrecovery.org.

**Resources:**

What is hip? The question that started in that famous Tower of Power song is still asked decades later. If you are asking a similar question, click your way to www.pitchforkmedia.com. This website, produced by too-cool-for-their-own-good hipsters, features independent music reviews of multiple genres and popularity levels. The writing can be somewhat pretentious at times but the site is still the place to find the best of modern music; indie, popular, or otherwise.

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“**The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn’t being said.”**

- Peter Drucker