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This past July, I attended the 2025 ACI conference in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Looking through the agenda, and being from the Ocean State, I was very excited to see that the keynote speaker was going to talk about shark conservation!

From the start of the conference, I was able to see that Dr. David Shiffman, is probably the best publicist for sharks around. He is passionate about sharks, their conservation - and he owns a phenomenal shark wardrobe!

What made his keynote address and subsequent sessions truly meaningful is that he made the time to chat with attendees. By connecting with us and learning what we did for our respective agencies, he was then able to use those conversations to help us utilize his approach to help spark ideas that we can use in our own work.

When I set out to view Dr. Shiffman's presentation at the conference, titled *How to Talk to the Public About Science and Why You Should*, I thought, *"This is perfect! I cannot wait to get back to my office to relay this to our biologists. This will be so helpful for them!"*

I was hoping that by having the opportunity to see this speaker I would have more tools in my toolbox to help our biologists relay what they do to our audience. Little did I know was that I was about to reflect how I conduct my own work and presentations.

Checking My Jargon at the Door.

It is truly important for your audience to understand what you are trying to convey to them. Effective communication includes evaluating your vocabulary. If the public cannot understand what you are trying to say the message can be completely lost.

During Dr. Shiffman's presentation, he introduced us to the Up-Goer Five Text Editor. This text editor was created based on a comic by Randall Munroe, which attempts to explain the Saturn V rocket using only the one thousand most common English words.

By having us check some of our own written work through the text editor, it was eye-opening - and sometimes hilarious to see what a challenge this can be! Even though I am not a technical writer, I can see where I sometimes I use jargon that the public may not understand.

Tailoring a Message

Dr. Shiffman highlighted some important points to ponder as you begin to craft your own message:

- Do we want to educate?
- Do we want to inspire behavior change?
- Are you promoting your work?
- Do we want to have a debate?

Within my role at Fish and Wildlife, I spend a lot of time talking about things that are unique to each wildlife species in our state. Fun facts about wildlife can be our bread and butter at public outreach events.

However, is that always my goal? Not always. Sometimes, it is important to help the public change their behaviors and how they interact with wildlife (I am looking at you coyotes!). By setting out with a goal to inspire behavior change, I now have a specific message that I am ready to convey.

I Have a Message- But Now What?

Through his experience in delivering the message of shark conservation, Dr. Shiffman has developed a keen understanding regarding the need to adapt how that message is delivered. This is especially important when it comes to digital communication.

Dr. Shiffman highlighted a few common digital communication tools and their effectiveness. Twitter may no longer serve your messaging needs and a new alternative -BlueSky (a platform not driven by ads or algorithm) -may be a better fit. Blogs are returning as a communication tool, perfect for highlighting new research.

I was also happy to hear that Facebook is still an effective messaging tool and you can target specific audiences through Facebook groups as part of your plan.

However, no matter how we get our information out, it is up to us to make sure that the correct information is there -and that misinformation is corrected as early and as often as possible.

A key takeaway for me is by evaluating what is my messaging and what is the best digital format to share that message.

After listening to Dr. Shiffman, I knew that there were many things that I needed to do to improve my own communication and message delivery for my agency. While I am happy to pass information I learned along to our biologists, I truly benefitted from what I learned myself.

I think it is important to continue to reflect on our own communication strategies as digital mediums change, and as the need to inform the public on important research continues to evolve.

