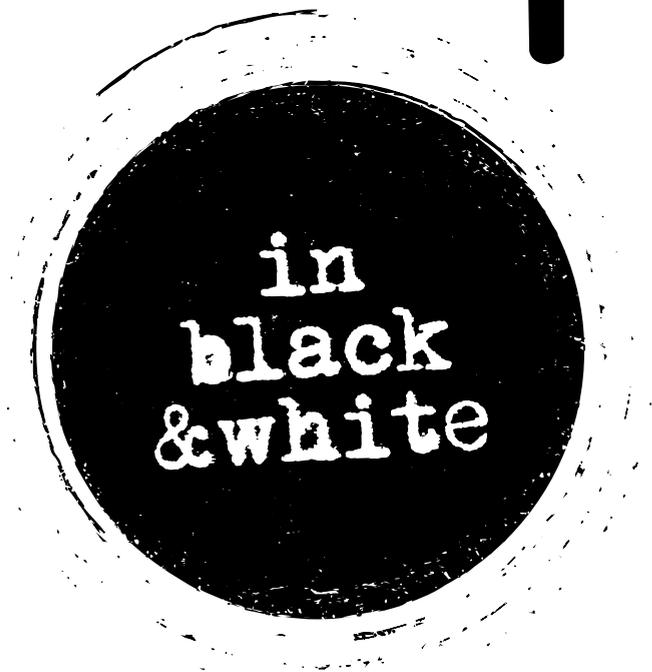


HEART

& FAITH





# Dr hab. Jacek Wasilewski

He works at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Science, University of Warsaw, where he deals with rhetoric and message efficiency. He worked for a decade at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities as a culture expert researching the semiotics of media messages and the cultural patterns of media use. Author of scripts for documentaries and social campaigns. He has now combined cultural, media and rhetoric studies and is happily dealing with brand storytelling.

Communication is not about words. It's about culture. When we talk about a change, we need to decide if we want people to believe in it. We need to figure out how to convince them that what we offer is a part of themselves.

**URSZULA RADZIŃSKA:** Most companies talk about employees' commitment. What do they actually mean?

**JACEK WASILEWSKI:** They often don't know it themselves. There are four main types of commitment in a company: being committed to a company ("this is my company and I need to do this and that"), being committed to work ("I work as a media strategist, I am committed to being a media strategist"), being committed to a project ("I am doing something important, I must complete this project, I am responsible for it"), and there is commitment to relations between people ("I like working with these people, but I could as well be someone else and work with them within a different structure"). The problem is that marketing communication in order to be manageable wants to be given a form. It wants to be put into charts and to be applied as "communication pills". This may be good in many situations. But at the executive level you also need to put your heart into it, believe in what you say and want to be a part of a community. The boss supervises, the leader makes people engaged. And that's when all the four types work: that's the company, this is what needs to be done and these are the people.

**ULA: Heart in business communication – sounds like a challenge.**

**JACEK:** Well, it is. If we write down our mission in a boring way nobody will believe in it and nobody will want to take part in whatever the company is doing. The Bible wasn't written by officials. Belief is like faith. We believe in people that we work with (what's important here is appreciation, commitment, showing simple kindness and the sense of having been through many tough situations together). Another thing is believing in what you do – you can even tolerate people who are not your favorites, but they are your allies. Do we know what we're fighting for? Or is it just the boss who gains? It is important to feel as an employee that you do something important for the world, for people, that your job can help someone. For instance, I deliver a better product, people are satisfied. Have I ever heard those people? Or on the contrary, do I hear them complain on every occasion? When I feel that I do something good I can talk about it and convert others. This is a bit like a sect, but when we work for charity we do talk people into joining us. In the same way, if we are confident about the company, we naturally become its ambassadors.

**ULA: How do we get employees to trust the company?**

**JACEK:** There are plenty of uplifting company stories on the Internet. Like the one about a guy who started to make shoes and with every pair sold the customers were also buying shoes for someone who lives in the slums. This brings a sense of meaning. Trust is not only about simple, rational things such as paying on time or providing bonuses, e.g. an entry to a swimming pool. This is of course important for people who are self-oriented, but in larger organizations we need to feel that what we're doing to-

gether is meaningful. That's when trust is born. The foundation is to build a good team. This is what people often fail to do. A team made up of the best players in the world is not necessarily the one that always wins. You need to find a balance between the "sect-like" attitude ("the company is battenning on us and we must sacrifice everything") and individual attitude to employees (my own career path). You can't treat an employee as if they were by themselves and whatever motivates them is customized. Take a look at sports fans. Their attitude is something that happens naturally and can also happen in business. Man is a social animal and needs to cooperate with others at various levels: at the abstract level – the mission – and at the relation level, that is doing something with people that you work with.

**ULA: What does it mean?**

**JACEK:** For instance, I have a group of people that I can work with regardless of the money – provided, of course, that we can make our living. If we can earn more, that's great; if less, that's OK, too. There are also people that I can work with only for good money. Procedural satisfaction is important – I know what I get money for and when, but also the psychological aspect: I know I will be good with those people.

**ULA: What about the leader. The coherence between the leader's actions and company values is decisive in how the company is to be treated by employees.**

**JACEK:** When employees don't feel they have a bond with the manager, for instance because they feel they're under control even though the company advertises itself as an open organization, the boss becomes an enemy. According to PARP research, the



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authoritative style of managing is prevalent in Poland, while the supportive/listening style is rare: what is people's individual business in doing what they do and what are their needs? This level of trust is well visible in what Jurek Owsiak is doing: when a person becomes responsible for something not because somebody told them to, but because they want to be responsible. Owsiak gives a lot of autonomy to his associates, but also a great sense of ownership. He believes in them. People come to the Woodstock Festival Poland because they feel it is their event and they want to be responsible for it. The sense of responsibility should be an integral part of trust.

**ULA: Strategies and values usually sound good in English, but when they get translated to other languages they often tend to sound awkward, or even ridiculous...**

**JACEK:** This is a serious problem that many companies have to face. There is no trust in colonialism. Employees would only follow new principles because they have to, but they assume that everything can change when a new boss comes.

But there is a different way. When we want to get to know a given value or make it more coherent, we can start from our employees. They can tell what is most important in their work and how it manifests itself.

When the collection of values is bigger, you can start making them coherent with the language of the managing staff, to make them fit your people, your concept and natural relations in your language. Communication is not about words. It's about culture. When we talk about a change, we need to decide if we want people to believe in it. We need to figure out how to convince them that what we offer is a part of themselves.

**ULA: We are talking about changing habits, which is a huge process. This may take years.**

**JACEK:** A company needs leaders. Those leaders can either say: "Attack!" or they can say: "Follow me!" The latter have a different bond with people, they are respected. If we want people to follow us, we need to give them goals that are important to them and that they can identify with. If you want to build ships you need to tell people about the beauty of the sea. We don't have to experience everything because we have imagination. When we have a vision, hope, sense of meaning – we become much more productive.

**ULA: Young people coming to the market... Are they going to ruin the system?**

**JACEK:** I work at a university and I try to show them various things through experience. Young people do live in the Windows reality – they are more focused on themselves, scattered, they have many windows open simultaneously. But at the same time, they are still humans and they need to have their groups or teams which they want to believe in. This is especially visible in two situations: when there is an important goal, something they want to achieve, or when there is danger and they need to defend themselves. This is when people put on their warpaint. I came up with the "shirt test" showing how many people are willing to wear a company shirt after hours. It has little to do with the fabric quality, it's a matter of identity. This can be seen with the example of various organizations. Being able to identify with the company or organization is key for getting committed, and commitment is followed by trust. You're no longer satisfied with earning your salary, you want to give something from yourself. You give

WHEN → EMPLOYEES FEEL THEY'RE  
THE COMPANY ADVERTISES

something to the company and the company gives you something in return. Trust is based on appreciation for others' effort. Such a more personal relation of leaders with their associates is crucial. Is your logo also the emblem of your team?

**ULA: The leader must be able to get down to people. We often take care of the top, but the bottom is neglected.**

**JACEK:** This is what the feudal system is about. Much depends on the language. We often talk about human resources as a type of capital. Human resources is not something you can dig out with a shovel. It is something you can shape into a tight team, a beach mass lying on sunbeds and doing nothing, or a magma of obstruction. People are not

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objective resources. They are rational within a story they believe in. If the management staff has a story they want to implement and the crew has their own story or don't have one at all, they will work because they are told to, but they will be thinking about a revolution.

We too often assume that people are rational. The worst case scenario is when the managers have a story about a good change, and the team does not see any advantages and only do what they are told because they have no alternative. They are waiting for a good moment to escape. Every leader must be a good listener first, and only then a good speaker. They must be seen by associates as someone who can help to find a way out of a difficult situation. Trust is when people keep rowing under harsh attack because they know the leader is heading them towards victory. ■

