

National Communication Association's Credo for Ethical Communication

Brief: The nine principles of the National Communication Association's *Credo for Ethical Communication* offer us building blocks to establish our personal ethical code—a guide for how we can become a good speaker for the people.

Learning Objective: Identify the nine principles of the NCA's *Credo for Ethical Communication*.

Key Terms:

- Credo for Ethical Communication: The National Communication Association's nine principles for building ethical communication code.
- Good Man Theory: Roman rhetorician Quintilian's theory that asserts if one cannot be genuinely good, then one cannot be a good speaker for the people
- Quintilian: A Roman rhetorician who published a twelve-volume textbook on the theory and practice of rhetoric called "Institutes of Oratory."

Ethical Communication

The academic study of Communication began with the Ancient Greeks who first defined the study of rhetoric—the art of persuading others through public speaking and oratory. In 95 CE, Roman rhetorician Quintilian published a twelve-volume textbook on the theory and practice of rhetoric called "Institutes of Oratory." In this work, Quintilian establishes that the perfect orator is first "a good man," and after that he is a good speaker.

Quintilian's "Good Man Theory"



The frontispiece of a 1720 edition of the Institutio Oratoria, showing Quintilian teaching rhetoric

Quintilian also believed that a speech should stay genuine to a message that is "just and honorable." Known as his "good man theory," Quintilian asserted that if one cannot be genuinely good, then one cannot be a good speaker for the people. According to Quintilian's theory, being a good speaker for the people is about more than simply getting one's message across. Being a good speaker for the people also means being in service to the people—helping to build a more prosperous and cohesive society in which everyone can thrive.

Today, continuing in this tradition of embracing effective rhetoric as a cornerstone of Western culture, The National Communication Association (NCA) is considered the preeminent organization in advancing Communication as an academic discipline dedicated to fostering and promoting free and ethical communication.

Credo for Ethical Communication

Founded in 1914, The NCA has a long history of supporting research and educational initiatives in the field of Communication. Backed by thousands of years of academic study and based on the wealth of contemporary scientific evidence, The NCA believes ethical communication is “fundamental to responsible thinking, decision making, and the development of relationships and communities within and across contexts, cultures, channels, and media.” Conversely, The NCA believes that unethical communication threatens the well-being of individuals and society.

To demonstrate their commitment to ethical communication, NCA formally endorsed a set of principles called the *Credo for Ethical Communication*, first approved in 1999 and more recently reaffirmed in 2017. These principles offer us building blocks to establish our personal ethical code—a guide for how we can become a good speaker for the people.

The Nine Principles

The nine principles of the NCA’s *Credo for Ethical Communication* include:

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 individuals, 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.

From Concept to Action

Reflect on principle nine of the NCA's *Credo for Ethical Communication* that says, "We accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences for our own communication and expect the same of others." In what ways do you currently take responsibility for the consequences of how you choose to communicate? Are there other ways that you avoid, ignore, or otherwise abdicate responsibility for the consequences of how you communicate? How would your life be different if you chose to take full responsibility for the consequences of how you communicate?

OER IMAGE SOURCES:

"Institutio Oratoria." Wikimedia Commons.

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https://www.natcom.org/sites/default/files/Public_Statement_Credo_for_Ethical_Communication_2017.pdf. Accessed 16 November 2018.