

Amy Walker, PEO C3T, Chief Knowledge Office, explains how Colonel Kyle Burke is improving language and communication throughout the US military's CBRN procurement process

TTFN to TLAs PDO*

* Ta Ta For Now to Three Letter Acronyms Pretty Damn Quick

You might say Colonel Kyle T Burke drove a Stryker vehicle through a milestone decision in December 2007. "We put a Stryker vehicle in the courtyard of the Pentagon, to send the message to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) that the Stryker NBC Reconnaissance Vehicle was ready to be given to soldiers," explained Burke, the Joint Project Manager for Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Contamination Avoidance (JPM NBC CA), of the US Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical and Biological Defense (JPEO-CBD). "Of the nine variants, that was the first and only Stryker ever to make it into the courtyard."

He explained how he has used strategic communications to convey simple, clear and consistent messages in

each milestone decision. This event was orchestrated in co-ordination with, and in support of, the PEO Ground Combat Systems and PM Stryker Brigade Combat Team and their Stryker NBC RV Milestone C Production Decision, Burke added. Both PM BCT and PM NBC CA attended the OSD Defense Acquisition Board (DAB) and they obtained verbal approval from the DAB to build 95 Stryker NBC RVs. The signing of the acquisition decision memorandum was delayed by weeks, however. So, to avoid

further delays in awarding contracts, he and his team used the audacious strategic communications campaign to help get things rolling.

Within two weeks of the plan's conception, a Stryker NBC RV was driven into the Pentagon's courtyard, surrounded by an intentional media blitz of internal and external media representatives. All the offices involved in staffing and approving the ADM were invited to see the vehicle on display. Four soldiers from various parts of the country – ranking from private first class to a staff sergeant – were brought in to talk about the vehicle. One by one, each described how the enormous increase in capability would benefit his or her unit.

Two senior leaders from OSD sat inside the Stryker and listened to the soldiers for a total of six hours. They came out of the vehicle convinced it was ready for fielding. "It was a great hit," Burke said. "On the third day of the event, the ADM was signed."

Burke first discovered the power of strategic communications at



Colonel Burke's communication strategy is helping to keep Stryker on schedule ©CBRNe World

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Pennsylvania State University, where he received his Master of Business Administration. The university stressed the enormous impact that strategic messages have in the world of business. Burke has carried that ideology in his back pocket ever since, and has incorporated it into each of his achievements.

"If you had the opportunity to spend five minutes with a strategic leader, what would you say?" Burke asked. "As I served two tours (five years) in the Pentagon, I found those five minute speeches are absolutely significant to senior leaders – the decision makers. Like today's mass media, even a sound bite makes a significant impact. You have to be able to come up with that message, that sound bite, and have it in the back of your head at all times."

Although Burke's strategic communications strategies don't always involve driving a Stryker vehicle onto the Courtyard of the Pentagon, he always strives to promote a concise message with clarity. When going through a production milestone decision on the Joint Chemical Agent Detector (JCAD), Burke had his team write a short magazine article on the JCAD that was published in *Chem-Bio Defense Quarterly* magazine at the same time. Alongside a large picture of the JCAD, the article provided the basic description of the system's capabilities and the benefits it would provide the warfighter. This alternative to a Powerpoint presentation proved effective. "Two members of the Joint Staff (J8) came up to me and said they did not understand what the JCAD was until they read that article. The real impact was that Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC) approval became easy," Burke said.

When the right message reaches the decision maker, it achieves the greatest impact when it is short, clean and correct. To ensure a successful strategic communications strategy, a strategic engagement must also be determined. This is the contact plan created to deliver the message. "When you brief any leader, the best words you can hear are either 'I got it' or 'I approve...,'" he said.

Strategic communications was the cornerstone of Burke's approach to achieve an impressive series of five

production milestone decisions in 2008 alone. Four of those products are on OSD Oversight. He plans to continue using it to obtain approval for each future milestone decision.

To improve JPM NBC CA's methods of communication, Burke has introduced strategies as simple as standardising and constantly improving the Powerpoint presentation templates and formats to make them easier to use. He has also conducted classes for team leaders that address ways to build better briefings. "The Army jokes about 'TRADOC Charts' cannot be read – by anyone – because they are too complex or too full of words," Burke said. "Unfortunately, the truth to this joke is missed by even the most senior leaders – if a chart cannot be read, the message cannot be delivered."

Since strategic communications is an ever-improving process, project or product managers (PMs) must constantly revisit and update their existing communications methods. "The starting point for a PM to begin utilising strategic communications is the day they take over their PM," Burke said. "From the first time they speak when they receive their charter until the day they leave, they are a strategic communicator. They have to embrace that."

The first thing a PM should do is examine and solidify the events and

accomplishments they want to achieve during their tenure. They should then decide how they are going to communicate those messages in a simple, clear and consistent manner. According to Burke, PMs must see themselves as business managers. But their roles are not to sell widgets, but to deliver capability to the warfighters. PMs must communicate the warfighters' needs to all of the stakeholders, including industry and Congress, to ensure those needs are being met. Strategic communications is the only way to successfully accomplish these objectives.

"The Army is a like huge corporation; its "product" or "service" is the defence of this country, and just like a huge corporation it has a lot people; some wear uniforms, some wear civilian clothes, but all of them communicate," said Burke. "Many of them speak using acronyms, abbreviations or strange words. To be successful, PMs must be able to understand and communicate inside and outside the Army in a clear text 'strategic message.'"

CBRNe World are grateful to the JPEO CBD Press Office for being able to provide us with this article after Colonel Burke was unable to complete the interview at short notice.



'Colonel Burke prefers concise articles to achieve his objective, rather than powerpoint' © CBRNe World