Risk Communications, Institutional Cooperation, Railroad Safety and Death

Clarke L. Caywood
Professor of Integrated Marketing Communications
Medill School of Journalism
Northwestern University
• Recent increase in crossing gate deaths in Lake Forest IL and 5000 deaths reported by the Federal RR Administration gave momentum to the program with about 60 attendees sponsored by the Transportation Center at Northwestern University.
• Three E's were on the agenda: enforcement, engineering and education/communication.
• On communications some notes:
• **Point 1:** How many of you are under age 35? (about 15 percent of the hands went up). The rest of us are not the target of education and communications for the most part. The learning behavior of over 60% of the population is unlike our experience. If you grew up where teachers, coaches, police officers and members of Congress were your friend. You are in the older 40%. You may know "stop drop and roll" and "look listen and live". You saws PSAs, watched network TV, read ink on paper news. We did not try to simultaneously task everything all the time. Today we have new channels, new media new messaging customized to the new ways people learn and behave.
• **Point 2:** Risk communications teaches us that if only 5% of the 5000 deaths reported by the Federal RR Administration has occurred in a single accident; the press, the Congress, the industry would have reacted much more directly and quickly to this still significant problem. When the crashes are isolated and are statistically more dangerous the public and media do not respond. We need new means to capture the attention to the importance of this issue with its higher risk to passengers and pedestrians.
• **Point 3**: Federal grants do not ask for policy or significant communications about research on this or related topics: an academic article is not significant communications for a policy issue. We need more demands for education and communications.

• **Point 4**: Stay on message: "How do we convince people to recognize the fatal consequences of being distracted around railroads" is accurate but not memorable or pithy enough to be repeated easily.

• **Point 5**: Who is credible? Research can tell us this. It is not the President (or any recent President of the U.S.) or corporate leaders, government leaders. It may be NGOs or cartoon characters - seriously.
• **Point 6:** We need to motivate and coordinate other institutions with billions of dollars of resources and investment in the risk of losing their employees.
  
  – employers who equip their highly educated and distracted professional with iPhone, Blackberries and laptops must help
  – families must be motivated to have designated safety directors (as we did with green issues and stop smoking issues in families).
  – Cell phone manufacturers and service providers need to accept (as liquor sellers) their contribution to the distraction and death of users beyond the auto
  – We need to link up with other more know programs in auto safety and instruction,
  – We need to organize all the RR, communities along the tracks and those with employees who depend on RR commuting