

“Good Communications!”

Do you ever tell somebody something and by the time it gets back to you, the story is completely changed? Listen to this:

A school superintendent told the assistant superintendent to tell all the school principals the following announcement:

“Next Thursday at 10:30 a.m., Halley’s Comet will appear over this area. This is an event which occurs only once every 75 years. Call the school principals and have them assemble the teachers and classes on their athletic fields and explain this phenomenon to them. If it rains, cancel the day’s activities and have the classes meet in the auditorium to see a film about the comet.”

The assistant superintendent naturally said yes. He was to pass that exact same message, word-for-word, on to the school principals, but this is what the school principals heard:

“By order of the Superintendent of Schools, next Thursday at 10:30 a.m., Halley’s Comet will appear on your athletic field. If it rains, cancel the day’s classes and report to the auditorium with your teachers and students where you will be shown films--a phenomenal event which occurs only once every 75 years.”

The principals were asked to pass this on to the teachers. This is what the teachers heard:

“By order of the phenomenal Superintendent of Schools, at 10:30 a.m., next Thursday, Halley’s Comet will appear in the auditorium. In case of rain on the athletic field, the Superintendent will give another order--something which occurs only once every 75 years.”

The teachers were asked to pass this message on to the students. This is what the students heard:

“Next Thursday at 10:30 a.m., the Superintendent of Schools will appear in our school auditorium with Halley’s Comet, something which occurs only once every 75 years. If it rains, the Superintendent of Schools will cancel the comet and have us all meet on our phenomenal athletic field.”

And then the students were asked to take this home to their parents. (Many of us have been on the receiving end of a message like this.) This is what the parents heard from the students:

When it rains next Thursday at 10:30 a.m., over the school athletic field, the phenomenal 75-year-old Superintendent of Schools will cancel all classes and will appear before the whole school in the auditorium accompanied by Bill Hailey and the Comets.”