



My Biggest Takeaway from ComNet 2025



This year was my second time at ComNet, and I relished the “network” part of the Communications Network. Each person I met was focused on how we could support each other in reaching and widening our audiences. Oh, and everyone was so kind. People held doors for each other, made extra places at tables,

and engaged each other with excitement and respect. That felt great.

The relationships I made were the most valuable thing gained from joining these folks in Denver, but for those of you who couldn't be there, I want to share my number one takeaway from all the keynotes and sessions I attended: (*Please scroll down to read more*).

<i>Upcoming online classes at The Goodman Center</i>		
TELL STORIES	PLAN CAMPAIGNS	GIVE PRESENTATIONS
Ethical Storytelling: The Case for Asset Framing	Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter	The Platinum Rules of Presenting
November 18 & 20 9am - 10:30am PT	December 2 & 4 11am - 12pm PT	December 9 & 11 9am - 10am PT

My Biggest Takeaway from ComNet 2025 (cont.)

Ask More Questions

Communication starts with “co” for a reason. Sometimes we focus so much on *our* messages, *our* words, and *our* stories, that we neglect the listening we must do. We tend to ask great questions about our outgoing communications, and it is time we apply that same level of inquisitiveness to understanding our audiences. Before we get to our messages, how can ask our audiences meaningful questions about what matters to them?

We can ask questions at the macro level. I met up with Doug Hattaway at his ComNet poster session. His team from Hattaway Communications was sharing their [SPIRE](#) audience insight research. They surveyed large audiences across the US about their values and needs. Then they divided these audience into segments that can be motivated and mobilized using the data and insights from the survey. Now they are sharing these tools with us.



Marisol Bello

We also have to ask questions at the micro level. As you know, it can be incredibly impactful to ask and learn from people in one-on-one conversations. I had a great conversation at ComNet with Marisol Bello, Executive Director of [The Housing Narrative Lab](#). This one really sticks with me. After getting to know each other a bit at one of those high-top tables outside the big ballroom, and bonding on our passion for wide-spread narrative change on housing, I wanted to get her advice. I asked her a question.

When traveling for work, I take a lot of airport Uber rides, and, time and again, friendly small talk with the driver has taken a turn into hearing their disdain for the homelessness in their cities. I asked Marisol if she runs into this as much as I do and how she handles it. She asks questions.

Instead of providing counter-arguments, her point of view, or even a personal story (you know I've done that!), she begins with some curiosity. "Is Denver a pretty affordable place to live?" Oh no, rents and property values keep going up. "How do you make ends meet? Is there plenty of money to be made driving?" No, it's never easy... Marisol told me she gently asks questions about their experiences which leads them to some critical thinking about what they are seeing in their cities.

Not only am I going to adopt this in my upcoming rideshares, but it was a powerful reminder that communication is not just about being heard. It is also about hearing.

Ask yourself what questions you might have for potential donors, partners, decision-makers, and clients. We want to do that more at the Goodman Center, too. So, as we plan for 2026 and beyond, I have some questions for you:

- What needs do you have for communications at your organization right now?
- What values are you tapping into to get through challenging times? How can we help you tap into those values as an emotional resource?
- How can our newsletter, blog, and workshops equip you to deepen and widen your impact in 2026?



Answer in an email to Kirsten@thegoodmancenter.com or find me on [LinkedIn](#) with your answers and ideas – or if you have questions of your own.

I Couldn't Have Said It Better Myself

"At some point, you realize your connection to the audience is greater if you're just talking like a normal person. That's what cuts through the clutter."

Ira Glass || October 7, 2025

From "An Inspiring Evening with Ira Glass and Pico Iyer Discussing Storytelling and Truth at UCSB"

About Us

This edition of *free-range thinking* was written by Kirsten Farrell and edited by Jasmine Elist. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

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