

COMMUNICATING

Communicating clearly and effectively is one of the most important skills that officers of a club or organization can learn. Proper communication will help officers explain their vision, discuss with members what is happening, and to elicit input from members so everyone feels included in the organization. To avoid frustration and people duplicating work, everyone must clearly articulate what their responsibilities are, the tasks they are going to work on, and what their expectations are of themselves and others.

12 Road Blocking Behaviors to Communication:

1. Ordering, directing, commanding
2. Warning, admonishing, threatening
3. Exhorting, moralizing, preaching
4. Advising, giving solutions or suggestions
5. Lecturing, teaching, giving logical arguments
6. Judging, criticizing, disagreeing, blaming
7. Praising, agreeing
8. Name-calling, ridiculing, shaming
9. Interpreting, analyzing, diagnosing
10. Reassuring, sympathizing, consoling, supporting
11. Probing, questioning, interrogating
12. Withdrawing, distracting, humoring, diverting

There are three parts to communication:

1. The sender – The person who is sending the message
2. The receiver – The person who is receiving the message
3. The channel – The manner of sending or receiving the message and the environmental conditions surrounding the message.

Problems with communication can occur within the sender, the receiver, or the channel. These problems with communication are often called noise because they interfere with the message being sent or received.

Some barriers to communication are:

1. Culture, background, and bias

When a person allows past experiences to change the meaning of the message. It can be beneficial to draw on one's past experiences, background, and culture but if we are not aware of how these experiences can interfere with our ability to understand someone else, assumptions may be made about a message that were not intended. People from different cultures often misunderstand one another because they may not realize that a gesture in one culture is different in another.

2. Ego

When a person focuses on him or her self instead of the other person, this can lead to conflict. Some of the factors that can lead to this miscommunication are defensiveness (person feels attacked by another), superiority (person feels he or she knows more than the other), and ego (person feels he or she is the center of the activity).

3. Perception

If the receiver feels the sender is talking too fast, not fluently, making wild hand gestures or some other distraction, the receiver may dismiss the sender. Also, preconceived attitudes affect our ability to listen. Someone with a stutter may be ignored due to the stutter and not due to the individual's ideas. People we consider to have high status are more often listened to than those we consider low status.

4. Message

Distractions happen when a person focuses on a specific word or words rather than the idea. Semantic distractions occur when a word is used differently than one expects it to be used. Someone may get bogged down because the word chairman is used instead of chairperson and the rest of the message is ignored.

5. Environmental

Anything in the environment that distracts from a person being able to focus on the message can create a barrier. Bright lights, excessive heat, loud noises or any other stimulus that might distract attention away from the message being communicated.

6. Smothering

Many times people assume that important information will be conveyed but this is not always the case. Sometimes people will think the information they have is not worthwhile or that everyone else already knows the information.

7. Stress

Under stressful circumstances, people see, hear, and feel differently about things. When talking with someone who is in the middle of finals week, this person may react differently than would be expected. If the person reacts unexpectedly, it might be best to return to the person on another day to discuss an issue.

These barriers are not permanent obstacles but they can cause confusion, problems, and uncertainty during a conversation. For these reasons, it is important to recognize all of the problems that occur and when a problem does occur to return to the conversation and talk it through with the other person. Everyone has their perspective on how a conversation happened so if you are looking to overcome a miscommunication, it is important to explore how everyone involved in the conversation perceived it. This type of reflecting on a conversation is not to determine who is right or wrong but to explore each other's perceptions and how the misunderstanding occurred.

Win/Win Communication:

Win/Win communication is an effective form of communicating where everyone involved in the process works cooperatively toward a goal that enables two or more people or groups to achieve their desired outcomes.

In order to achieve win-win communication results, you must first be willing to act upon the highest intentions in yourself, set aside any “attitudes” that may undermine positive results, and resist your human urge to be right, look good, or teach a lesson. This form of communication is about everyone being able to win. It is not about “getting” the other person or proving that you are right and others are wrong. It is about cooperation.

After reading this list you may think win-win communication is too difficult. If so, consider the possibility of examining your beliefs and attitudes about yourself, others, and the nature of reality. Win-win communication can require an adjustment in attitude and self-examination of biases and prejudices. It is not easy, but remember someone has to start the process of communicating effectively and it might as well be you.

Attitudes for developing win/win attitudes:

1. Come from a win-win attitude where your number one priority is respect, cooperation, and the idea that everyone can win.
2. Be clear on what you want. Take responsibility for your own happiness and well being. Be prepared to take a stand for yourself. Expect that this may be difficult and might bring about some big changes in your life.
3. Begin your communication by stating intention and ask if your listener has the same intention. Clearly articulate that you want to work with the other person so that both of you can still achieve your goals. This does not necessarily mean you give everything up.
4. Express all you communicate in a positive manner.
5. Allow the other person to have their “say” first. This will make them feel like you want to listen to them and not just set up your own soapbox from which to speak.
6. Do not disagree when your co-communicator is having their “say.” Just listen.
7. Active listen during and after they have had their “say.” Repeat to them the essence of what they have said. Ask if your perception is correct.
8. Be aware of good timing. Be patient. Know you will have your “say” when the time is right. Everything you have done up to this point will help prepare the other person to be open to new possibilities. You are modeling to them the win/win strategy. By giving them an opportunity to speak, they will afford you the same opportunity.
9. Repeat as many times as is necessary your highest intentions for the both of you until you see they “get it.” If they still want to communicate in a win-lose manner ask them what their intention is. For example, say, “I want both of us to win here. What do you want?” Wait for their answer. If they avoid answering, ask them again until they do. If their answer indicates that they also want both of you to win, you have succeeded in enlisting them in this form of communication. For win-win communication to work, both parties must be come to accept it as important and doable.
10. State what you want. Be specific. State your boundaries. Be willing to enforce them.
11. Now begins the problem solving stage. Be patient. Problem solve with an open mind. Think in terms of possibilities. Be persistent. Do not stop until both of you have won. Insist that your boundaries and needs be met. Help the other person meet his or her needs and boundaries. Realize that there are many ways to meet one’s needs and boundaries so be open to new ways of doing something.
12. Conclude by repeating what you both have agreed upon. Ask that both of you acknowledge the agreement.

Skills for developing win/win attitudes:

1. Congruence – Verbal and nonverbal communication must match. What you think and feel must match with what you say. If they do not, people will see right through you.
2. Empathy – “The capacity and willingness to understand the inner experience of another person.” This is an active attempt to truly understand how the other person does feel in response to his or her circumstances.
3. Acceptance – This is in reference to an unconditional positive regard for another person. You do not have to agree with the person but accept that the person has a different viewpoint but is still a good person.

Ground Rules for Dialogue:

1. We will respect each other's thoughts and ideas.
2. We will avoid judging each other's motives, intelligence, and integrity. We will set aside our urge to label each other. While being hard on problems and issues, we will be gentle with people.
3. We will expect everyone to say what is believed to be true, realizing that cynical mistrust is the major dynamic behind all failed communication. Since most opinions have at least a bit of merit, we know we best communicate with each other when we really listen to what the other person is saying.
4. We will resist the temptation to be absolutely right. We will often be tentative and reflective so that just maybe we can move from “cocksure ignorance to thoughtful uncertainty.”
5. We will be patient and kind, not boastful, arrogant, or rude. We will avoid speaking judgmentally or implying superiority.
6. We will speak for ourselves without apology and use I-statements to let others know what we see, hear, think, and feel.
7. We will look for points of agreement as well as notice disagreement and we will avoid implying or saying, “you are wrong.”
8. We will accept disagreement as okay. We will be patient with the process of change in our own thinking and behavior and with the thinking and behavior of others.
9. We will listen carefully and pause before we respond so that we can say back in fresh words what we have heard another saying. We will attempt to understand what others mean to say.
10. We will seek to be open and growing persons, sensitive and flexible enough to be touched by the thinking of others.

Problems in Giving Good Directions:

1. The leader incorrectly assumes the other person has some knowledge or skill, and gives incomplete directions.
2. The leader uses jargon with which the other is unfamiliar.
3. The leader gives directions so quickly that the receiver is confused.

Ways to Avoid These Problems:

1. Check all assumptions before giving directions, including the skills and knowledge the person has in the area.
2. Avoid the use of jargon. If it is used, define it.

3. Give directions clearly and slowly; try to avoid giving directions when there is a lot of pressure or too little time. Ask listeners to repeat the directions in their own words so that you can be sure the meanings are clear and the same.

Problems in Receiving Good Directions:

1. People often interpret words differently. The listener may associate what is said with something different from what is meant.
2. Under pressure to do the task correctly, the listener becomes tense, and thus may misunderstand the message.
3. The listener jumps ahead, assuming he or she knows what comes next, and misses part of the directions.
4. The listener doesn't ask for needed clarification because he or she doesn't want to look dumb.
5. The listener is busy or bothered by something and doesn't hear the directions clearly.

Ways to Avoid These Problems:

1. Reassure the listener that you are there to help and answer questions. Encourage questions and be supportive.
2. Go back over the directions, being sure that all were heard and understood.
3. Set aside sufficient time to give and check directions, especially when something or someone is new to you.
4. Preface directions by soliciting questions and input. Be open and encouraging.
5. If the listeners seem distracted, ask whether this is a good time for the discussion. Suggest that the listener write down the directions, and then review them later.

Active listening is listening with a purpose. It is more than just hearing which is the act of perceiving sound. When you hear a sound or noise, you are receiving aural stimuli. Listening goes beyond just registering that there is a sound in the environment. It involves receiving and interpreting the aural stimuli, and creating meaning from the sound.

Using active listening skills can help to minimize or avoid unnecessary conflict. It can bring clarity and understanding to conversations and interactions with other people. To work, the listener focuses on the words and the feelings of the speaker for understanding. Active listening happens when the listener hears the various messages being sent, understands their meaning, and then verifies the meaning by offering feedback.

Characteristics of an active listener:

- Spends more time listening than talking
- Let's the speaker finish his or her own sentences
- Let's the other person finish speaking before responding
- Allows the other person to speak and does not dominate the conversation
- Aware of own biases
- Asks open-ended questions

Focuses on what is being said and not what one's response will be to the speaker

Active Listening Techniques:

Type of Action	Purpose of Action	Implement Action	Examples
Encouraging	1. To convey interest in what the speaker is discussing	Don't agree or disagree.	1. "I see..." 2. "Yes..."
	2. To keep the person talking	Use noncommittal words with positive tone of voice	
Restating or Clarification	1. To show that you are listening and understand	Restate the other's basic ideas, emphasizing the facts	1. "If I understand, your idea is..."
	2. To check the listeners perception of the speaker's message		2. "In other words, this is..."
Reflecting or Paraphrasing	1. To show that you are listening and understand	Restate the other's basic feelings	1. "You feel that..."
	2. To show your understanding of their feelings		2. "You must feel angry that..."
Summarizing	1. To pull important ideas, facts, etc. together.	Restate, reflect, and summarize major ideas and feelings	1. "These seem to be the key ideas..."
	2. To establish a basis for further discussion		2. "If I understand you, you feel that..."
	3. To review progress		

These nonverbal behaviors can help increase and improve the impact of your message on other people. Please note that some nonverbal behaviors may have different meaning in different cultures. This is a time when it is important to pay attention to how people are reacting to your actions and speaking.

Eye Contact

This helps to regulate the flow of communication. It signals interest in others and increases the speaker's credibility. People who make eye contact open the flow of communication and convey interest, concern, warmth, and credibility. Eye contact can also help signal that you are coming to an end and the other person can speak. Please be aware that in some cultures, extended eye contact can be considered a sign of disrespect. Know who you are talking to.

Facial Expressions

Smiling is a powerful cue that transmits happiness, friendliness, warmth and liking. By smiling, people will be more comfortable around you and more willing to listen.

Gestures

Without proper hand gestures, you may be perceived as boring or stiff. If you gesture too much, people may find it distracting from your message. Find a good balance and people will find you an entertaining and captivating speaker.

Posture and Body Orientation

You communicate numerous messages by the way you talk and move. Standing erect and leaning forward communicates that you are listening or that you are approachable. Face the person with whom you are speaking. If you are writing or working on something else, the person is going to feel like a nuisance. Folded arms may indicate that you are closed off so try to keep your body open by not folding arms or legs.

Proximity

Cultural norms dictate a comfortable distance for interaction with others. Look for cues of discomfort from others to check that you are not invading personal space.

Vocal

Speaking can signal nonverbal communication when you include such vocal elements as tone, pitch, rhythm, timbre, loudness, and inflection. Pay attention to these parts of your speech because they may belie what you are saying. From your voice people can tell if you are angry, afraid, nervous or many other emotions. Don't lie about how you are feeling; people will be able to tell from your voice.

Checklist for Active Listeners:

- Do you paraphrase or rephrase what has been said before you respond?
- Do you seek clarification (I'm not quite sure what you mean)?
- Do you open all meetings with meeting ground rules (including one person speaks at a time)?
- Do you encourage everyone to participate?
- Do you look at and make eye contact with others when they are talking to you?
- Do you make every effort to understand the question from the questioner's point of view?

_ Do you seek an immediate response or run quick meetings (some people need more time to process new information)?

_ Are you aware of the numerical imbalance in meetings (men vs. women)?

_ Do you go around the table and address each person by name and give them an opportunity to speak?

_ Do you watch for body language and indicators that certain individuals want to participate but look frustrated because peers keep cutting them off?

_ Do you have meetings where a few voices dominate the meeting?

_ Do you remain neutral until all points of view have been presented?

_ Do you balance participation between different styles?

These questions are meant to provoke thought and discussion. If you answer no to any of these, the impact your actions have on others may vary from your intentions. Active listening is a way to bring your impact closer to the intended effect.