



The Leadership Letter May 2014

Communication and Feedback: A Critical Skill Set

It doesn't matter what profession you represent: the ability to communicate effectively is a skill of paramount importance to any manager or leader. This skill is no longer confined to the ability to talk to someone in person or by phone....we now have e-mail and social media to throw into the mix.



Dr. Anthony Debenedet

Your day may consist of supervising and training staff in a program, completing a variety of administrative tasks, communicating with parents about their children, working with vendors of supplies and materials, or, on a more personal level, communicating with your spouse and family. You may also be serving in a leadership capacity with your local or state early childhood association.

Have you found yourself:

- ◆ **Frustrated** with the action of a staff member who you thought understood the directive you had issued?
- ◆ **Challenged** by parents who got a completely different message from the one that you thought you were delivering?
- ◆ **Stumped** by the failure of someone to follow through on a simple request?
- ◆ **Caught** in a bind because policies you had written didn't clearly communicate the position you had intended?

2014 Conference Keynoters: Great Communicators

Ellen Galinsky



- ◆ **Backpedaling** from a conversation because what you said and what you meant were two different things?

We've all been there but learning to clarify and communicate effectively can help you to minimize these incidences. Nobody likes to be confused and misunderstood and your effectiveness as a manager/director/leader can hinge entirely on your ability to communicate in a clear and consistent manner.

Read on to get some ideas about how to improve your communication skills.

Learning to communicate effectively will pay off both professionally and personally.

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Leadership Commission Members

- Anita Dailey, GA
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Top Ten Communication Skills

If communicating effectively is so important, what do I need to know about what skills are necessary to be an effective communicator? Here are some skills to consider to enhance your communication skills.

1. Listening: A good listener tends to be a good communicator. No one likes the person who doesn't listen but has an opinion about everything. Active listening means that you are paying attention to what the person is saying, asking questions to clarify if necessary, and responding to their thoughts appropriately. This is just as important with adults as with children!

2. Nonverbal Communication: What does your body language say? Do you keep eye contact? Are your hand gestures appropriate to the conversation? If you are relaxed and open to a dialogue, the other person will be as well. Eye contact is extremely important—it says that you are focused on the speaker and paying attention. Also, pay attention to the speaker's body language and non-verbal cues. You can get significant feedback about how your communication is received.

3. Clarity and Concision: As educators, we tend to use a lot of words. Good communicators use only as many words as necessary. Don't use 10 words when 6 will do! If you ramble, your listener will tune out. Think about what you want to say before you say it. It doesn't require a script, just a little forethought.

4. Friendliness: As Southerners, we already have this skill in our portfolio! If you're friendly, the person with whom you are communicating will be as well. No one likes to talk or interact with someone who is surly or arrogant.

5. Confidence: Good communicators are confident of their information and what they want to share. People also react positively to you when you demonstrate self-confidence and they are confident that you will follow-through.

6. Empathy: We may not have the same opinions as others and it's always important to remain respectful of someone else's viewpoint. If you're an advocate and working in the political process, this approach is particularly important. As they say in politics, "Don't burn your bridges today...you may need that person tomorrow."

7. Open-Mindedness: Don't start a conversation with an opinion already formed that can't move or change. You might possibly come to a different or modified conclusion about an issue if you genuinely listen to what someone else has to say. Good leaders exhibit an open-mindedness to new ideas and different strategies.

8. Respect: Showing respect to someone can be as simple as using their name in correspondence or actively listening in a meeting or conversation. Communications by e-mail or social media can convey respect if you've taken the time to thoughtfully craft a message and edit that message before



*SECA Members are Great Communicators!
The FLAEYC Crew at SECA 2014*

sending it. This shows that you respect your colleague enough to want to make your message clear and concise.

9. Feedback: Providing meaningful feedback can be one of the hardest skills to master. Particularly if you're in a management position and evaluate employees, how you provide that feedback will demonstrate how well you can communicate. This skill applies as well to leaders in associations who work with volunteer boards. Feedback should be constructive and positive, even if the issue relates to something that requires attention or adjustment. Also, be open to receiving feedback on your end...everyone can use constructive feedback.

10. Picking the Right Medium: An important skill is knowing how to communicate and what method to use. Things such as employee reviews, changes in salary or employment should always be handled in person. Think through how the person you're contacting would prefer to receive communication. It's a thoughtful gesture that says you are thinking of them.

Source: *Top 10 Communication Skills*, www.About.Com, Retrieved February 24, 2014.

Conference Calls: Communication Disaster or Success?

With the cost of face to face meetings increasing each year, many organizations have chosen to conduct some meetings by conference call. Although the conference call is much cheaper than travel and lodging, it has its challenges, particularly with groups for whom the face-to-face correspondence is so important.

We all know these “types” from calls on which we’ve participated:

- ⇒ **The Juggler:** They are on the call but only about 50% there. They are answering e-mail, feeding the dog, taking care of a child, etc. Because they forget to mute the call on their end, we’re treated to all the background sounds such as typing, barking, and crying.
- ⇒ **The Coach:** This person follows the conversation, pays attention and helps to bring the group back on task when they begin to wander.
- ⇒ **The Monopolizer:** Who wants to hear someone’s thought process out loud during the call? Talks endlessly without regard to the other participants.
- ⇒ **The Host:** Explains the purpose of the call and ensures that the participants have the opportunity to express opinions and comments, all while moving toward a stated goal.
- ⇒ **The Lurker:** Doesn’t let you know he/she is there often until the end of the call, if then.
- ⇒ **The Interrupter:** Doesn’t have the Top 10 Communica-

tion Skills we just discussed! Repeatedly breaks in while other people are speaking and tries to monopolize the conversation.

Here are some tips for making your conference calls productive and beneficial rather than an exercise in frustration and wasted time.

FOR THE HOST

- 1) **Send out an agenda prior to the conference call** and ask for any additional agenda items to be submitted prior to the call. A conference call is not the place to add items to what is usually an already crowded agenda.
- 2) **Ask participants to join the call within a specified period after the call is to start.** For example, ask participants to join by 2:05 if the call is scheduled for 2:00 or wait to identify themselves until a break in the call. Don’t disrupt a discussion to ask “Who just joined the call?”
- 3) **During that 5 minute preliminary period, set out the process by which participants can submit comments.** Some organizations tie a webinar function to their conference calls that allows for comments to be posted online rather than through the call.
- 4) **Ask participants to participate in the call from a quiet location and to utilize the mute button.**
- 5) **Don’t schedule a call for**

more than 45 minutes to an hour....the shorter the better! Also, avoid lunchtime...it’s hard to eat and talk.

- 6) **Make sure that you start on time and end on time!**
- 7) **Follow the agenda!** Conference calls can become rambling discussions if the focus is not maintained.
- 8) **Set time limits for discussions on particular topics.** Ask someone to be the time-keeper and keep everyone on task.

FOR THE PARTICIPANT

- 1) **Go back to the article on page 2 of this newsletter about effective communication!** Remember that these skills are very important on a conference call: listening, clarity and concision, friendliness, open-mindedness, and respect.
- 2) **Focus your attention solely on the conference call and the topic of the call.** No multi-tasking!
- 3) **Be respectful of others when talking or entering the call.** Do your best not to interrupt another speaker.
- 4) **Be prepared.** Go through the agenda prior to the call and get your thoughts together.

5) Use that mute button!

Sources: Help! I’m on a Conference Call, Wall Street Journal, Personal Journal, 2/26/14; Conference Call Etiquette, www.accuconference.com



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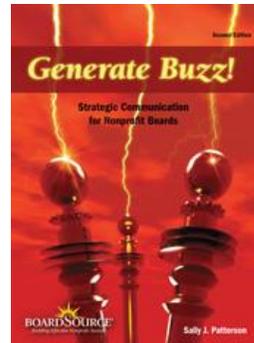
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Some Other Resources



Board Source is an organization that provides many different types of resources for non-profit boards. *Generate Buzz* is designed to assist organizations in developing a strategic communications plan.

You can find information about it

at www.boardsource.org.

ASAE (American Society of Association Executives) produces resource materials for associations.

This book has a variety of communication & PR ideas that have been implemented by various associations with success. You can find

information about this book at www.asae.org.



A Failure to Communicate? Why Did You Leave?

Yes, it's a famous line from the movie *Cool Hand Luke* but a failure to communicate can cost you in time, money and future success.

If you've lost a valued employee, do you know why? Was there something about that employee's position with your program that caused dissatisfaction with the job? Did a "failure to communicate" cause the employee to make other employment decisions? *Did the employee have an opportunity to communicate their feelings and opinions to you?*

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 16.2% of workers **voluntarily** quit their jobs in 2010 at a time when jobs were scarce and a quick turnaround to new employment was anything but a given. **The Society for Human**

Resources Management (SHRM) estimates that it costs \$3,500 to replace just one \$8 per hour employee after you factor in the costs of recruiting, interviewing and hiring, and re-training. Early childhood is even more challenging because staff must be present to ensure accountability with state licensing standards.

Losing members on volunteer boards is no different than an employment situation. There's some reason that members leave. Most often it's because the board is not functioning well and members don't see that their time is valued.

With employees, communication may not be the problem but it's important that you find out. Be sure to conduct an exit interview

to determine if there's a problem. If there is, take steps to correct what's wrong and make sure that the work environment enhances employee motivation and morale.

The same thing goes for volunteer boards...fix the problems and you'll have no problem retaining those qualified and creative board members.

Also, **remember that communication in this era of social media means that anything you send through the Internet is unlikely to remain a secret.**

Make sure that you don't post information about an employee or board member, particularly if it's critical or negative. Once that post is made, you're an open book and you will wish that you indeed had a "failure to communicate"!