

ACHIEVING YOUR COMMUNICATION POTENTIAL

Impediment:

You may be uncomfortable addressing a group. You're not alone. Fear of public speaking tops the charts of what people are most afraid of; in fact, fear of death ranks second.

Solution:

The person who can put across his or her ideas is the one who succeeds. The good news is that public speaking isn't the only way to do that—all the technological advances such as E-mail, Voice-mail, along with written



communications and one-on-one talks are important components of good communication. But public speaking is inevitable. So, start with small groups, do it often, and you will begin to find some level of comfort.

Opportunities to practice exist outside the organization in groups like Toastmasters. For those with severe stage fright, solutions can range from speech coaches to special courses.

FEEL THE DIFFERENCE

Walk through an organization where there's good communication and you can feel it. There's a current of energy, a sense of purpose. Walk through one where there isn't, and you can feel that too. Where would you rather work?

HOW AM I DOING?

Use this list to check yourself periodically on good communication practices.

- ✓ Employees are sharing information with each other.
- ✓ Staff meetings are a planned, regular occurrence.
- ✓ You're providing feedback to employees.
- ✓ Questions and feedback flow freely back to you.
- ✓ Be visible, accessible to your employees.
- ✓ Share successes from your group, other departments, participants, the community, and funders.
- ✓ Publicly recognize individuals and groups for results.
- ✓ Don't duck the bad news.
- ✓ Make resources, including other people, available.
- ✓ Take the fear of making a mistake out of the environment.
- ✓ Let yourself off the hook! It takes time and effort to be a good communicator, and we have "good communication" days and "bad communication" days.
- ✓ *Have fun!*

STAGING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Just as you wouldn't run your agency without a plan, the smart manager won't run a meeting without a communications plan.



This is true for one-on-one meetings but especially effective for larger meetings. Getting up in front of a group is the last place to wing it. A little homework can pay off in big results. A communications plan answers the following:

- ✓ What is the objective of the meeting?
- ✓ How long will the meeting last?
- ✓ Who is invited?
- ✓ What is the central message?
- ✓ How is it conveyed?
- ✓ Is it reinforced throughout the meeting?
- ✓ What media are appropriate?
- ✓ How will you recognize achievement?
- ✓ How will you solicit feedback?
- ✓ Does the information need to be passed on by those attending the meeting?
- ✓ How will you make certain it is?
- ✓ How will you determine whether you have met the objectives?

BRAINSTORMING

Getting the most from the most Brainstorming is an excellent way to suspend judgment until the maximum number of ideas have been generated. It also promotes listening positively to the ideas of others, while refraining from negative comments which might cause the creative process to dry up. The theory behind brainstorming is that a group can generate more ideas, and better ideas than all the individual members could do if they worked independently.

How Does It Work?

Participants must discipline their inputs to the discussion or project suggested. The facilitator for the session only presents the ideas and keeps the group on track with the following steps.

- ✓ Generate, don't evaluate.

Quantity is the goal: the more ideas the better. While quality is important, stopping to judge or challenge an idea will only inhibit the creative process.

- ✓ Create new ideas by amending or analyzing those which have already been suggested. This amendment can take such forms as increas-

ing, decreasing, adding, deleting, consolidating, substituting elements, or reversing. Ideas can be built upon and alternatives can be suggested, but they cannot be negated.

- ✓ Once the group has developed an idea, the facilitator will have the option to have the group further develop the idea with an action-plan. If the facilitator or group members elect not to develop the idea, the group must not invest in the idea.

GROUND RULES

Since this training method relies heavily on the synergy of the group, group members must feel comfortable in freely expressing ideas.

To produce an atmosphere of free expression and creativity, you might have the group develop a list of ground rules to follow. Some ground rules that support the process, include:

- ✓ All hidden agendas must be checked at the door.
- ✓ All titles, years of experience, power, etc. must be checked at the door.

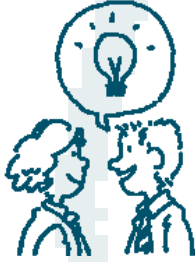
- ✓ The facilitator's only role is to keep the group on track with an open agenda, and with time checks.
- ✓ All group members are responsible for understanding the rules and enforcing them within the session.
- ✓ Group members must not become invested in an idea.
- ✓ Seating and setting of the session will be determined by the facilitator prior to the session.

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP

Since group members will invest their time and energy in generating ideas, it's a good idea to follow-up with them to recognize their efforts and let them know of outcomes. Some suggestions include:

- ✓ Scheduling a follow-up action planning session.
- ✓ Forming a committee for implementing ideas.
- ✓ Sending a follow-up memo on actions taken from the session.

RESOURCES



CONDUCTING A COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY

Conducting your own survey is one way to get feedback on how you're doing. Here are some sample questions you may want to include. Not all questions may be appropriate for your situation.

From which sources do you prefer to get information: *(Rank in order of preference with one being the highest)*

- Meetings with senior management
- The grapevine
- Immediate supervisor/manager
- Bulletin boards
- Radio, TV, newspapers
- Videotaped messages

How do you get that information now?

- Meetings with senior management
- Publications
- The grapevine
- Immediate supervisor/manager
- Bulletin boards
- Radio, TV, newspapers
- Videotaped messages

RESOURCES

Do you attend regular staff meetings?

- Always Sometimes Never

How would you rate the frequency of these staff meetings?

- Too often OK Too infrequent

Do you receive an agenda for the meeting?

- Always Sometimes Never

Are topics covered in enough depth in the meetings?

- Always Sometimes Never

Are all the subjects covered about which you need information?

- Always Sometimes Never

List the subjects about which you want more information.

Do you get enough information about other teams, groups or departments in the organization?

- Always Sometimes Never

List the other areas about which more information would be more helpful.

How would you rate your organization on the following?

EXCELLENT (1)	GOOD (2)	AVERAGE (3)	FAIR (4)	POOR (5)
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Listening to your problems and complaints

1	2	3	4	5
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RESOURCES

CONDUCTING A COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY (CONT.)

Developing an atmosphere of open communications

1 2 3 4 5

Feedback on job performance

1 2 3 4 5

Communicating department strategy and goals

1 2 3 4 5

Providing sufficient information necessary to perform your job

1 2 3 4 5

Providing clear information about organizational strategy and goals

1 2 3 4 5

Understanding the department's role in achieving overall goals

1 2 3 4 5

Passing on information from senior management

1 2 3 4 5

What kinds of information do you want to know that you are not currently receiving?

What kinds of information are you now receiving that is very important to you?

TIPS FOR ANALYZING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY: NEXT STEPS

So you get back all these surveys, what do they mean?

The most effective surveys are the ones that affect change in an organization.

When analyzing a communications survey look for consistent patterns. It's likely you will have a variety of responses for each question. It's best to code the questions and average the responses. When you have "crunched the data" you might want to look at:

- ✓ What people want to know more about: You may want to schedule special information sessions to address.
- ✓ How people are getting important information: If they indicate the grapevine or other unofficial sources, they are probably indicating information is not sent quickly enough.
- ✓ Staff meeting frequency and topics: You may want to restructure your meeting to include an agenda that goes out prior to the meeting that can be added to. If your organization is undergoing numerous changes—especially in leadership—you may want to increase the number of staff meetings to pass on timely and important information about the changes.
- ✓ Departmental performance: Staff may need to re-address mission, vision and values of the organization and department. They may also benefit from team-building.

RESOURCES

ADDITIONAL COMMUNICATION RESOURCES

**ACT-Action Communication Training*, August Scornaienchi and Stanley Shalit (this is out of print but is available from National Service Resource library)

The Business of Listening, Diane Bone
Crisp Publications, 800-442-7477, \$9.95 (group training video also available)

Clear Communication: Breaking Down Barriers, Pfeiffer and Co., 800-274-4434, 1/2 day workshop kit includes looseleaf trainer's guide, 1 participant guide, 10 minute video, \$395.00

Communicating with Employees, Frank M. Corrado
Crisp Publications, 800-442-7477, \$9.95

**Communication and Conflict Resolution*, (video) Youth Service California
Great River Productions, 707-445-9105, \$19.95

Communication: Skills to Inspire Confidence, Barrie Hopson and Mike Scally
Pfeiffer and Co., 800-274-4434, \$7.95

Communications: A Positive Message From You, Trudy R. Sieta
Points of Light Foundation, 800-272-3806, \$7.00
Guide to improving personal communication skills.

Culture, Communication and Conflict: Readings in Intercultural Relations, Gary R. Weaver, ed., Intercultural Press, 207-846-5168, \$36.00

Do's and Taboos of Public Speaking, Roger E. Axtell
Nonprofit Partners, 800-860-4490, \$14.95

50 One-Minute Tips to Better Communication, Philip Bozek
Crisp Publications, 800-442-7477, \$9.95 (group training video also available) "Fifty easily mastered techniques for improving meetings, memos, and presentations"

RESOURCES

**Getting Past No: Negotiating With Difficult People*, William Ury
Nolo Press, 800-992-6656, \$9.95

**Getting To Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, William Ury and
Roger Fisher, Houghton Mifflin, 800-225-3362, \$29.95 (hardcover)

Getting Your Message Across, Kurt Hanks
Crisp Publications, 800-442-7477, \$12.95

“The innovative ideas, practical examples, and exercises in this book help readers identify and overcome communication problems.”

Influence: Portable Power for the 90's, Elaina Zuker
Crisp Publications, 800-442-7477, \$9.95

Influencing Others, William L. Nothstine, Ph.D.
Crisp Publications, 800-442-7477, \$9.95

“Influence others more effectively through written or verbal communication.”

Listen Up Learning Activities, Kittie Watson and Larry L. Barker
Pfeiffer and Co., 800-274-4434, \$59.95

38 reproducible activities in a loose leaf binder.

Listening Styles Profile, Kittie Watson and Larry L. Barker
Pfeiffer and Co., 800-274-4434

Facilitator's Guide, 1 profile, 1 answer sheet: \$19.95 (other packages available)

**Rules for Reaching Consensus: A Modern Approach to Decision Making*, James R.
Lawson and Steven Saint, Pfeiffer and Co., 800-274-4434, \$9.95

Speaking With Confidence: A Guide for Public Speakers, Wanda Vassallo
Points of Light Foundation, 800-272-3806, \$9.95

**You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, Deborah
Tannen Random House, 800-773-3000, \$12.50

* = items available from National Service Resource Library, call
1-800-860-2684 for more information.

Original document:
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Revised document developed by:
United Way of Chicago's
AmeriCorps Training &
Technical Assistance Project

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