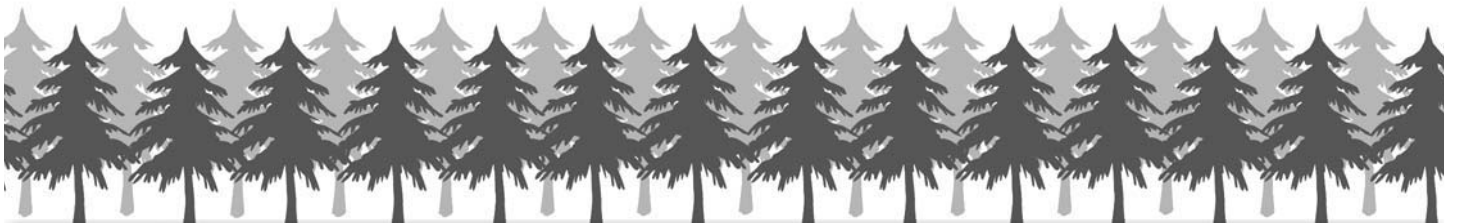

10. Communication



10. Communication

Introduction

Communication takes many forms and is the foundation for success in every organization and for all projects, events and programs. The types of communication most frequently thought of are: verbal; non-verbal and written. Communication can be either formal (official and planned/structured like in a letter or presentation) or informal (casual and unplanned such as a conversation or random meeting).

In recent years, communication has changed with the use of technology and we have a much better understanding of media messaging and the influence of advertising. We are more connected (and for longer each day) due to technology such as internet, MSN, facebook and other social networking as well as cell phones, blackberries and other tools that have moved us to faster responses and constant availability. Communication, and the expectations around communication, are in transition, and it is going faster than ever with the use of new and improved tools and a generation of young people who want or need to stay connected 24/7.

Materials and books, documents and reports also are part of communication with increased interest in copyright and ownership of intellectual property. We are becoming more aware of how and when we communicate (and with whom) as all forms of communication can change the perceptions about the organization, the staff, and what is or is not being done. Good communication does not just happen, you have to work at it and learn how to do it well. It includes some of the following things:

- Information sharing
- Talking and listening
- Writing skills
- Reporting
- Presentations
- Day-to-day discussions
- Meetings and group gatherings
- Public and community relations
- Representation and “spokespersons”
- Language and terminology (the words we use)
- Cultural considerations
- Good manners and common sense
- Use and misuse of technology

Listening is every bit as important as talking, and sometimes it is the silent communication that tells the story. Not all communication is positive and helpful – some of it, like gossiping and taunting (bullying), conveys a message and can be very effective, but it is not pleasant and can be very harmful. When trying to use effective communication, non-verbal communication and body language also play a role in understanding what is and is not being communicated – and how any of it is being received.

“Talk once, listen twice.” – Unknown Source

Training may be required if communication is part of your job or if there are aspects of your work that require certain skills such as writing grants, reports or e-mail messages. Even basic telephone communication may require some training. Specific skills in communication such as presentations, public relations and marketing are more focused and are useful for those working with sport, culture and recreation. Statements such as – I didn’t know, I didn’t get the memo, and I didn’t understand what was being said, are all too common and create a breakdown in communication and less effectiveness in our relationships.

Planning for Good Communication

Communication is complex and multi-faceted. If it is critical to the work being done, a communication plan should be considered for community and sector connections, as well as internal needs around information sharing and basic day-to-day communication within the office. Most groups say that communication needs improvement, but they do very little to improve it.

Discussing communication needs with staff and with community partners (and the public) might provide some insight into areas that are working well and those that need to be changed. Some issues are difficult to talk about and a tool can be used to help people focus on the problem and not the personalities. This tool is often called an issue sheet or summary and basically asks the questions: what's the problem; who's involved; what are the consequences of the situation; what you think needs to be done. A process like this (in writing) often resolves things as people have to think through the issue and the solution.

How we approach our formal or community messaging and our internal information sharing is worth looking at. What we say, the way we speak and how we communicate with each other is also part of good communication, and if bad habits have developed, correct them. Northerners say that there has been a significant decline in common courtesy and caring in how we speak with each other either in face-to-face conversations or through electronic media. We should not be too busy to improve this aspect of our lives well – after all it is often how we are judged by others.



The Northern Context

Communication in the north is slightly different than in other places. While many people are a bit shy, we also tend to say what is on their minds. Usually (and hopefully) this is done in a respectful manner. Elders have a voice and are given opportunity to share what they know and are included in most meetings and activities. While there can be some pretty straight shooting comments made in the north, body language and the unspoken word is powerful and well understood. It's not what is said in many situations but rather what is not said.

We learn how to communicate with each other by the way we are taught and the way it is done around us. We hope that our communication is well understood, clear, respectful and honest, but there can be confusion when things fester or are not given a good way to be expressed. In the north it is important to listen and watch as much as talk – actually listen more and talk less is the general rule, and this is particularly true if you are not from the north.

10. Communication

What's Important to Know?

- ★ Respectful communication is important to personal and professional credibility.
- ★ Good old-fashioned courtesy is always in style.
- ★ A communication plan is a very useful tool.
- ★ Listen carefully to what is being said as well as what is not being said.
- ★ There is greater expectation to be connected faster, more frequently and in a variety of new ways; it is important to learn how to do this.
- ★ Many people expect to have instant and continuous connections while others may not. Learn the difference between wants and needs and use a variety of ways to communicate.
- ★ Improving presentations can be as simple as asking someone good at it to provide some help.

Tips and Advice

1. Develop communication skills and get some professional help if required.
2. Don't assume that everyone understands what we are communicating.
3. Use a variety of approaches and tools to present ideas and thoughts.
4. Change the language and examples for different audiences.
5. Check the copyright on any material that is being reproduced or printed.
6. Use new technology in a healthy way but don't assume that everyone is "online".
7. Support cultural/ethnic values and Aboriginal languages in every way possible.



Story

Grandmother's Bay has an executive board whose members are all Elders, two male and two female. They make decisions on all the programming in the community and identify what should happen in terms of community events. They meet once every two months. There is also a Planning Committee consisting of teachers, volunteers, community store manager, the Recreation Director and the Band Councillor. They follow Band Office guidelines and policies when it comes to meetings.

"One of the problems we have as a community is our inability to keep secrets. And it costs us, in terms of our relationship with other communities, in terms of willingness for other services or sectors to work with us, in terms of revealing programs and services." – Gavin McCallum, Pelican Narrows

"In our small community it's easier to go door to door with our newsletters to make sure the families are getting the information." – Florence Ratt, Community & School Recreation Coordinator, Sucker River

Toolbox Connection

In the toolbox you will find the following tools related to this section:

- Communication Strategy Framework
- Social Messaging and Social Media Tips
- Issue Paper
- Public Speaking
- Presentation Tips