

COMMUNICATION FOR LEADERSHIP

Good communication involves both giving and receiving information, so that we may clearly share ideas. A well-functioning group works when members feel that their views are being heard and addressed, and a leader must communicate effectively to achieve this.

GIVING FEEDBACK

- ✓ **"I" Messages** allow us to tell people what impact their behavior has on us without judging them, while letting them decide whether or not to change that behavior. We describe our responses and do not evaluate behavior or suggest changes. We are not forcing them to accept our ideas.
- ✓ **Asking for More Information** enables others to expand on initial information. It tells the speaker we are interested in her/his thoughts
- ✓ **Paraphrasing** is saying what we think the speaker said, giving the speaker a chance to confirm our interpretation or to clarify what was meant.
- ✓ **Sharing Information** assures that everyone's input is important. Group leaders need to be as open and honest as other members
- ✓ **Checking Feelings** enables us to check to see if the emotion we think we see is the correct interpretation.
- ✓ **Reporting Feelings** tells others what your emotional state is at a given time.
- ✓ **Offering or Requesting More Options** Even good ideas can be made better when more people are involved. Suggesting other options is helpful.
- ✓ **Active Listening** lets the speaker know we are concentrating on her/his message.

ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

Listening is not just hearing what people are saying, but also interpreting messages they may be sending through body language, tone of voice, etc.

- ✓ Focus your attention on the speaker to show you are listening.
- ✓ Ask for more information to allow the speaker to clarify and show that you are interested.
- ✓ Paraphrase to clarify what the speaker said.
- ✓ Check feelings—*"You sound frustrated. Would you like to talk about that?"* But make sure the group continues to make achievements, and doesn't get off track.
- ✓ Report your own feelings—let people know where you're coming from.
- ✓ Seek the input of the whole group on a difficult issue.

KEEP INFORMATION SIMPLE

- ✓ People can only absorb so much information at a sitting—don't overwhelm them with details.
- ✓ Stick to the point and avoid going off onto tangents. If someone brings up a related but different topic, table it until the first topic is finished.
- ✓ When presenting information, summarize, repeat key points a few times, and only offer as much information as is needed (without making people feel you are holding something back).
- ✓ Ask someone else in the group to interpret your presentation to be sure that the group understands.
- ✓ Offer particularly complex or intricate information in more than one format—with a written handout as well as a verbal summary, for example.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

Every group has its quiet members, but a good leader works to draw out even these “silent types” to be sure all views are heard. How groups come to a decision is also important for making people feel they are being heard - whether you choose consensus or majority rule, be sure the procedure is fairly implemented. There are a few ways to do this:

- ✓ **Round robin**—Go around the table asking for each member’s input. Members may pass, but no one may speak a second time until everyone has been heard from.
- ✓ **Small group breakouts**—the group divides into smaller groups to discuss a question, then one person from each small group presents the results. Be sure to give plenty of time for the discussions, and divide into groups of no more than six people.
- ✓ **Brainstorming**—encourage all members of the group to come up with as many ideas as possible in a short period of time. A volunteer writes key words from the ideas on a large piece of paper. Creative, “off-the-wall” ideas are encouraged. (See “Brainstorming Rules” below for more information on this idea-generating process.)

BRAINSTORMING “RULES”

- ✓ Collect as many ideas as possible—doubles & repeats are okay. The greater the number of ideas, the greater the likelihood you’ll get some winners.
- ✓ All ideas are welcome, no matter how silly or far out they seem. Complete freedom stimulates more and better ideas.
- ✓ No discussion of items during the brainstorming activity. Reserve this for later to keep ideas flowing.
- ✓ No criticisms or judgements of other people’s ideas.