Communication Module

"The two words 'information' and 'communication' are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communication is getting through."
- Sydney J. Harris

Competency 4 - Facilitate a flow of information pertinent to the guest experience.

Assignment 1

Read Ephesians 4:29, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Now please respond to the following questions. You may want to write down your responses to help you in your group discussion after completing this module.

● What word or phrase sticks out to you the most from this verse?

● Why did the writer mention "unwholesome talk"?

● Why is good communication between people very important in society today?

Assignment 2 – Internal Communication

● Read – Promoting Internal Communication (*article is attached at the end of the module).*
● Answer these questions. (Again, you may want to jot down some notes.)
  o Why should you promote internal communication?

  o What are 3 areas where we do well in internal communication?

  o What are 3 areas we need to work on in internal communication?

  o As a First Impressions Team Lead – what do you think your role is in internal communication?

Assignment 3 – Upward Communication

● Watch: *Who's on First?* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sShMA85pv8M

● Answer these questions.

- o Give an example when you felt like each of the characters in this conversation?

- o What do you think was the main reason they could not understand what each other was trying to say?

- o From a First Impressions perspective, how can we make sure we understand the needs/concerns our guests are trying to communicate to us?

- o How can we ensure we properly communicate those guests needs/concerns up the pipeline at The Ridge?

- o What do we need to do as leaders to ensure that the guests get the information they are asking for?

Selection of: *Promoting Internal Communication*

By Phil Rabinowitz – Community Toolbox

Worst-case scenario: It's 3:45 p.m., and your organization has scheduled a rally in favor of the new Youth Center at 4:00. The press is there, the folks pushing the Youth Center are there, the politicians are there...where are all the people from your organization? In a panic, you call the office to ask where the rest of the staff is. "Rally? What rally? Nobody told us about it," they say. "We're not prepared for any rally."

Even-worse-case scenario: You're the director of a community health clinic, and you're about to open on Monday morning. Suddenly, all the clinic's nurses are lined up in front of you. "Working conditions at this place are terrible. We've been abused and exploited long enough! We're all handing in our resignations...right now!" You stammer, "But you never told me you were unhappy. Let's discuss it!" Then you realize that you're talking to the slamming door.

Each of these situations results from poor communication within an organization. They're particularly awful examples, it's true, but poor internal communication has plagued many grass-roots and community-based organizations, and has been the downfall of quite a few. It's tremendously important that your organization foster an atmosphere of openness and create systems that will lead to the freest flow possible of, not only information, but ideas, feelings, and a sense of shared purpose.

WHAT IS INTERNAL COMMUNICATION?

In its simplest terms, internal communication is communication within an organization. It encompasses both "official" communication -- memos, guidelines, policies and procedures, etc. -- and the unofficial communication that goes on among and between the staff members of all organizations and the communication of customers' needs -- the exchange of ideas and opinions, the development of personal relationships, and the proverbial conversation around the water cooler. It goes in all directions among line staff (those who do the specific work of the organization and work directly with the target population), administrators, supervisors, clerical and support staff, volunteers, and even customers.

Internal communication is a lot more than people talking to one another, however. It's the life blood of any organization, the way in which everyone gets the information they need. It means that anyone can easily get their question answered, as well as that no one gets left out when there's important information critical to the success of their role.

Good internal communication can:

- Provide people the information they need to do their jobs effectively
- Make sure they know about anything that concerns them
- Provide people with clear standards and expectations for their role
- Give people feedback on their own performance
- Provide them emotional support for difficult times

- Suggest new ideas about both their work and their lives
- Allow them to take the pulse of the guests and understand their overall experience
- Help them maintain a shared vision and a sense of ownership in the organization

In many ways, internal communication is the glue that holds an organization together. Without it, you're just a collection of disconnected individuals each working individually at her own job. With it, you're a unit with power far beyond the sum of your parts.

So good internal communication is a good thing. But there's so much to do. Why spend a lot of time on this stuff? Can't the organization do just fine by leaving people alone to do their jobs and let internal communication take care of itself?

The short answer to that last question is "No." Unless you're a one-person organization, communication is one of the most important aspects of managing what you do. What can internal communication do for you? Here's a short list:

- *It can improve the effectiveness of the organization*. The more information people have, the more quickly they get it, and the better connections they have with others in the organization, the better the work of the organization gets done, and the better jobs individuals do. The better jobs they do, the better they feel about their jobs and about the organization. The ultimate beneficiaries of all this are the target population, the community, and the organization, which finds itself with committed and efficient staff members, satisfied participants, and community respect.
- *It keeps everyone informed of what's going on in the organization*. No one gets any unpleasant surprises, and everyone has the chance to deal with changes, good news, and bad news together.
- *It allows the organization to respond quickly and efficiently to change, emergencies, etc*.
- *It makes problem-solving easier by providing a channel for everyone's ideas and opinions*. Solutions can come from unexpected directions, but only if there's the possibility that they'll be heard.
- *It creates a climate of openness within the organization*. If everyone feels he has access to whatever information he needs or wants, and can talk to anyone in the organization about anything, it encourages good relations among people, promotes trust, and forestalls jealousy and turf issues.
- *It promotes an atmosphere of collegiality, and makes the organization a pleasant place to work*. Good internal communication means that problems among people get resolved and the workplace is generally a pleasant place to be. This, in turn, leads to job satisfaction and organizational stability (people will be less likely to leave their jobs if they're happy in their work and working conditions).
- *It gives people more of a sense of ownership of the organization*, and more of a feeling that everyone is working together toward the same goal. The combination of openness and the easy flow of communication to everyone

combine to make people feel like part of a coherent whole, and to feel that their ideas and opinions are listened to and valued.

- *It shows respect for everyone in the organization*, by assuming that everyone's ideas and information are valuable.
- *It gets problems and potential problems out in the open*, rather than letting them fester and turn into something far harder to deal with. You can't deal with a problem if you don't know it's there; exposing it is the first -- and often the hardest -- step toward resolving it.
- *It forestalls the spread of rumors* by making sure that accurate information is constantly being communicated to everyone.
- *It improves the work of the organization* by increasing the likelihood that ineffective practices, problems, etc. Can be identified by those closest to them, and replaced or resolved by things that work better.

HOW DO YOU PROMOTE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION?

To foster internal communication, the first and most important step is to establish a climate of openness that encourages the free flow of communication and information in all directions. This means that the organizational culture has to embrace internal communication, and that individuals -- particularly key individuals, who might be the director and other administrators, or who might simply be the people that others respect and listen to -- have to feel comfortable with, and model communicating regularly and clearly with, anyone and everyone else in the organization.

Creating a climate that fosters internal communication includes:

- Practice what you preach, i.e. listen to others, and act quickly and appropriately on their questions, complaints, suggestions, issues, etc. This is probably the most important aspect of developing an atmosphere of openness.
- Treat everyone similarly, regardless of what job they have in the organization, or of how you feel about them personally.
- Be sensitive to your -- and others' -- style of communication. Ideally, the people on both ends of a communication are partners. Being open and offensive or condescending is probably worse than not being open at all. Many people are apparently born expert communicators; others need to be trained to communicate appropriately (see the description of "Staff training" below); and still others simply need to be informed that -- often because of differences in age or gender -- their style of communication is bothering others. Again, leaders need to set a clear example here, but part of good internal communication is the willingness of people to speak out when they feel uncomfortable or offended. Often, that can be enough to solve the problem.
- Be culturally sensitive. This encompasses a large area, and runs both ways. The people on both sides of a cultural divide -- whether it's a divide of race, ethnicity, religion, or something else -- need to be sensitive to the assumptions and needs of the other. Something as simple as how far apart they stand can create tension, and the use of some terms that seem innocent on the part of one

-- "you people" is a prime example -- can cause anger and lasting bad feelings on the part of the other.

- Make sure information flows in all directions. The organization should ensure that people learn immediately about things that interest or affect them, and should set up systems to make sure that happens, as well as mechanisms to make sure that less timely information gets passed around (see "Systems" below). Information flow might include -- in larger organizations -- an internal newsletter or bulletin that contains interesting or important information (this could be circulated as either print or e-mail).

CLEAR DEFINITIONS OF WHAT NEEDS TO BE COMMUNICATED AND BY WHOM

Much of the information an individual gets is directly related only to him or his job. He obviously can't relay all of it to everyone else. What does need to be communicated to others, and who is responsible for doing it? The answers to those questions will vary from organization to organization, but here are some broad guidelines:

- Any information that anyone needs to do his job or to better understand the context of the work should be communicated to him immediately by whoever has the information. Some possibilities here include information from another staff member about a participant that both are working with; information from another staff member about a situation that he is about to encounter as part of his job; or new rules, regulations, guidelines, etc. that affect his work (from the director or his supervisor if they are internal; from whoever learned about them if they are external, e.g. federal laws).
- Any problem or issue with someone's job performance should be communicated to him as soon as it becomes apparent. The assumption should be that the situation will improve, but if it gets worse, neither the seriousness of it nor the consequences should come as a surprise.
- Any problems that arise between or among staff members should be addressed immediately. As discussed above, the ideal is that all parties would be capable of simply dealing with the issue face to face. If they can't or aren't willing to, there should be an organizational procedure by which the situation can be mediated by someone trusted by everyone involved. In either case, it's vital that the situation be identified by at least one of the parties involved as quickly as possible, so that it can be addressed and resolved before it affects the work of the organization.
- Any information important to the working of the organization as a whole --
- Positive information, praise, etc. should be communicated as often as possible by anyone who has it to give, but especially by directors or supervisors. People in grass-roots and community-based organizations too often deal with bad news. They need to hear good news and get credit for what they do. In situations where an individual is being praised for a job well done, he should be praised twice: once privately by his supervisor or the director, and then again

publicly (at a staff meeting or awards presentation). And every opportunity should be taken to pass around that kind of praise.

IN SUMMARY

Promoting internal communication is one of the most important things you can do to make sure that your organization runs smoothly and effectively. Good internal communication will flourish if you can create an organizational climate of openness that is conducive to the free flow of communication and information in all directions; adjust your organization's systems or develop new ones to encourage, rather than discourage, internal communication; and create clear definitions of what needs to be communicated and by whom.