

*"The art of communication is the language of leadership."*

— James Hume

How do I control communication in my meetings? How do I get the message out to my membership about an upcoming event or initiative? How can I be a better listener and take everyone's opinion into account?

Many questions may be running through your head about communication in your organization. As an officer of a student organization, it is your job to craft communication and get the message out to your officer team, membership, and outside sponsors and advisors. Communication is a complicated concept that involves many different elements. How can you bring all of these elements together to create effective communication in your student organization? Here are a few tips that can focus your officer team to effectively elevate communication in your organization.

### **Listen!**

Don't just hear the message, but listen to it. Actively take part in conversations by showing you understand.

Characteristics of a good listener include:

- **Being There:** Be present in heart, mind, and spirit. You need to comprehend what the other person has to say. If you do not have time or do not want to listen, wait until you do!
- **Accepting:** Reserve judgments. Accept the speaker's feelings, however they may differ from your feelings. Don't be afraid that just because the feeling is expressed that the person will always feel that way.
- **Trusting:** Trust the speaker's ability to handle his or her own feelings, work through them, and find solutions to his or her own problems.
- **Listening:** Pay full attention to the speaker. Don't plan what you are going to say. Don't think of how you can interrupt. Don't think of how to solve the issue or how to console it. Simply stop everything you are doing and be considerate!
- **Keeping Out of It:** Keep yourself removed and objective in the situation. Listen to everything being said and do not insert your personal beliefs or feelings into the circumstance.
- **Empathizing:** Put yourself in the speaker's shoes, in his or her point of reference. Understand what he or she is feeling, saying, thinking. Stay separate enough to be objective but involved enough to help.

## Provide and Encourage Feedback

One of a leader's responsibilities is to create an environment that fosters open, constructive communication in which feedback is an important aspect. Giving feedback is the only way to ensure behavior will change, and it can help others focus on the most important issues at hand. Many people are motivated or inspired by well-delivered feedback, and you will see the most positive outcomes as a result.

What does effective feedback look like?

- **Be specific!** Avoid being vague and give concrete examples to illustrate your feedback.
- **Choose one issue at a time.** Focusing on too many skills or situations at one time can be confusing and overwhelming.
- **Don't be too critical or focus too heavily on the negative.** Feedback should inspire the other person to improve, not make them stumble on what went wrong. Give a piece of positive feedback along with the more negative feedback to maintain a strong relationship and encouraging atmosphere among the organization.
- **At the same time, feedback should not avoid real problems.** When there is an issue, it must be stated, so improvements can be made!
- **Leave adequate time.** Make sure the recipient of the feedback has enough time to ask questions and respond to what you've said.

While giving feedback is an important skill to have, as a leader, you should also encourage others to provide you with feedback to further elevate your organization!

## Model Effective Communication

As an officer and leader of your organization, others are looking to you as an example of what effective communication should look like. Be sure that your actions support your communication. Be personal, direct, trustworthy, and authentic in your interactions. Talk *with* members of your organization, not at them. Always be aware of the purpose of your messages, understand that everyone has a slightly different way of communicating, and make sure to follow up.

### References

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