



Minnesota State University, Mankato

Leadership Institute

Newsletter

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Special Points of Interest:

- The next session of the Leadership Institute will be held on January 25th from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Old Main Village.
- Please read the articles "Email as a Communication Medium: Pitfalls and Promises" and "Conflict: Must conversations always be difficult?" before the upcoming session.
- Please consider the discussion questions listed in "Perception and Communicating" on Page 2 of the newsletter.

Inside this issue:

**Day 4:
Communication in
the Leadership
Process**

**Principle-Centered
Communication**
By Lori Lamb

**Perception and
Communicating**
By Kristen Cvancara

**Additional
Leadership
Resources**

Day 4: Communication in the Leadership Process

Welcome back! We hope that you had an enjoyable holiday season, and we are very excited to introduce the fourth session of the Leadership Institute. The day will include information and activities which will focus on skills and strategies for managing interactions with individuals and within small groups.

There will be many topics for the day focusing on communication, including but not limited to: difficult conversations, perceptions, active listening, team building and meeting management. We are tremendously fortunate that the day will include presentations and activities from a variety of speakers from our own Speech Communications department.

Throughout the course of the day, the activities and presentations will target issues such as: how to communicate and receive messages more effectively and efficiently, and how to develop and apply communication skills and strategies in challenging work environments.

As preparation for the day, please read the articles "Email as a Communication Medium: Pitfalls and Promises" and "Conflict: Must conversations always be difficult?", which will be emailed to you.

In the meantime, here are some tidbits about verbal and non-verbal communication to serve as food for thought:

While verbal messages convey the

content of a message, nonverbal messages primarily convey the *relationship* (affective and emotional) aspects inherent in a message.

While verbal messages typically have a distinct starting and stopping point, nonverbal messages are more continuous in an interaction and often occur before, during, and after the words have been exchanged.

Although verbal messages may be provided in an interaction, any accompanying nonverbal messages will be interpreted as more reliable indicators of the real meaning being communicated by an individual (especially if the verbal and nonverbal messages are inconsistent).

Principle-Centered Communication by Lori Lamb

One of the greatest issues leaders face is determining when, how and what to communicate. Some say you can never over-communicate, some say you can; some say that what you say is not nearly as important as how you say it. No matter how you look at the issue of communication, everyone has an opinion and everyone sees the issue differently.

Given the last session on Ethics in Leadership, the topic of Principle-Centered Communication seems timely and relevant. The information that follows is taken largely from an article by Idalynn Karre, written in 2003. I am "communicating" this information with the full permission and gracious consent of Ms. Karre.

The foundation for the principle-centered leadership discussion is that excellence in communication is one of the most important keys to managing the complex role of leaders at any level of an organization. Keeping in mind certain "principles" about communication, helps us be more effective in the critical role of communicator:

Principle 1: Principle of Inevitability

- We cannot NOT communicate.
- Often, communication is intentional, purposeful, and consciously motivated.
- But sometimes we are communicating even when we are unaware that we are doing so.

It is absolutely inevitable that we communicate. We communicate when we lead meetings, participate in conversations, and listen while others speak. We also communicate when we walk in a room, sit at our desks, and walk through the corridors of our buildings. No matter what we are doing we are communicating – so bear this in mind at all times.

Principle 2: Principle of Irreversibility

- We can NOT uncommunicate.
- What we communicate remains communicated, although we may try to qualify, negate, or somehow reduce the effects of the message.

Continued on Page 2

"Communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy, and mutual valuing."

~Rollo May



Lori Lamb, Chair
Professional Development
Committee
336 Wigley Administration
Minnesota State Mankato

Phone: 507-389-2015
Fax: 507-389-2960
E-mail: lori.lamb@mnsu.edu

[www.mnsu.edu/
humanres/profdev/](http://www.mnsu.edu/humanres/profdev/)

Leadership Resources

The following books will be available during the next session for your reference:

- The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey. (The 5th Habit is particularly relevant).
- Powerful Communication Skills by Colleen McKenna.
- Crucial Conversations by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler.
- Working through conflict: Strategies for relationships, groups, and organizations by Folger, Poole, & Stutman (2001).
- Difficult Conversations by Stone, Patton, & Heen.



Principle-Centered Communication, cont'd.

- Communication is unrepeatable.
- Communication is immediate and present.

Always remember – you cannot take it back – the damage done is still there. Trying to qualify messages after delivery is not effective. By the same token, capitalize on positive experiences, behaviors, and communications when they happen. Even positive communication moments are moments you can never get back.

Principle 3: Principle of Symmetry and Asymmetry

- All communication is either symmetrical or asymmetrical.
- Symmetrical communication is communication of equality.
- Asymmetrical communication is communication of inequality.

While power, role, and influence differentials are a part of every organization – we are all human beings deserving of “equal” communication status. Do you engage in similar communication styles with executive staff and custodial staff? Why not? There are few times when asymmetrical communication is appropriate and effective. One example might be a disciplinary situation, but if you are communicating appropriate early on in the relationship, you can avoid most of these.

Principle 4: Principle of Content and Relationship

- All communication transactions have both content and relationship.
- The content dimension includes the verbal and non-verbal messages sent.
- The relationship dimension is defined by the formal and informal relationship between the communicators.

It is interesting that conflict is most often anchored in the relationship dimension of communication. You don't necessarily need to communicate the same content to everyone – you might have “short-cuts” with close friends, partners, and family members. With these individuals, your relationship is such that the content is “given.” When you argue with your significant other, spouse, partner, child, staff, etc. about the same thing over and over, is it really about the “content” (e.g. taking out the trash) or is it really about the relationship (e.g. roles, responsibilities, power, behavioral style, etc.)?

There is much more to what Idalynn Karre tells us about principle-centered communication. However, keeping these principles in mind when we communicate can do nothing but help ensure that the communication goes the way we want it to go.

Perception and Communicating by Kristen Cvancara

Perception is a complex phenomenon through which we gain awareness and knowledge of ourselves, others, and events that occur in our environments. A skilled leader needs to understand how perception plays into the communication process in order to facilitate the successful attainment of individual and group goals.

Our perceptions are gained through a process that can be illustrated in four stages. The first stage involves selecting and paying attention to certain bits of information that we deem relevant in a situation. The second stage involves categorizing and organizing the information in one's mind. The third stage involves assigning meaning to the selected information. And, the fourth stage involves storing and remembering the information.

Various factors influence the perception process. For example, the cultures in which we live, work, and play shape our norms and expectations for what is and is not appropriate communication behavior. Gender and sex-role expectations influence the ways in which we perceive others' actions and interactions. The environment in which we communicate, along with the technology through which we communicate, also impacts how interactions are perceived. And, do not forget the influence of personal features, such as physical appearance and self concept. These aspects frame our perception process, whether we are the leader or the follower, and highly influence the ways in which we communicate.

To further our discussion of perception and communication, I would like you to consider three

different questions in the days before Jan 25th:

First, how does your self concept influence the ways in which you communicate with others? Second, what aspects of the interaction are you most likely to focus on in a situation that involves a conflict? And third, whose perception do you think is most important in an interaction, your perception or your partner's?

We will discuss your answers to these questions as they pertain to interactions you experience (or anticipate experiencing) that involve conflict. In addition, the discussion will include communication skills that may be used to overcome perception biases that often separate the leaders from the followers.

“I remind myself every morning: Nothing I say this day will teach me anything. So if I'm going to learn, I must do it by listening.” ~Larry King